LOVE AND LANGUAGE:

A Study of the Classical French Moralist Writers

by

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INTRODUCTION

The dazzling Alexandrine verse continues to exert a virtual monopoly in the field of Classical French literature. Once seduced by it, there is admittedly a reluctance to return to prose. Certain novelists, notably Mme de Lafayette, are of course given some attention, although it is generally limited to La Princesse de Clèves. (More students surely read Racine's La Thébaïde, although it is not included among the few truly famous plays, than read the lesser known works of Mme de Lafayette: Zaïde or La Princesse de Montpensier.) As for the moralist writers and the letter writers, with the sole exception perhaps of Pascal, they remain a supposedly rather homogeneous group, and are studied together, generally, as one body of thought, their lack of individuality signaling their failure to captivate, to entice.

Moreover, certain among these prose writers continue to be, at least on this side of the Atlantic, virtually neglected. While Pascal, La Rochefoucauld, Mme de Lafayette, and to a lesser degree, La Bruyère, do filter into the American curriculum, many other writers--the chevalier de Méré, Saint-Evremond, Nicole, Jacques Esprit--are consigned to the pejorative categories of mineurs or secondaires, this value judgment conveniently negating their possible worth and thus freeing the student of French literature to concentrate

upon the brilliance of the Classical theatre. It is not our intention here to question the exceptional merit of that theatre. Rather, in undertaking to study the "moralist" (in a general sense) writers, we attempt only to show the extraordinary complexity of thought which permeates the individual works, a complexity which too often, in the face of demands for reduction, has disappeared, covered over by so many generalities. And although some of the authors we have chosen are better known than others, for us, they are all _majeurs_.

Considerably more is at stake than a delineation, however precise, of the thought of any one writer, a self-evident fact from the selection of several writers. Nor does this study attempt to summarize the totality of these writers' thinking, which is also obvious from the limited length of each chapter. Instead, our study proposes a "sounding" of one particular preoccupation of the age, that which years later Stendhal would call _l'amour-passion_. No single text, no one writer can possibly offer the multiple facets of that problem in the same way as can a study of diverse thinkers, and the problem of the nature of erotic love in Classical French literature suffers if posed from an overemphasis upon an isolated text or author. To counteract such a trend, the opposite tendency, equally limiting, is toward generalization, toward "relevancy." This series of essays concertedly attempts to avoid either of those directions.

It is somewhat of a cliché to state that the preoccupation, the obsession even, with the passions dominated

the Classical experience. However, critics and students of the age have long fixed upon the theatre of Racine as the primary focus of their investigations, and whether the study has been couched in the heavily moralizing, bourgeois expression of la critique universitaire, or in the deliberately evocative, provocative language of Roland Barthes, the functioning of Eros in the plays has been viewed as the undisputed center of that theatre. What has been done for Racine, we seek to do here for several prose writers.

From a series of related essays whose principal common element is precisely "love," what will hopefully emerge is a deepened awareness of how intensely these writers experienced the problem of powerful emotion as a potentially destructive force--both for the individual and for the society which envelops him--which has to be controlled via the experience of language. Writing about passion was, at the very least, an effort to structure, to systematize, hence to reduce the sense of chaos perceived as inherent in erotic energy. Whether the writer is Mme de Sévigné, Méré, or Jacques Esprit--each so seemingly "different" one from the other--the effort is essentially identical: writing about passion will diminish, through careful structure, its unreasoning side. Certain of the authors--the three just mentioned, for example--were acutely aware of this ongoing struggle, of their attempts at "control" through language. Others--Saint-Evremond, La Rochefoucauld--offer a less direct appraisal. Nevertheless, the constrained, highly structured form of the maxime, its

decided "playing" with language, thereby concentrating upon form, minimize the possibility of uncontrol. The form tames the subject matter. In another vein, there is Saint-Evremond's emotional distance, a distance cultivated primarily through a consistent use of letters of advice, which allowed for a flirtation with questions of love and sexuality, while also permitting a safety zone of escape, the boundaries of the page.

In two of our essays, however, the problem is carried still further, in an effort to show the ultimate failure of language to control at all, and hence the necessary recourse to total silence. Mme de Lafayette and _la religieuse portugaise_, in a direct negation of the hope that the "word" can successfully master erotic energy, offer bitter portrayals of exactly that failure. Language here is viewed as unable to repress successfully the spontaneous impulses of love, for the two domains persistently refuse to mix. But even when the antidote of language is shown as a failure, even when silence is viewed as the sole "out," what cannot be denied is the extraordinary awareness of language at this time. This perception is translated, of course, in the theatre of the age. Hippolyte's inability to "communicate," part of his Amazon heritage, shows to what degree language has been sexualized in this theatre. And the entire tragedy of _Bérénice_ is precisely one of aphasia. This strong consciousness of language should not be neglected, for it forms one of the most essential parts of the Classical experience.

Essentially, the moralist writers of that period were caught up in a persistent attempt to define, perhaps to redefine after a cataclysmic period of history, the "self," and it was the power of language which could, it was hoped, not only explicate, but create. There is an astounding attention to what can only be called the factice in the works of many of our selected authors, an urgency to reform the raw material, to transform the private into the societal. The long, introductory pages of Mme de Lafayette's La Princesse de Clèves form one strong example of the opposition of these two structures: the glittering brilliance of court society serving to mask the personal, hidden tensions of warring egos. And the fascination with l'honnête homme, which marks so much of the moralist literature, and which was so dependent upon the successful manipulation of form, particularly of language, is yet another sign of the ongoing effort, through writing, to create an individual free of the disruptive impulses of passion. Even Mme de Sévigné's corpus of letters to Mme de Grignan can be viewed as an attempt to reform, restructure their love relationship into a more esthetically, and emotionally, satisfying experience.

But our study, however diverse in its selection of writers, is by necessity limited. Although a series of related, but independent, essays best serves our purposes as explained above, nonetheless, there is inevitably a distinction to be made between what has been stressed and what has been omitted. Certain writers have been included, while others,

often important, are simply left aside. For what reasons? This study seeks, first of all, to focus upon writers of seemingly different intellectual bents. At the same time, we have attempted to represent various "genres": straight essays, maxims, novels, letters, for the prose works of the seventeenth century are far from limited to one format. It seems important, moreover, to add here that biographical information is left aside, as not contributing to the subject, and in fact, possibly detracting from it, for the emphasis remains throughout not on any one writer, but on his or her analysis of l'amour-passion. Furthermore, each chapter is an interpretation unto itself, related to those which precede and follow, but deliberately not through any system of comparisons. And finally, there is a recognition that each work studied can be viewed from other, different perspectives. What is really proposed here is one person's reading and evaluation. This, we believe, is the primary task of any critic--a personal "struggle" with the text--and at all times, without falling into vague impressionism, this dialogue must be lucid.

However, there still remains the significant question of who was left out, and why, a question ultimately far more difficult to justify than the corresponding one regarding those included. As a primary criterion, the selection of writers was based on a certain, limited time period of the 1660's and 1670's (although parts of Saint-Evremond's writings do traverse a longer span). Hence, moralists such as the "mystical" Saint-François de Sales, or the "libertine" La

Mothe le Vayer are not studied, their works dating from earlier in the century. La Bruyère does not fit in here, important as his work is, also for reasons of date: the Caractères were not published until 1688.

But the above justifications do not pretend to lead to any conclusion that therefore this study is a systematic, completely thorough probing of a little more than one decade. Bossuet, for example, could easily be included in our "sounding," as could Nicole, and if they are not, it is only because of certain artificial limits which any study, by necessity, places upon itself, as well perhaps, because of a reluctance to probe writers who demand a thorough knowledge of the subtle depths of Christian theology. In the end, there was also the important recognition that certain writers could best exemplify not any specific, preformed thesis (for there is no attempt here to "prove" any formulated-in-advance, tight theory; the study remains consistently a sondage), but at least general movements, directions along which any analysis must be oriented.

There are, however, two writers who, although not included in the body of this study, deserve attention even if of a summary nature: one, Descartes, omnipresent throughout our series of essays, though concealed; and two, Pascal, central to his age, and not included here because of a reluctance to add still more verbiage to the ancient debate over the authenticity of the Discours sur les passions de l'amour, and also, perhaps, because of the realization that this work, questions of authorship aside, is not all that

original, and repeats to a large extent many ideas exposed in several of the chapters in far more striking fashion.

But it is first Descartes who deserves, even demands, some explication, and in particular his work, Les Passions de l'âme, published at the end of 1649, shortly before his death. Many of the ideas he espouses in this work had already been expressed in his correspondence, notably in that with "la princesse Elisabeth." As early as 1645, Descartes seems to have been preoccupied with defining and explaining his overview of man's involvement with strong emotion, and in one letter to Elisabeth clearly posits his belief: "Je ne suis point d'opinion . . . qu'on doive s'exempter d'avoir des passions; il suffit qu'on les rende sujettes à la raison, et lorsqu'on les a ainsi apprivoisées, elles sont quelquefois d'autant plus utiles qu'elles penchent plus vers l'excès."[1] This notion of taming through reason, through self-knowledge and control, is also at the base of Les Passions de l'âme, and the work relies heavily upon a constant synthesis between emotional emptiness and untamed passions. Descartes seeks to maintain the perfect measure, the right dosage of emotion, and while les passions frequently serve to fortify and maintain concepts and beliefs, they may also risk pushing too far: ". . . tout le mal qu'elles peuvent causer consiste en ce qu'elles fortifient et conservent ces pensées plus qu'il n'est besoin, ou bien qu'elles en fortifient et conservent d'autres auxquelles il n'est pas bon de s'arrêter."[2]

The "self" that Descartes creates in his work,

constantly on guard against emotion which is not understood or directed by the system of will, when touched by love is involved in a process of self-perfectioning that becomes a goal unto itself, love serving then as but a means. This view of love, consistent with the age's close attention to the societal, and which demands a recognition of superiority in the chosen love object, reflects Descartes' preoccupation with self-discipline and control. What emerges is a picture of a well-disciplined, self-knowledgeable individual, bent upon composing a personnage seeking to maintain a limited amount of emotion in his life. Any distance from this basic principle of perfection, results in a serious moral downfall: ". . . l'amour qui est injuste nous joint à des choses qui peuvent nuire, ou du moins qui ne méritent pas d'être tant considérées par nous qu'elles sont, ce qui nous avilit et nous abaisse."[3] The persistent theme of potential self-degradation traverses the moralist literature, the awareness that love can throw into disruption the composed, tight system of self-regulation, can disorient, alienate the self. This awareness which may, as for Madame de Lafayette, translate itself by a vocabulary of "falling," seems to point persistently back to Descartes.

But Descartes himself admits to the possibility of failure in this attempt at "taming" passions: ". . . j'avoue qu'il y a peu de personnes qui se soient assez préparées en cette façon contre toutes sortes de rencontres, et que ces mouvements excités dans le sang par les objets des passions

suivent d'abord si promptement des seules impressions qui se font dans le cerveau et de la disposition des organes, encore que l'âme n'y contribue en aucune façon, qu'il n'y a point de sagesse humaine qui soit capable de leur résister lorsqu'on n'y est pas assez préparé."[4] What Descartes proposes, then, as the definitive remedy in the battle, is a constant state of self-preparation, maintained via a "reflective" process, via an interior dialogue. Thus, the word is given the ultimate task of control. If moved to unreason, the sole final recourse must be to the domain of language, to la réflection and to la résolution, hence to a temporal structure which places its greatest value upon the slow, meditative, recuperative balm of reason, rather than upon the spontaneous immediacy of emotion. The principal component is the "word," always lucid. It is above all this emphasis upon structured language to counteract the disorder, the disorientation caused by les passions that makes Descartes significant in terms of the study proposed here, and why it was felt that he merited some preliminary attention.

The reasons for mentioning the Discours sur les passions de l'amour, for so long attributed to Pascal, are not unlike those for Les Passions de l'âme. Both works decidedly reflect important trends in the thinking of the age, many of which lend force to what will be studied in the body of our essay. If "Pascal's" short piece was not included there, it was for the reasons mentioned earlier: a wish to avoid adding yet more opinion to the long-standing debate over authenticity, and secondly (and far more importantly), a developing awareness

that the work does not truly offer the originality and richness one might have anticipated. Many of the ideas expressed in the Discours, e.g., on the ties between love and ambition, are expressed with far greater force in a writer like the chevalier de Méré. However, because the work is considered a "highlight" of the age, it does seem necessary to indicate some of the thinking which bears most directly on our study, for whether the Discours properly belongs to Pascal or not, it is at least a part of the writings of the age, and hence deserves consideration as reflecting certain general trends.

As for the debate over authorship, it is a very old one by now, going back to 1842 and to Victor Cousin's discovery of the manuscript. Cousin, like Lanson and Saulnier after him, was ready to accept the attributing of the work to Pascal. However, Louise Lafuma, returning to a careful and precise study of the sources, adopted another opinion, maintaining that Pascal could not have written the work, for the author seemingly made use of texts which did not appear until after Pascal's death in 1662.[5] However, this argument, obviously unending, although M. Lafuma's conclusions have been accepted by many, is not really of interest here. Rather, it is more important to focus upon those passages of the Discours sur les passions de l'amour which reflect certain dominant directions and currents.

As in Descartes' writings, as in so many of the moralists' works, there is in the Discours a decided fasci-

nation with the perfection sought from the love experience. The association of love with moral superiority, with self-development runs through the work: "Il semble que l'on ait toute une autre âme quand l'on aime que quand on n'aime pas; on s'élève par cette passion, et on devient tout grandeur. . . ."[6] Loving, stripped here of an erotic base, denied its element of sexuality, becomes a means to self-recognition, to self-recomposition, through a constant mingling with "reason," an association which the author maintains throughout the work. Love remains, within this context, a tamed force; is tamed, more precisely, within the context of the work.

Moreover, the "rules" of loving--the diverse stratagems--are developed in the Discours much as in the other mondain literature of the age, properly reflecting the semi-literary milieu which produced it. There is a close attention to correct form, to the certitude that the "right" language can communicate love, can thereby assure its success, and the wooing attempts of the male, his many little "seductions," are viewed here as an absolutely integral part of the love situation.

But the most important part of the Discours sur les passions de l'amour, and that which forms its central premise, is the close relationship between love and boredom. The work opens upon a declaration of direct hierarchy: "L'homme est né pour penser." The passions, we are then told, serve primarily as a stimulus in what would otherwise become a monotony of reason. "C'est une vie unie à laquelle il ne peut

s'accommoder; il lui faut du remuement et de l'action, c'est-à-dire qu'il est nécessaire qu'il soit quelquefois agité des passions, dont il sent dans son coeur des sources si vives et si profondes."[7] Thus, from the beginning, the role of love has been relegated to a distant second place, necessary only as a lift in an otherwise thinking universe. What particularly stands out is the denial of spontaneity, the extreme sense of regulation, the feeling that "love" is viewed as a rather benign force. Through this very deliberate hierarchy, passion emerges as being of highly weakened status. In fact, "discoursing" as he does, the author successfully limits, even bans, the spontaneous, disruptive side of erotic energy, and thus tames in advance a potentially chaotic situation.

While it is surely true that the authors of Les Passions de l'âme and of the Discours sur les passions de l'amour share with many of our writers certain basic beliefs, what is far more important in terms of the study we have proposed here, is that they reflect the one fundamental trend of all the Classical moralist writing: the need to analyze love, to structure, to negate, to purge. This need, furthermore, clearly translates a desire to free themselves and their readers from the illusions of love, from the romantic, romanesque myth-making (so prevalent earlier in the century, but also a long-standing trend of Western thought). One after another, each writer, emphasizing diverse means, seemingly seeks a liberation from the demands of love, of passion, and it is precisely these diverse ways "out" that this study will attempt to explore.

Footnotes

[1]Descartes, Les Passions de l'âme (Paris: Gallimard, 1953; préface, 1969), préface, p. 10.

[2]Ibid., p. 80.

[3]Ibid., p. 126.

[4]Ibid., pp. 175-176.

[5]A precise analysis is available in M. Lafuma's 1950 edition of the Discours sur les passions de l'amour, published by Delmas. This scholar attributes the work to Charles Paul d'Escableau, marquis d'Alluye, and believes that the work may have been written circa 1666, at a moment when the subject of love, in the form of diverse questions and maximes, was preoccupying the frequenters of the salons.

[6]Blaise Pascal, Discours sur les passions de l'amour (Paris: Hachette, 1966; original edition, 1897), p. 134.

[7]Ibid., p. 123.

CHAPTER I

THE CHEVALIER DE MERE

The chevalier de Méré, rarely studied among the seventeenth-century moralist writers, is best known anecdotally as the gentleman who one day in 1653 accompanied Pascal (and the duc de Roannez, their mutual friend) on a coach ride, thereby supposedly exposing the great mathematician to a whole new way of thinking, which he would call l'esprit de finesse, and which represented man's intuitive, perceptive side. Although Méré describes the ride and ensuing conversation in detail (and readily sheds much favorable light on his own role as philosopher-teacher), the incident surely has been overdeveloped by scholars at the expense of careful, thorough study of Méré's works, the Conversations, first published in 1668 and 1669, the Discours, published in 1677, and a few posthumous writings on l'honnêteté and on social intercourse in general.[1]

This is not to deny, of course, the mutual influence that Pascal and Méré may have exerted over one another. Or perhaps the ideas they shared in common are less a result of direct influence than of the force the age's diverse philosophical currents may have exerted on them both simultaneously. In any

case, Méré writing on the two kinds of study needed by man to advance successfully in the world, does indeed call to mind the more famous passage of Pascal on l'esprit de géométrie and l'esprit de finesse:

> Il y a deux sortes d'Etudes, l'une qui ne cherche que l'art et les Règles; l'autre qui n'y songe point du tout, et qui n'a pour but que de rencontrer par instinct et par réflexions, ce qui doit plaire en tous les sujets particuliers. S'il fallait se déclarer pour l'une des deux, ce serait à mon sens pour la dernière, et surtout lorsqu'on sait par expérience ou par sentiment, qu'on se connaît à ce qui sied le mieux. Mais l'autre n'est pas à négliger, pourvu qu'on se souvienne toujours que ce qui réussit vaut mieux que les Règles. (II, 109)

Méré, of course, far less steeped in the scientific tradition, gives more favor than Pascal to man's intuitive, feeling side, but his entire philosophy, or if not that, at least his entire approach to the life experience, is constructed on a base of analytical, methodical unmasking, as we will show later.

Like Pascal, moreover, the Chevalier was fascinated by mathematics. Gambling interested him for its rewards, perhaps even more so for its elegant retirement into a closed circle, removed from less refined preoccupations (that is, as the quintessential activity of l'honnête homme), but he was also drawn to the mathematical aspect of the stakes and worked with Pascal at solving various game problems.[2] The idea of order which permeates his writings is perhaps a result of this training, but in any case, what is clear is that Méré, while relying heavily on intuition in structuring his moral universe, nevertheless was influenced by an esthetics of symmetry and proportion: ". . . tout ce qu'on fait et tout ce qu'on dit est une espèce d'architecture: il y faut de la

Symmétrie" (II, 37). Thus, affective reactions, inherently less organized in their original state, demand a constant ordering and structuring, a belief consistent with his heavy emphasis upon control.

To achieve his ends, then, the Chevalier relied on techniques culled from finesse and géométrie. But it is at this point that Méré is usually abandoned. Once his intellectual kinship with Pascal has been established, it seems there is little need to pursue the study of the Chevalier any further. He is a shadow figure at best. But perhaps there is another reason for passing him by. Reading through his works, one is able to understand why he is a more-or-less neglected writer of the seventeenth century. His works are dry, often repetitious, overly rigid; there is no spontaneity, everything is constrained, measured. Moreover, he seems very remote; any discussion of actualité is futile. Contemporary beliefs in movement, free expression are belied by Méré's attention to performance in society, to what rules must be followed for one to gain social acceptance.

The question must then arise whether Méré offered a "relevant" experience to seventeenth-century Frenchmen. His writings clearly do not propose a code of living in reach of "everyman." Méré, building a moral whose goal was social perfection, ordered, structured, designed for a superior individual constantly in control of himself, was surely writing for an elite. His code was "relevant" to those who earlier in the century had found in the ethics of glory and grandeur an appropriate, pleasing expression for self-definition.

Thus the directives offered by the chevalier de Méré fall upon those who have discovered the total faillite of the morals of heroism. The nobleman's glory was hardly a significant concept at a time of weakening political power, and Méré's works, published well into the second half of the century, propose exactly the small-scale, reduced code necessary to such a time, the diminishing of stress on la vraie vertu reflecting the decreased political power. Henceforth, social perfection will be the new "moral," one ever so much easier to attain.

Jean Starobinski, in an article on La Rochefoucauld, but which applies perhaps with even greater force to Méré, formulates the transition which has occurred: "C'est dans le champ social lui-même, c'est dans le commerce quotidien que les valeurs esthétiques vont se substituer aux impératifs moraux et prendre à leur tour valeur d'impératifs. L'existence trouvera sa règle dans la loi qui gouverne le rapport harmonieux des formes et des fictions: il faudra apprendre à plaire, à cultiver les agréments, à trouver les airs et les manières."[3]

With the new self-acknowledgment that the old rules no longer compose an operable force, with the decline of the Cornelian system of heroics, the nobility, the elite, must have an alternative structure, one this time imminently accessible and far less vulnerable, and the moment is therefore propitious for the advent of the system of l'honnêteté, whose principal component is an elegant style. This mood

pervades completely Méré's writings. Especially his conversations with the maréchal de Clérambault, in their structure alone, reflect a preoccupation with refinement, with style, as they fluctuate between two modes of activity: speaking, that is conversing (the dialogue form adding an element of sociability), and gambling, recourse to the latter being the primary interrupting force in the flow of words. It is not only a leisured world which emerges, but a facile one, alternating between gentlemanly conversation and le jeu, and a strong feeling of carefully realized désinvolture permeates the whole atmosphere.

This heady emphasis upon refined elegance, upon manners, upon correct form demands a backdrop which must contrast with the situation of the then contemporary France. A sense of exquisite order must replace that of cluttered chaos, and perhaps that is why Méré's ideal civilization was situated way beyond the time and space of seventeenth-century France, in ancient Greece, and in a fictitious Greece at that, heavily romanticized, clearly removed from any historical accuracy. What he sought from placing his dream in Antiquity was a superb glorification of a refined, elegant civilization, superior in manners and conduct to any other. He frequently alludes, it is true, to heroes and heroism, but does not use these terms in the way Corneille did earlier in the century. Gone are the sublime pride, the heroic stances, the princely declamations, for Heroism is now refinement, and the Hero is he who conquers not violently, but "d'une manière qui plaise" (I, 51-52).

The central core of Méré's works is l'honnêteté and l'honnête homme. The Chevalier was not the first to treat that subject in seventeenth-century France. There had already been the words of Chapelain, of Balzac, but Méré's direct predecessor was perhaps Faret, who, in his L'Honneste Homme published in 1630, sought to establish a code of behavior for aristocratic man at court. But Méré's definition of l'honnête homme went further than anything which had come before, and his own involvement with l'honnêteté seems far more intense. He both enlarged and deepened the term, separating it from notions, essentially limited, of mere courtly conduct and endowing it with a new sense of vitality surpassing levels of simple social gallantry. L'honnêteté for him was an active force--"il faut qu'elle agisse et gouverne" (I, 55)--not a decoration. It was to be the essence of the individual and "la quintessence de toutes les vertus" (III, 71). All this is very vague, of course, and deliberately so, the assumption being that the elite circle to whom these words were destined could reach behind the imprecision. The code, obviously, was not to be accessible to all, was never meant to be, but rather only to a certain few seeking to maintain, for themselves and for the society which surrounded and observed them, their superior status.

Méré reaches his height of exclusion in the statements referring to the "je ne sais quoi": "Ce que j'aime le mieux et qu'on doit selon mon sens le plus souhaiter en tout ce qu'on fait pour plaire, c'est je ne sais quoi qui se sent bien, mais

qui ne s'explique pas si aisément . . ." (II, 12). And when he does propose a definition, Méré does little more than beg the question: ". . . ce n'est autre chose que d'exceller en tout ce qui regarde les agréments et les bienséances de la vie" (III, 70). If the "je ne sais quoi," an entire system unto itself, is not so easily explainable, translatable, it is because it was never so intentioned. Instead, Méré was intent upon establishing a code, one to be deciphered by the maréchal de Clérambault and by a few others, but clearly restricted in its accessibility. Nothing has really changed, the "essence" of nobility has remained intact, or at least the belief in that quality has not shifted, but this time, failure can more readily be avoided, "essence" becoming, paradoxically, a mask.

L'honnêteté for the chevalier de Méré takes precedence over any rivaling demands, which is why love, spontaneous and uncontrollable, or why any passion for that matter, cannot be of great significance in constructing the new moral edifice. However, it is not all quite so severe as might at first be thought; Méré did not seek to impose a code upon a reluctant subject, but rather he sought to harmonize his system with the larger one of human happiness:

> L'honnêteté me semble la chose du monde la plus aimable, et les personnes de bon sens ne mettent pas en doute, que nous ne la devons aimer, que parce qu'elle nous rend heureux! Car la félicité, comme on sait, est la dernière fin des choses, que nous entreprenons. Ainsi tout ce qui n'y contribue en rien, quoique l'on s'en imagine quelque apparence honnête, c'est toujours une fausse honnêteté. . . . Car à bien examiner toutes les vertus, elles ne sont pas à rechercher que de cela seulement qu'elles peuvent servir à notre bonheur. (III, 99)

His program was then to captivate, to seduce through an appeal to an illusory bonheur. La vraie vertu will be dismantled by showing its clear inability to realize happiness, for its demands far surpassed that quality, striving instead for a heightened excellence, unicity, even if self-destruction were the means. Gone now are thoughts of transcendence, and in their stead emerges the revived Epicurean value, le bonheur, hedonistic only in a very limited sense.

But perhaps the most interesting part of Méré's writings, and certainly the most important part for this study, is the elaborate emphasis on authenticity, on true "selfness," not only because it was a constant theme in so much of the literature of the age, but also because the Chevalier so magnificently entwines the genuine with the sham that in the end there is no longer any distinction. The two become readily convertible, "authentic" man ultimately revealing himself as but totally factitious.

L'honnête homme is first of all authentic in the sense of unaffected. Méré's entire esthetics are based upon a strong belief in the natural, unadorned way. Thus, anything artificial, make-up, fancy dress, is rejected as a mask of the "true self." And pedantry is attacked as a cover-up for true knowledge. L'honnête homme, Méré's authentic man, is totally free from such false, disguising manners:

> Mais les gens faits, et qui jugent bien, n'aiment pas les choses de montre, et qui parent beaucoup, quand elles ne sont que de peu de valeur. Celles qui n'ont guère d'éclat, et qui sont de grand prix, leur plaisent. Cela se remarque en tout, et même en ce qui concerne l'esprit et les pensées. Car

> si ces sortes de choses semblent fort belles, et qu'elles ne soient belles qu'en apparence, elles dégoûtent tout aussitôt, et celles qui le sont sans le paraître, plus on les considère, plus on les trouve à son gré. C'est qu'elles sont belles sans être parées, et qu'on y découvre de temps-en-temps des grâces secrètes, qu'on n'avait pas aperçues. (I, 56)

Méré had a decided penchant for all in life that was secret, mysterious, below the surface. Ultimate truth, he felt, could be attained only by penetrating beneath the layers of mask, be it clothes or words, and all his notions of beauty are intimately tied to this philosophy of bareness.

What appears first as an esthetic (not ethical) judgment, soon however reveals itself as much more. The honnête homme, who must constantly strive to free himself from any outer convention which might hide the genuine man, must also be able to discern authenticity in others. Everything and everyone is hidden, and one must take it upon himself to delve below the surface, to distinguish the real from the mask: "Quand il m'arrive de rencontrer quelqu'un je le sais bien démêler, et quoique j'entende dire de bonnes choses et que j'en voie faire qui ont toute la grâce qu'on peut souhaiter, je ne conclus pas pour cela. Ce n'est bien souvent qu'un langage emprunté, ou qu'un personnage qu'on joue. Je prends garde si tout vient du fonds, et si rien ne se dément . . ." (I, 45). What Méré seems to demand is a constant attention, a constant tension, on guard against mistaken judgment. At base, is the fear of being duped, and immediate and thorough demasking is a sure means of controlling such risk, the Chevalier seeking "authenticity" less as a desired ideal than as a means to regulating

deception.

But there is yet another side to the problem. L'honnête homme must certainly be able to discern quickly the true from the false, in others. He must also remain "natural," that is, free from exterior clutter, allowing his basic, undecorated self to show through. Authenticity is thus seen as an esthetic ideal as well as a means to achieving freedom from others' disguises. Curiously, however, this honnête homme, supposedly a master of authentic behavior for himself and for others, is ultimately conceived as a factitious individual, l'honnêteté manifesting itself as nothing more than a role. One plays at being authentic, and naturalness is a theatrical pose which must somehow come across as ingenuous. What counts alone is the appearance, the form. Metaphors of the theatre abound in Méré's works: ". . . mais le personnage d'un honnête homme s'étend partout; il se doit transformer par la souplesse du génie, comme l'occasion le demande" (III, 157). Authenticity is only another role, among others, to be acted out, played for its fullest. So long as others remain convinced of its sincerity, it is valid, which is to say that what appears the most authentic, is. In order not to be duped, one must dupe first, hence, control. The question of authenticity in Méré shows itself to be little more than a travesty of the ongoing attempt of the time to arrive, somehow, at the inner self, for rather than penetrating through layers to reach a basic unit, beyond all further reduction, Méré builds new layers, adds more armor (admittedly

of "simplicity," but armor all the same) and sends out into the world not the true self, but two selves.

The honnête homme thus becomes considerably more complex than has been suggested by most scholars, and it is quite clear that when Méré insisted upon a distinct opposition between l'honnêteté and la galanterie, he was not being simply contrary. The system of l'honnêteté only uses the essentially superficial ideas usually associated with gallant, court behavior, in an effort to construct a satisfactory social presence. Beyond that, however, Méré developed a highly complex system of structuring relationships in society, whose primary element was manipulation and control. The essential posture of l'honnête homme is one of sharp observation combined with an art of analysis which not only demasks, but then conquers, not only strips, but possesses. In modern terminology, we would refer to an effort by the self to possess the other, and Méré was not without his own strong awareness of the subconscious, that which he called man's faible. In order to achieve total control, he sought to build an elaborate paradigm based upon this weakness: ". . . nous avons toujours quelque chose qui nous tient au coeur, et nous touche sensiblement, et c'est un grand avantage, que de pénétrer ce faible pour gagner les personnes comme on veut" (III, 152).

All of human relationship, as viewed by Méré, has as its principal resort this mechanism of control, and relationships with women are no exception. It is not too extreme to

say that "love" is absent from his thoughts, at least as they were expressed in the Conversations and Discours. When he does write of commerce with women, his first concern is toward controlling the relationship. Perhaps it is fear of adventure, fear of being duped, fear of losing the social self, which motivates him, but Méré is clearly seeking mastery through the power of the word. What he wants is not passion, nor even any mild reciprocal pleasure between male and female, but simply an art de plaire that is nothing less than an art de séduire. How to win over a woman is what counts, and mastery of language is deemed an essential component in the battle. Although fairly discreet on this subject in his essays, Méré writes directly to the point in the Propos: "Il ne faut pas moins cacher le dessein qu'on a de plaire quand on se veut faire aimer d'une femme que quand on plaide devant un juge, par des égards différents! Quand on n'a point d'empressement, une femme s'imagine qu'on fait les choses naturellement, et qu'elles ne coûtent guère. On ne l'embarrasse point" (I, 147).[4] In the Conversations with the maréchal de Clérambault, Méré pushes still further with the word-control theory: "On leur jette son coeur à la tête, et d'abord on leur en dit plus que la vraisemblance ne leur permet d'en croire, et bien souvent plus qu'elles n'en veulent" (I, 21).

Implicit in any "art of pleasing" or "art of seduction," however refined, is a close attention to form. Méré attempts to establish ways of perfecting the form of love, its appearance. Authentic love, for him, is only that which is most successfully mimed. Women are seen as objects of conquest;

they must be won over, persuaded, seduced, and careful manipulation of appearances is seen as a sure means to victory. Méré's seduction, of course, is of a most refined and elegant nature, but in the end it remains a code, a stratagem, with no risk of exposing the heart. He is interested in the conquest, the game plan, relying heavily upon self-mastery and mastery over others, denying the more spontaneous, emotive side of male-female relationships.

Ultimately, what concerned the chevalier de Méré was the language of love. In fact, all of life in this factitious universe is viewed basically as an exchange of words, always the correct ones, of course. The entire social structure rests upon a foundation of verbal communication, or more exactly, of verbal manipulation and control: "Mais je puis vous assurer que l'on ne saurait trop avoir une certaine justesse de langage, qui consiste à se servir des meilleures façons de parler, pour mettre sa pensée dans l'esprit des gens comme on veut qu'elle y soit, ni plus ni moins" (I, 15). It might be more precise to say that for Méré everything is language, everything is highly significant. A gesture, a tone of voice, a silence, all are "statements" charged with meaning, which must be perceived as such, penetrated and decoded.

And love, too, is envisioned as essentially a problem of language, on more than one level. Méré was fascinated by the forms the expression of love adopted in the novels of the time. L'Astrée was not only the ideal novel, but also the ideal expression of romance. And although the romanesque is

is virtually absent from the Conversations and the Discours, it is amply expressed in Méré's letters and in a short tale adapted from Tasso, Les Avantures de Renaud et d'Armide, published posthumously. It is in these stories that the précieux vein is given full vent and that Méré's imagination can find easy expression. The letters, actually, are frequently short tales, recounting various romantic predicaments--a ménage à trois where all three parties are totally content; the famous incident of "La Matrone d'Ephèse," whose origins lie with Petronius and which Saint-Evremond also adapted for his purposes. What interested Méré was the literary expression of love, which was why he was always so captivated by L'Astrée and its atmosphere pregnant with romance.

Love is measured, moreover, by its ability to conform to literary manipulation. When he criticizes the amorous practices of Oriental potentates--the slave-like harems in particular--his objections are expressed solely in an esthetic, never ethical, context: ". . . il y a toujours en ce pays-là des aventures d'amour et de guerre, mais elles sont telles, que je défierais l'Arioste et le Tasse et même Sapho d'en faire un agréable Roman" (I, 84). Hardly shocking or scandalous by any standards, Méré's own stories are nevertheless the only vehicle for any hint of passion and sex. His recommendations for social behavior, as expressed in his essays, make no allusion whatsoever to any such free, spontaneous feeling. Indeed, it is as if the Chevalier felt that all such concern belonged strictly to the domain of fiction. "Serious" writing

had no room for it.

Méré's concern with the language of love shows itself on yet another level. In "De la Délicatesse dans les choses," (another posthumous essay), he tells the story of a gentleman who stirred up the wrath of the woman he loved by une incivilité. Not until he has adjusted his language can she again return his affection. Once the offending word, or any like it, is banished, the relationship can resume a normal path (III, 122). Language, then, dictates love. Similarly, Méré writes at length of yet another gentleman who, through the unsuccessful use of language, failed to reach his desired goal with a woman he greatly esteemed. Relying too heavily upon "Spanish-type" galanteries, the man was unable to persuade the woman of his feelings. His language was at fault, according to Méré: "Car cette manière galante et même enjouée, qui pourrait être bien reçue au commencement d'un amour, n'est pourtant pas de saison dans les plus forts accès, où l'on n'a guère accoutumé de rire et de badiner" (I, 57). In order to arrive at his ends successfully, it would have been necessary to adopt other expression, other words. The choice of convention was unhappy; the wrong manières were employed. Méré persists in directing himself to the form of love, to its appearance, and what counts, what is at a premium, is mastery over the word.

The mondain code which banished spontaneity and sincere emotion and replaced them with word-games relying heavily upon convention, may well have been, as Maurice Magendie has said,

a reaction against the "sensualité sans esprit mise à la mode par le Vert Galant."[5] The super-refinement, the stress on the correct "airs," the close attention to language, do indeed seem to offer an alternative to an overemphasis on sensuality. Viewed as such, l'honnêteté becomes but another form of sublimation. Or perhaps there is another reason, as proposed by Roger Duchêne: "La galanterie . . . est un alibi commode. Elle introduit dans la conversation entre hommes et femmes un langage qui, malgré ses conventions, reste un langage amoureux."[6] Interpreted in this fashion, the mondain writers' heavy stress on form stems from society's strong interdiction against spontaneous, free expression of love, against sexuality. But "insincere" language, language of a second, somehow different "self," can also be a sure means to achieving emotional independence while at the same time maintaining and guaranteeing consistent social perfection. Failure becomes thus increasingly more difficult, as the standards themselves are visibly reduced.

Perhaps also there is something of the Epicurean ideal in Méré's writings, a view which is linked also to Magendie's thesis. The Epicureans emphasized, in their descriptions of ideal woman, both physical charm and a high degree of intelligence. Many passages in the Chevalier's works allude to the importance of intellectual ability in women, and the emphasis which he places on this talent seems to result from an overall attitude which values intelligent discourse over strictly physical pleasure. Addressing himself

to a female friend, Méré writes: ". . . ce qui fait principalement que vous plaisez toujours, c'est que vous avez l'esprit fin, avec une extrême justesse à parler, à vous taire, à être douce ou fière, enjouée ou sérieuse, et à prendre dans les moindres choses que vous dites le meilleur ton et le meilleur tour" (II, 10).

The chevalier de Méré certainly accorded a high value to intellectual finesse in women, and the fact that he leaves all remarks on passion and sensuality to his little fictitious dramas seems to indicate that he sought an elevated role for women in male-female commerce. But the time and attention he devotes to form, to appearance, to seduction through language techniques, indicate especially an overwhelming constraint, a reluctance to participate as an exposed, vulnerable individual. What is sexual in man is strictly "literary," anecdotal for Méré. All relationships with women require, in life, a delicacy of manners that immediately reduces any erotic tone: "La belle Déesse, dit un ancien Grec, ne trouve nullement bon que l'on parle si ouvertement de ses mystères; et quand personne ne le dirait, qui ne voit point qu'un voile en cela fait bon effet, et que l'expression n'y saurait être trop délicate . . ." (I, 68). Woman is thus associated with all that is hidden, mysterious, delicately impenetrable, and the burden of rejecting passion is thus placed squarely upon her.

And it is precisely "passion," the tumultuous side of love, that Méré, like so many others of his time, sought to negate, or at least to dilute. For diverse reasons, the

Classical French writers were caught in a continuing fear of man's passions: fear of loss of self-control, religious fears, fear of engagement, of adventure, of failure. Méré probably fits most closely in the last category; not unlike Saint-Evremond, with whom he is frequently compared, Méré preferred to counsel, to advise, to write, rather than to engage himself, thereby maintaining a freedom from control by others. What bothers him in love is its frequently disruptive character, its ability to remove one from his "true" self. Fictional characters serve to illustrate this fear: "On aime Armide dans le camp des Chrétiens, parce qu'elle s'y présente douce et composée dans une grande modération, mais quand Renaud la quitte . . . et que dans l'excès de sa colère et de ses regrets elle ne garde plus de mesure, quelle différence d'elle à elle-même" (II, 15). This alienating element of passion is that which Méré fears most with its concomitant loss of acquired, studied tranquillity and control.

What is really sacrificed, however, is the entire system of l'honnêteté which Méré sought always to salvage. In one rather remarkable passage, he states unequivocally his basic philosophy:

> L'honnêteté se montre si agréable à toute sorte de jour, qu'elle mérite bien qu'on la cherche; et quand on la trouve, et qu'on ne la perd point de vue, on ne manque jamais de l'acquérir. Ayons-la toujours devant les yeux, et si nos passions nous veulent détourner de ce qu'elle nous ordonne, rebuttons-les sévèrement. . . . Nous y sentirons d'abord quelque contrainte, mais elle ne sera pas longue, et puis à considérer nos plus sensibles contentements, ils s'en vont bien vite, à peu près comme un songe agréable. . . . (III, 88)

Love is seen as a dream, l'honnêteté as a durable, solid force. The metaphor of the dream, which appears in the above quote, is used also in a letter that Méré addressed to Ninon de Lenclos, his former mistress: ". . . et quoique je vous aime à ne me pouvoir consoler de vous perdre, si vous en êtes plus heureuse, oubliez-moi comme si notre engagement n'était qu'un songe. . . ."[7] For the Chevalier, l'honnêteté was of such high value that any rivaling system could be seen best as ephemeral, fading out in favor of the superior moral code he had created.

Ultimately, the only form of love possible in Méré's world is a mutual honnêteté governed by a strict code whose principal mechanism is reciprocal esteem. A woman who has all that is necessary to please a man must frequent only an honnête homme so that she herself will gain (II, 80). Moreover, Méré continues, "il est certain que quand on aime une personne d'un mérite exquis, cet amour remplit d'honnêteté le coeur et l'esprit, et donne toujours de plus nobles pensées, que l'affection qu'on a pour une personne ordinaire" (II, 81). Love is seen then as a means, among others, for arriving at this perfection of the self that Méré called l'honnêteté--"c'est de l'amour que naissent la plupart des vrais agréments" (III, 75)--and it is no longer an intimate art. Instead, love has become open, social, and a means to perfection and advancement in the world. Méré catches his reader by surprise by what appears at first to be a standard praise of the emotions, but which reveals

itself at the end as little more than a praise of certain social techniques:

> Je connais des gens qui seraient d'avis que pour être agréable et même pour vivre heureusement on n'eut point de passions. Il y a même eu des gens fort sévères, mais de peu de sens, qui se sont autrefois imaginés qu'elles sont toujours mauvaises. Mais elles sont ordinairement si bonnes, que tant s'en faut qu'on les doive retrancher, on fait bien d'en augmenter le nombre, et d'être touché de tout ce qui plaît aux personnes raisonnables. Car si peu qu'on leur revienne d'ailleurs, c'est un moyen bien sûr pour en être aimé. De sorte que quand on se pourrait défaire de toutes les passions, ce qui serait assez difficile, il s'en faudrait pourtant bien garder, parce que celui qui ne souhaiterait rien, et qui ne serait sensible à quoi que ce soit, trouverait la vie ennuyeuse et déplairait à tout le monde et à soi-même. (II, 49)

The emotions become a useful device in triggering social acceptance, in generating positive feelings towards one's self in others. Love is little more than a way to develop further social aspirations. Méré's entire world-view seems nothing more than a giant framework of codes and rules. Every word is directed toward indicating the surest path to achieving l'honnêteté, which itself is little more than a composite, factitious quality, a mime of authenticity, a role. Within this moral universe, there is hardly any room at all for what we think of traditionally as love, for the essential mechanism in Méré's moral is an extraordinary restraint, in radical opposition to the spontaneity and exuberance, or even anguish, of passion. At best, reciprocal honnêteté serves as love in a composed universe where social perfection has become the highest standard.

Footnotes

[1]Antoine Gombaud, chevalier de Méré, Oeuvres complètes, ed. Charles-H. Boudhors (Paris: Editions Fernand Roches, 1930). Direct quotations from Méré's works will be noted by volume and page number in the body of the chapter.

[2]Edmond Chamaillard, Le chevalier de Méré, suivi d'un choix de Lettres et Pensées du Chevalier (Paris: G. Clouzot, 1921), p. 81.

[3]Jean Starobinski, "La Rochefoucauld et les morales substitutives," La Nouvelle revue française, XIV (Août 1966), 211.

[4]The Propos, anterior to the Conversations and the Discours, were gathered together by Boudhors in the Revue d'histoire littéraire de la France between 1922 and 1925.

[5]Maurice Magendie, La politesse mondaine et les théories de l'honnêteté en France au XVII[e] siècle, de 1600 à 1660 (Genève: Slatkine Reprints, 1970), I, 133.

[6]Roger Duchêne, Réalité vécue et art épistolaire/ Madame de Sévigné et la lettre d'amour (Paris: Bordas, 1970), p. 53.

[7]Chamaillard, op. cit., p. 78.

CHAPTER II

LA ROCHEFOUCAULD

The 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 sort of special challenge. Hypotheses explaining why La Rochefoucauld favored the maxim have been amply formulated, perhaps most satisfactorily by Jean Starobinski,[1] and it seems somehow clear that the form does indeed reply 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 and meaning (interpretation) 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 esthetics 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?) corrobrant 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."[2] La Rochefoucauld's Maximes, although not exactly proverbial, belong certainly both in forme and fond to a tradition of pithy, moral reflexion. 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, in this instance, irreconcilable with intention. This problem not withstanding, once the critic decides to comment upon the text, to criticize, he has no other choice than to structure into an intelligible whole the sum total of all 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, etc. 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 a totally 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, felt even more acutely than when the style of the former closely parallels the continuous discourse of the critic. Ultimately, the Maximes taken as a whole (or any group of maxims thus perceived) are impenetrable. Their fragmentation, their sense of indivisible totality, escape any notion of system. With all this fully in mind, we are nevertheless involved in "penetrating" the maxims which 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 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, under the title of La Justification de l'amour, whose heavy emphasis on courtoisie seems to be in contradiction with the basic tenets of the Maximes.[3] 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--and it is this structure which first needs some elucidation.

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, and is translated into the realm of language by reference to disguise, mask, and concealment. However, in a series of articles begun in 1962 and concluded in 1966, Jean Starobinski reverses this premise which has held sway for so long. Relying upon certain maxims which 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."[4] 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 variété,

quelquefois par paresse, souvent par crainte, et presque toujours par tous les trois ensemble."[5] Causation reveals itself as both complex and flexible.

Delving further, Starobinski disassociates the "self" from l'amour-propre, attempting to show that the two are not equivalent for La Rochefoucauld, and that l'amour-propre is a sort of impulsion which takes over, appropriates the self. The latter emerges as an empty, hollow space, a vacuum, subject not only to invasion by self-love, but by all forces. Vice, virtue, passion, all are conceived as "outside" of man, exterior to him, almost as floating energies.[6] Starobinski's theory is totally 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 he writes that "L'amour-propre est le plus grand de tous les flatteurs" (Max. 2), or "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, virtual autonomy, rivaling man's own, and therefore a threat to the very philosophical beliefs of voluntarism and freedom which man 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 man endowed with an unmitigating self-interest,

but so also are the intruding passions, their foundation a twin of man's own. 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 which depicts l'amour and l'amour-propre as two parallel forces, each making its independent set of demands upon the vacuum that is the self. That La Rochefoucauld saw, or conceived of, these forces as operating in similar fashion, is clearly 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 which corresponds to the writing of

the earliest maxims. The subtlety, nuance, paradoxes of the Maximes and of a few of the Réflexions diverses are totally 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 sort of plaidoyer, urging a woman to quit her modesty and to bestow her favors upon the author.[7] 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 only very recent (1971), it is necessary here to give some background information on that work, and we cite M. Hubert, the editor, to that point:

> 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)

Our own analysis, while 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), if the work is not by the author of the Maximes, it still nevertheless belongs to an analogous group of writings and

therefore reflects their concerns and expression. For our purposes, we will consider the work here as one of La Rochefoucauld's, although we are aware of, and accept as potentially valid, the questions concerning the authenticity.

What is properly 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 significant 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 indeed 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 from the same metaphysical source: man is subject to "invasion" by forces, energies, exterior to him. 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--is used copiously 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 seen essentially as a passive agent in a world of

forces over which he has very 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 there is still an effort at reconciliation, the only prerequisite being that love be viewed as a socialized pattern, dependent upon convention and a banal cause and effect.

The concept of harmony is basically an alien one to La Rochefoucauld, at least as he expressed himself in the Maximes; however, it is not without some attention in a few of the Réflexions diverses. "De la société" (written at approximately the same time as the Justification) is a short manual on how to achieve a stable social state, and in which the ideas of honnêteté are given primary importance:

> Il serait inutile de dire combien la société est nécessaire aux hommes; tous la désirent et tous la cherchent, mais peu se servent des moyens de la rendre agréable et de la faire durer. Chacun veut trouver son plaisir et ses avantages aux dépens des autres; on se préfère toujours à ceux avec qui on se propose de vivre, et on leur fait presque toujours sentir cette préférence; c'est ce qui trouble et qui détruit la société. Il faudrait du moins savoir cacher ce désir de préférence, puisqu'il est trop naturel en nous pour nous en pouvoir défaire; il faudrait faire son plaisir et celui des autres, ménager leur amour-propre, et ne le blesser jamais. (pp. 185-186)

Through the values proposed by the honnête code (civility, discretion, art de plaire), man's needs and society's can be harmonized. It is exactly this procedure that La Rochefoucauld uses in his apology of love. The same code will be judged responsible for regulating love in society, a task which the

maxims will deem impossible.

The deterministic view of man and the passions is as fully expressed in the Justification as in the Maximes,[8] but the images used are of a nature to coincide perfectly with the general courtois, précieux tone of the piece: "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 obligation, although involuntary. Basically, the entire concept of a floating love-energy, a "potion" quantitatively and qualitatively distinct from the self, which the individual absorbs into his system, not only does not betray La Rochefoucauld's views on the invasion by annihilating impulsions, but rather reflects perfectly the deterministic bent of his thinking.

As for the personification so evident in the Maximes, it is given an enhanced status in the treatise on love, and now borders on allegory, recalling certain medieval trends (as does also the Tristan theme of the philter), in this case

the first part of the Roman de la Rose. The use of capital letters for "Amour" and "Beauté" gives to these entities a new 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, superelegant style of the Précieuses, and adheres strictly to the courtois code. Nevertheless, the personification, the quasi-allegorical note, follow perfectly his fundamental beliefs. The war-like 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."[9] La Justification de l'amour appears then as the pinnacle of La Rochefoucauld's efforts to give concrete structure, precise images, to his world-view. The heavy emphasis on personification and allegory is also perhaps one of the most convincing arguments for attributing the work to him in the first place. However, this feeling

that man is no longer responsible for his desire is not, in the Justification, viewed as a problem of any consequence, since the conflict can still be socialized, civilized, and the moral question reduced to primarily an esthetic one.

While the Maximes center on love as a highly imperfect force, quick to dissipate into coquetry, gallantry, or worse into total stagnation, there is nevertheless a place for an ideal form of love which La Rochefoucauld acknowledges as being hidden to us all. The concept of a vrai amour appears frequently also in the Justification, both explicitly and implicitly. Following the code of l'honnêteté, (the new chevalerie), La Rochefoucauld states that "une maxime qui doit régler la vie des belles Ames, c'est que le vrai amour est la chose du monde la plus raisonnable" (p. 30). In a less direct fashion, but more in detail, he describes love in the opening phrases of the work: "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; . . ."[10]

This conception of le vrai amour, however, differs sharply from that presented in the maxims where throughout, it is maintained as an impossible ideal, a goal which man will never reach. There are no given qualities in the maxims which would help identify in any way La Rochefoucauld's véritable amour. To pinpoint, to qualify would be to destroy

its nebulous, vague, idealistic character; what is at stake is a feeling of perfection we carry in us, without ever being able to realize this ideal in our actual life experience. But such is not the case in the apology of love; "true love" is describable, it functions not on an abstract level, but as a viable social force, actively participating in man's existence. At this juncture, La Rochefoucauld was still giving credence to harmonizing instincts (energy forces) and social demands, and the vrai amour was seen as a perfect point of reconciliation.

Undefined, vague, left deliberately abstract in the Maximes, the perfect love is, as explained in the Justification, at the hands of every honnête homme who seeks to avail himself of it. Primarily he need adhere to the Epicurean mode and utilize its precepts to the fullest degree. As countless critics have already indicated, the Epicurean style was hardly alien to La Rochefoucauld's thinking--in the well-known conversation with Méré, La Rochefoucauld purportedly remarked: "Je trouve aussi que les plaisirs sensuels sont grossiers, sujets au dégoût et pas trop à rechercher, à moins que ceux de l'esprit ne s'y mêlent. Le plus sensible est celui de l'amour, mais il passe bien vite si l'esprit n'est de la partie."[11] The Maximes, too, in their antistoical posture, reflect certain Epicurean views, especially their underlying emphasis on man's constant and continual search for pleasure. But aside from the conversation with Méré, no other work of La Rochefoucauld gives as much attention to the Epicurean

ideal as does La Justification de l'amour.

In language reminiscent of the more devoted Epicurean writers of the time, notably Saint-Evremond, La Rochefoucauld firmly states his position on man's relationship to pleasure:

> C'est une opinion extraordinairement ridicule et extravagante, que celle qui condamne le plaisir; et néanmoins nous ne voyons rien de si commun parmi les Hommes que des reproches, et des sévérités d'un nombre infini de grossiers réformateurs contre les divertissements de la vie. Ces Philosophes froids . . . nous ordonnent de manquer à notre être, d'oublier que nous sommes Hommes, et qu'ainsi ils détruisent avec cruauté cette belle alliance de l'âme et du corps, laquelle proprement consiste dans le rapport que ces deux parties ont ensemble, particulièrement par leurs plaisirs.[12]

Not to participate in both physical and mental pleasure, La Rochefoucauld determines, is to be unfaithful to one's own nature, and he spends many pages of the Justification embellishing upon these Epicurean precepts. But whereas Saint-Evremond is satisfied with elaborate encomium of pleasure, divertissement, and equilibrium between mind and body, La Rochefoucauld pushes further and emerges with a specific code for maintaining the Epicurean beliefs as a force in society. He makes the transition between the individual and the societal, something which Saint-Evremond, ground into his own personal struggle, fails to do.

Thus, if the honnête homme is to be successful at all--not only in the wooing of his lady (la Dame and all her prerogatives are firmly reestablished in the work, reflecting the obvious courtois-précieux lessons), but also, especially, in his attempt to reconcile love with his social being--he must subscribe to more than a set of rules. Rather, his

entire conception of love must center upon a series of mutual obligations. That La Rochefoucauld was indeed capable of such orientation is seen in one famous maxim on friendship: "Ce que les hommes ont nommé amitié n'est qu'une société, qu'un ménagement réciproque d'intérêts, et qu'un échange de bons offices; ce n'est enfin qu'un commerce où l'amour-propre se propose toujours quelque chose à gagner" (Max. 83). The economy of friendship, or more accurately, the economics of it--a series of reciprocal duties and mutual obligations--is a concept with a definite kinship to what La Rochefoucauld is prescribing in La Justification de l'amour.

It is the male who, according to the maxim writer, is most susceptible to "falling in love." Woman's beauty attracts him powerfully, and when combined with a good mind, weaves a strong web from which he cannot escape. He is "determined" to love, or more precisely, "determined" by it. But la Dame knows no such potent attraction, and therefore must be governed by a separate code:

> . . . encore que l'Amour ne les assujettisse pas avec une autorité si puissante que notre Sexe; néanmoins on peut dire avec justice qu'il leur donne de la nécessité, et leur fait quelque sorte de violence, par ces raisons qu'il leur représente en si grand nombre, qu'il les contraint; qu'elles ne peuvent raisonnablement résister en toutes rencontres; qu'elles ne doivent pas désagréer une passion qu'elles-mêmes produisent; qu'elles sont obligées de reconnaître par quelque chose de naturel un amour qui vient d'elles, et de souffrir un effet dont elles sont la seule cause. (pp. 46-47)

Between l'honnête homme and la Dame, there exists a totally factitious relationship, built on convention, not too unlike the system propsed by the chevalier de Méré. But La

Rochefoucauld stresses less the perfection of language as a means to maintain amorous discourse free from emotional involvement, than a relationship built upon the importance of what is owed, of what is due.

Going beyond the first level of what is due man by woman, (the courtois language barely masking the sense of commerce, of exchange), La Rochefoucauld constructs an elaborate set of rules to govern the male-female interchange, all of which have as base the same notion of what is deserved, earned. Man must earn woman's attention; her honor is due her, and he owes it to her to preserve that honor by hiding his feelings from the rest of the world. Thus, through careful ordering and regulating, love can become an essentially benign social force, never a great, tumultuous passion, but never degenerating into morbid stagnation either. It is a force within man's reach, and though it may impinge upon him from the outside, he is still able to exert full control. It is really a sort of game that is played out to the fullest, wherein man and woman participate as two pawns, void of deep feeling, but able to relate on a system of exchange: ". . . l'Amour du côté de l'Homme n'est qu'une reconnaissance du mérite de la Femme, et du côté de la Femme n'est qu'une reconnaissance de l'amour de l'Homme" (p. 53).

Turning now to the Maximes, one perceives that no such promising 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 some messy shame and an exhausted heart.

The deterministic view of life which ruled over La Justification de l'amour is, as we showed earlier, present throughout the maxims. But whereas the love treatise was free of any rivaling principle, the aphorisms are not. "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."[13] 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. . . ."[14] Nevertheless, the problem remains when individual maxims confront others of a different persuasion.

Maxim 262 of the 1678 edition, for example, states that "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 maîtresse 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 which center upon the theory of narcissism, holding that "love of self is of the same nature as love of another person, or of exterior objects. Both are classified as sexual instincts and considered to originate in the libido."[15]

But if priority is to be established, it would seem that primary consideration is given to external, that is, to physical causes,[16] although La Rochefoucauld, fearing perhaps the consequence of overly stressing this virtual 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" (Max. 5); "La fortune et l'humeur gouvernent le monde" (Max. 435).

It is, however, in the maximes supprimées that we can find the greatest indictment against freedom and will that La Rochefoucauld offers, and although the basic belief of causation is not very different from that expressed in the 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" (Max. supp. 59).[17] 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" (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."[18]

Beyond the level of determinism, of erosion of autonomy, the Maximes take a quite different bent from the 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 our study, it does highlight eloquently the maxim writer's views. "De l'amour et de la mer" is short and should 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 saison; 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 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. 197-198)

This "réflexion" contains basically all of La Rochefoucauld's ideas on love. In the first part he describes the internal chaos of love, its storms and reefs, while 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 jeuenesse 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 a constant juice; never static, it dies if not fed continuously. Varying his elements, La Rochefoucauld also adopts the metaphor of fire: "L'amour aussi bien que le feu ne peut subsister sans un mouvement continuel; et il cesse de vivre dès qu'il cesse d'espérer ou de craindre" (Max. 75). Not only then, it would appear is love in a state of constant change and movement, rushing to an unfulfilling end, but it is conceived only 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, per-

haps 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 which sweep over us, demanding satisfaction.[19]

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" (Max. 274)--most of the adages are concerned with the end of love, with its eventual erosion and subsequent staleness. In the terminal stages, there remains no pleasure, and the frequent reference to illness suggests a feeling of corporal decrepitude, of a worn-out, worn-down mass of tissue, no longer truly alive. 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, which indicates 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 remplies" (Max. 477). Here love is linked to notions of energy, 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 the vrai amour, a concept upon which La Rochefoucauld elaborated at length in La Justification de l'amour, and which occupies also an important place in the Maximes. Nevertheless, the latter work fails to establish a working plan for this superior ethic, while 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 sincere love in the Maximes is no longer a perfectioning of the Epicurean mode, combined with the excellence of the

mondain principles; it is instead an intangible, quixotic even, vision, an ideal value, which La Rochefoucauld periodically "injects" into his writing as a tantalizing standard. Moreover, it is truly undefinable, and it seems that the sole method of explanation is through defining what it is not.

Most obviously, the véritable amour is not coquetry or gallantry, although these activities are frequently confused with the higher satisfaction of true love. Furthermore, these two modes are most often associated with women, and a streak of light misogyny seems to color certain of the maxims purporting to relate coquetry to the female almost exclusively. Women are offered a choice between two unsatisfactory domains: on the one hand, total abstinence ("Il y a peu d'honnêtes femmes qui ne soient lasses de leur métier" [Max. 367]); and on the other, a heavy dose of superficial emotion ("La coquetterie est le fond de l'humeur des femmes" [Max. 241]). That La Rochefoucauld had little favor for this travesty of love is not difficult to discern: "Le plus grand miracle de l'amour, c'est de guérir de la coquetterie" (Max. 349). Women, however, have little chance to attain a more substantial level of sentiment; the kingdom of the vrai amour is beyond their reach.

Even when abandoning the annoying problem of female loving, he remains rooted in a comparative definition. Several maxims allude pointedly to the difficulty of defining, of explaining, and almost all center upon one of La Rochefoucauld's most basic themes, concealment:

> S'il y a un amour pur et exempt du mélange de nos passions, c'est celui qui est caché au fond du

> coeur et que nous ignorons nous-mêmes. (Max. 69)
>
> Il n'y a qu'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 existence and places the whole question into the realm of the superstitious.

And yet the ideal remains strong, tempts us, appears almost viable sometimes, but ultimately remains elusive, not within our grasp. Of course, were we to achieve such purity, all coquetry, gallantry, envy, and jealousy would disappear. But the final reality is the imperfect state of love that we know, an inauthentic copy.

Evidently, as Jean Starobinski has suggested, La Rochefoucauld never succumbed to the Nietzschean type of nihilism that he only flirted with, for he maintained at least a façade of belief in absolute moral values, unattainable perhaps, but existing as images in man's mind.[20] 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 certain

fundamental, humanistic notions--freedom, will, self-perfection--are given a new lift, after having been thoroughly 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 which seem to destroy the hope that was put forth in the apology on love. There is an element of finality to the maxims, while the apology of love proposes an "open end," an aperture onto the world. That La Rochefoucauld is the author of both works (if indeed he is), may indicate that seventeenth-century literary form predominated, and that ideas could be molded to fit comfortably, or else, it may simply be stunning paradox.

Footnotes

[1]Jean Starobinski, "La Rochefoucauld et les morales substitutives," La Nouvelle revue française, XIV (Juillet 1966), 16-34; (Août 1966), 211-229.

[2]Roland Barthes, "Littérature et discontinu," Essais critiques (Paris: Editions du Seuil, 1964), p. 178.

[3]La Rochefoucauld, La Justification de l'amour, ed. J. D. Hubert (Paris: A. G. Nizet, 1971). Subsequent direct quotations from the above text will be followed by the page number(s) in the body of the chapter.

[4]Jean Starobinski, "Complexités de La Rochefoucauld," Preuves, No. 135 (Mai 1962), pp. 35-36.

[5]La Rochefoucauld, Maximes, ed. Jean Truchet (Paris: Garnier Frères, 1967), p. 10. Subsequently, the maxim number alone will be cited in the body of the chapter. (Our references are to the 1678 edition of the Maximes except when specifically noted otherwise.) This same format will be used for quotations from the Réflexions diverses, published in the same edition (Garnier) as the Maximes. However, in this case, the page number will follow the quotation.

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 intérêts, 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; . . ."

[6]Starobinski, "La Rochefoucauld et les morales substitutives," NRF, (Juillet 1966), pp. 16-17.

[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.

[9]Starobinski, "La Rochefoucauld et les morales substitutives," NRF, (Juillet 1966), p. 16.

[10]It is clear that the tripartite form used here recalls La Rochefoucauld's frequent recourse to that structure in the Maximes.

[11]Edmond Chamaillard, Le Chevalier de Méré, suivi d'un choix de Lettres et Pensées du Chevalier (Paris: G. Clouzot, 1921), p. 17.

[12]Ibid., pp. 31-32.

[13]Philip Lewis, "La Rochefoucauld: The rationality of play," Yale French Studies, No. 41, p. 144.

[14]Ibid., p. 144.

[15]May Wendelene Butrick, "The Concept of Love in the Maxims of La Rochefoucauld," (unpublished doctoral dissertation, State University of Iowa, 1959), p. 87.

[16]Lewis, op. cit., p. 145.

[17]We are following the order established by Jean Truchet in his edition of the Maximes, that is by the date of their removal after the first edition.

[18]Starobinski, "La Rochefoucauld et les morales substitutives," NRF, (Juillet 1966), p. 16.

[19]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'âme 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. They form, together, that which we refer to as love, but each has a separate, independent name, hence existence.

[20]Starobinski, "La Rochefoucauld et les morales substitutives," NRF, (Juillet 1966), pp. 25-26.

CHAPTER III

MADAME DE LAFAYETTE

"Pendant que la guerre civile déchirait la France sous le règne de Charles IX, l'Amour ne laissait pas de trouver sa place parmi tant de désordres et d'en causer beaucoup plus dans son Empire."[1] The abrupt ingression of the opening sentence of La Princesse de Montpensier, its direct thrust upon the reader, succeed in translating perfectly the view of passion as a violent, interrupting force in a world dependent upon monotonous repetition, upon unquestioned habit, for its smooth functioning. In Mme de Lafayette's works, true passion results from a sudden shock, from the arrival on the scene of a new presence, unknown before, and capable now of radically altering the existence of the participants. It is not by chance that the opening lines of La Princesse de Montpensier establish a link between love and war. The martial metaphor for Mme de Lafayette, as for La Rochefoucauld, was the most potent means of expressing the state of man subject to invasion by violent forces (passions) which call into question his yearnings toward repose as well as his belief in free will.

It is precisely the explosive, destructive, anarchical

force of Eros that Mme de Lafayette sought to depict. Under the decency of style (or the stylė of decency), the mind and the body are warring, the former manifestly unable to exert control over the spontaneous, free impulses of the latter. In the tradition of the Rambouillet group and of the précieux code in general, passionate love could be traced to an origin of mutual understanding and admiration.[2] In other words, it had a past. But for Mme de Lafayette, passion originates explosively, combustively, and is related not at all to the mental concepts of esteem and respect, based upon prior knowledge.

Originating spontaneously within the body, erotic passion is translated by the body, totally unreceptive to the dicta of virtue and le bon sens. This coup de foudre effect occurs in rapid succession in La Princesse de Clèves: M. de Clèves, upon seeing Mlle de Chartres for the first time, "demeura si touché de sa beauté et de l'air modeste qu'il avait remarqué dans ses actions qu'on peut dire qu'il conçut pour elle dès ce moment une passion et une estime extraordinaires."[3] When Mme de Clèves and the duc de Nemours first meet at a court ball, the effect is absolutely electric and does not fail to astonish all who surround them: "Quand ils commencèrent à danser, il s'éleva dans la salle un murmure de louanges. Le roi et les reines se souvinrent qu'ils ne s'étaient jamais vus, et trouvèrent quelque chose de singulier de les voir danser ensemble sans se connaître" (p. 262). The moment a new passion is born, it is sufficient unto itself, and, originating in the demands of the body, is totally free

from dependency upon the past.

That the body's impulses offer the most direct truth concerning the individual is adequately perceived, although unconsciously perhaps, by the king and queens, who, vaguely troubled, react to this scene of perfect physical harmony by seeking to reinstall through a rapid introduction the reign of reason and virtue signaled by the term "se connaître." The instant, spontaneous accord between Mme de Clèves and the duc de Nemours is in violation of the traditional code--occidental, humanist, Christian--seeking to render love subordinate to the life of the mind.

The entire story of Zaïde and Consalve belies also the précieux, devout humanist conception of love based upon prior knowledge, admiration, and respect. Early in the tale, Consalve expresses his strong belief that he could never love a woman without first knowing her well; the prince, his friend, takes the opposite stance (the whole discussion recalling a long tradition in courtois literature, the debate on love, from the medieval jeux partis to the précieux novel): "Je serai incapable de devenir amoureux d'une personne avec qui je serai accoutumé et, si je ne suis surpris d'abord, je ne puis être touché. Je crois que les inclinations naturelles se font sentir dans les premiers moments; et les passions, qui ne viennent que par le temps, ne se peuvent appeler de véritables passions."[4] Consalve, of course, falls passionately in love with Zaïde from the first moment he lays eyes on her and thus contradicts his own strongly held theory of

prior acquaintance. (Marie-Rose Carré in a very interesting study has shown the importance of "seeing" in Mme de Lafayette's works, how the visual is at once that which excites but fails to satisfy; that is, "seeing" by necessity incites to possession.[5]) The obvious conclusion from Consalve's experience is that the nature of passion is sudden, violent, interruptive, independent of control by reason or by will.

Because Mme de Lafayette was able so successfully to clothe her tales and novels in a habit of cold concision, where the voice of passion central to her writing rarely fails to adopt anything but the most lucid, structured, carefully modulated tones, the very obvious erotic center of the works is shunned in criticism for the most part, as if to penetrate the style would be a transgression of sorts. While criticism has not failed to point out that one of the major themes of the novels and nouvelles is the difficult transition between appearance and reality--hence the lengthy portrayal of courtly splendor in the early pages of La Princesse de Clèves, contrasting with the moral imperfection which soon follows--it has, nonetheless, not carried such analysis one step further by showing that Mme de Lafayette's careful masking (through the channels of monotonous repetition, barren vocabulary, rigid structure) was only that, a mask, an appearance which barely veiled the erotic center, the diverse inner tensions.

It is true that allusions to the violent demands of

the body, to the preeminence of the erotic over all else, over in particular, the mind and its illusions of will, may be stylistically reduced in Mme de Lafayette's works. The sole exception to this general pattern of minimal portrayal of that which is directly, explicitly sexual is the short, posthumous La Comtesse de Tende where the "language" of the body belies the code of decency, social and literary. Sensual fulfillment is ushered in, expressed obviously through recourse to adultery, pregnancy, and illegitimate birth. Of course, the guilty participants are punished severely, but for a short time, the duration only of the tale itself (the illusion of fiction translating the illusory situation of a reigning, satisfied desire), the code of erotic gratification presides. The language of the text, still consciously attempting to conform to litote and refinement, is virtually "violated" by the intrusion of vocabulary such as "grossesse," but with the death of the heroine, the temporary social and literary deviation is expunged.

Contemporary writers have the option of adopting the most primitive discourse in attempting to translate the outcry of passion. Neither grammar nor stylistic euphemism is required. Language can be not only direct, but obscene, in its effort to capture spontaneity, intensity, violence. These same emotions were hardly absent from the literature of the Classical age, but they were reduced, modulated by an extraordinary super-structure. The chaos of passion was thematically present, but linguistically ordered. Phèdre's

lamentations, for example, over the tremendous burden and pain of her body, are cloaked in the rigid, highly structured Alexandrine verse:

> Que ces vains ornements, que ces voiles me pèsent!
> Quelle importune main, en formant tous ces noeuds,
> A pris soin sur mon front d'assembler mes cheveux? [6]
> Tout m'afflige, et me nuit, et conspire à me nuire.

The body's disorder and pain are couched in poetry's contained refinement, the structure of the verse lending structure to, and thereby instantly diminishing, the effect of emotional chaos. In a similar fashion, mythological symbolism replaces a more direct allusion while offering a potent explanation, entirely sufficient, once decoded. That Hippolyte is painted as "ce fils de l'Amazone" serves notice poetically that there will be indeed an ambiguous struggle with the opposite sex.

For Mme de Lafayette, the relaxation of the socio-literary code occurs directly only in La Princesse de Tende. Her other works are free of obvious violations. Hence, the recourse is to sexual symbolism as in the second scene at Coulommiers in La Princesse de Clèves, a scene which Michel Butor has thoroughly analyzed. Butor suggests that such symbolism, in this case, la canne des Indes, perceived by us in the post-Freudian age, was also probably discernible to the seventeenth-century reader accustomed to its frequent use in the fairy tales of the age.[7] (We will attempt to discuss later Mme de Lafayette's recourse to various elements derived from the romanesque and the atmosphere of the contes de fée.)

Although the truth of their extraordinary mutual attraction is already sensed by Mme de Clèves and M. de Nemours,

through immediate feelings of great pleasure from the moment of their first encounter, it remains for the time being an unconscious, hidden perception. Within the boundaries of a socially acceptable act--dancing--an act that is moreover ordered by the social authority (it is the king who commands them to dance), the power of the body's extremely forceful presence and vitality is at once lessened and harmonized. The experience is still perceived as basically esthetically satisfying; the beauty of the couple provokes "un murmure de louanges," although imperceptibly there is already the beginning of a transgression, for the couple has never met before, and prior acquaintance, we have seen, was deemed a necessary element in the acceptable code of love, old already by centuries. But the physical harmony takes precedence over any sense of imminent danger, and the sexual nature, origin, of the pleasure the two partners experience, is hidden by the veil of social acceptability and by the structured, measured elegance of the dance.

At Coulommiers, however, another mood prevails, quite different, and although Mme de Clèves lives the entire scene in a blur of conscious and subconscious, of dream and reality, the moment posits the entirety of her conflict. What was before socially authorized becomes now a transgression, an intrusion, a penetration that threatens to destroy not only Mme de Clèves, but the entire social network based upon a norm of control and restraint.

There is, in particular, at Coulommiers, a sense of

underlying violence which menaces directly the person of Mme de Clèves. Her utter exposure to Nemours, the penetration of his look upon her, testify to a strong male aggression. The game of love, as Bernard Pingaud has shown, is not played without some extreme consequences for the woman: "Un homme peut bien conquérir et abandonner successivement plusieurs maîtresses. Une femme, surtout si elle est mariée, perd à ce jeu non seulement la considération, mais le repos. Cette aventure qui n'est pour les autres qu'un sujet de curiosité, est pour elle une déchéance progressive, contre laquelle, par tous les moyens en son pouvoir, elle essaie en vain de lutter."[8] Throughout all of Mme de Lafayette's works--in her fiction as well as in the short biography of Henriette d'Angleterre--there is a pervading atmosphere of male prowess which exerts itself either in the game of war or in the game of love. No less than four men attempt to control the princesse de Montpensier, each regarding her as his own exclusive conquest. The comte de Tende freely neglects his wife, subjects her to pain and humiliation, until his passion is eventually ignited through jealousy. And the duc de Nemours never really ceases to see the relationship with Mme de Clèves in terms of anything but an aggressive seduction.

Women are the prey of virile, violent instincts, and martial activity is seen by Mme de Lafayette as the sole satisfactory means to repressing aggressive, erotic impulses. Thus, when the chevalier de Guise fully comprehends Mme de Clèves' feelings for Nemours, he is so grieved that "dès ce

jour, il prit la résolution de ne penser jamais à être aimé de Mme de Clèves. Mais pour quitter cette entreprise, qui lui avait paru si difficile et si glorieuse, il en fallait quelque autre dont la grandeur pût l'occuper. Il se mit dans l'esprit de prendre Rhodes, dont il avait déjà eu quelque pensée" (p. 307). Aggressive energies must be released in some fashion, and war is perhaps the sole satisfactory outlet in a world where passion is rarely capable of being gratified, and when it is, of enduring. Women are perceived as the object of the male impulses to vanquish, and the acts of transgression which their amants commit leave them in a highly weakened position.

In La Comtesse de Tende, the most direct attack is of course the adultery which triumphs over female virtue, exposing the Countess to extraordinary guilt and dishonor. But although we are never witness to any adulterous scene (we are told only that she has become pregnant), a strong preliminary violation occurs when the chevalier de Navarre successfully enters her chambers, surreptitiously, thus penetrating beyond the limits of socially acceptable meeting grounds. This violation is, moreover, keenly felt as such by the Countess; she perceives a direct threat to her person and reputation, and success, in terms of desired strategy is total. The entering of a room is in itself for Mme de Lafayette, an act of seduction over a weakened adversary who quickly succumbs to irresolution and confusion: "La comtesse se laissa tomber sur un lit de repos dont elle s'était relevée

à demi et, regardant le chevalier avec des yeux pleins d'amour et de larmes: Vous voulez donc que je meure? lui dit-elle. Croyez-vous qu'un coeur puisse contenir tout ce que vous me faites sentir"?[9] The Chevalier's triumph, his successful attempt at drawing out the confession of love, is flawless.

It is, however, in La Princesse de Clèves that Mme de Lafayette constructs her most masterful scene of symbolic rape. Early in the chain of events, Nemours freely steals a portrait of Mme de Clèves, and the symbolic possession is reinforced by his knowledge that the portrait belongs to M. de Clèves. The Princess observes the entire scene, not at first without considerable pleasure, says nothing, but the ravishment is soon perceived as an aggressive attack on her person: ". . . elle fit réflexion à la violence de l'inclination qui l'entraînait vers M. de Nemours; elle trouva qu'elle n'était plus maîtresse de ses paroles et de son visage" (p. 303). For the moment, Mme de Clèves has been successfully undermined.

The desired goal is physical possession, and this triumph of Eros is shared completely by the woman, although she is never the aggressor. She may flee, as does the princesse de Clèves, succumb as the comtesse de Tende, but she is not the initiator of the struggle to possess. If she does choose to withstand the attack, her conscious behavior may well conform to her prescribed rules, but her subconscious, via her body, her gestures, her almost imperceptible movements

and reactions, succeeds in communicating her yearnings. The body announces exactly what the mind seeks to obliterate, for it is the desire of the body alone which is at the base of the passion. The mark of erotic passion is the body's complete inability to disguise it, and the spontaneous expression of this passion--unnatural silences, blushes, self-conscious gestures[10]--is the surest sign of the mind's loss of control. Originating in the body, erotic love is translated totally by it, and the upsetting, disquieting effect of passion upon the individual cannot be successfully masked, for it is the starkest of all truths. The dancing scene in La Princesse de Clèves reveals itself as the moment of optimum candor, for here the basic truth of spontaneous drives is neither blocked outwardly nor repressed inwardly.

The nature of passion is to ravage, to destroy the smooth continuum of existence, to alienate the self from its most intimate conception. Surging suddenly, seemingly from nowhere, endowed with no past, no safe points de repère (knowledge, respect), passionate love is experienced as a radical break, both temporal and psychological. In La Princesse de Clèves, which is the most complete of all of Mme de Lafayette's works (the other tales offering more-or-less diverse fragments of the whole cycle), the basic problem throughout, the desired goal, is an attempt at reestablishing the integrity of the heroine who feels herself, bit by bit, losing the continuity of her person. Mme de Chartres' recourse to a vocabulary of imminent danger, of fall--"vous êtes sur le

bord du précipice" (pp. 277-278)--suggests that at stake is the concept of "breaking apart," of falling from one world into another, where the dispersion of the moi, its alienation from a preliminary set of values, is sovereign.

The problem then becomes, once the disquieting force of passion sets in, how to recompose the self, how to reestablish continuity, how to regain the lost sense of "oneness." The battle was not a new one in the century, and Mme de Lafayette's writings seem to bear directly upon the solutions of her predecessors, if only to deny their ideas. The whole of La Princesse de Clèves, from one point of view, seems designed to combat a perspective of life based upon the strength of the mind. With the example of Consalve, M. de Clèves, and the princesse de Clèves herself, Mme de Lafayette quickly and forcefully undermines Mlle de Scudéry's and the précieuses' belief in mutual understanding and admiration as a prerequisite to a satisfactory love relationship. The body, and not the mind, is the seat of passion, and therefore any struggle to resist it based upon reasoning and lucid discourse is doomed to failure.

The traditional means for coping with the upsetting power of passion, as depicted earlier in the seventeenth century, was through an inner dialogue where passion and reason on opposing sides battled it out, with the latter eventually triumphing. Don Rodrigue's and Polyeucte's soliloquies posited precisely the moral and emotional dilemma of the hero torn apart by the effects of strong love, which,

ultimately, is transcended in a quest for a superior code. Seventeenth-century tragedy, the depository par excellence of la parole, relied heavily of course on the soliloquy as a means to translating, to "enacting" the conflict. But there is a philosophical base to the question also, which is that in itself, the interior dialogue, the reasoning discourse with the self, is sufficient to combat the forces of passion.

Descartes, whose Les Passions de l'âme is perhaps at the base of Mme de Lafayette's thought, for what he expressed she so avidly seems to have opposed, proposed that it was possible to acquire "un empire très absolu sur toutes les passions, si on employait assez d'industrie à les dresser et à les conduire,"[11] through the practice of la vertu (a predominating word, moreover, of La Princesse de Clèves and certainly not by chance the final one). La vertu was considered as the exercise of those standards which an honnête homme would judge to be superior. The necessary factor ensuring the continuity of this standard is "une ferme et constante résolution d'en bien user, c'est-à-dire de ne manquer jamais de volonté pour entreprendre et exécuter toutes les choses qu'il jugera être les meilleures."[12] The concept of a resolution relies heavily upon the firm use of mental faculties to drive back the force of the passions and endows the "word" with ultimate powers of transcendence.

This path is foredoomed a failure by Mme de Lafayette, however, for as Serge Doubrovsky has expressed, "La réflexion, comme son nom indique, ne fait que refléter les pensées que

nous avons formées spontanément et sur lesquelles elle n'a aucune prise."[13] All the conflict is there. Mme de Clèves' multifold attempts at extricating herself from her prison will miscarry for they are based upon a code which is unable to reply to the body's spontaneous drives, that is, upon la parole. Mme de Chartres, in an effort to regulate her daughter's behavior on the side of virtue, depended upon a system of self-control, obtained in turn by a constantly on-going dialogue with the self in favor of certain moral values, the antipode of which is the disorganizing life of passion. This "extrême défiance de soi-même" (p. 248) is reached only via an unremitting inner soliloquy; the "right" words will achieve the desired goal of virtue. Thus, the resolutions which Mme de Clèves makes after each emotional jolt are her chosen method of breaking the cycle.

After her portrait is stolen, after she reads the letter supposedly addressed to Nemours (the one which in reality was directed to the vidame de Chartres), after she spends time alone with Nemours in an effort to copy that letter from memory, Mme de Clèves, aware of her violently intense feelings for him, resolves to control herself, to reestablish reason in her life, to combat her passion. But this task will prove impossible, although she fully believes that her resolutions in themselves are sufficient to do battle with her desires.

In the moments following her reading of the letter which she mistakenly believes is for Nemours, Mme de Clèves, totally absorbed in her remorse and guilt, is consoled by

the recognition that, "après cette connaissance, elle n'avait plus rien à craindre d'elle-même, et qu'elle serait entièrement guérie de l'inclination qu'elle avait pour ce prince" (p. 311). Later, however, after the moments of solitude with Nemours in an effort to reconstruct the letter, moments which bring her considerable pleasure, she concludes: "Je suis vaincue et surmontée par une inclination qui m'entraîne malgré moi. Toutes mes résolutions sont inutiles; je pensai hier tout ce que je pense aujourd'hui et je fais aujourd'hui tout le contraire de ce que je résolus hier" (p. 330). With the full recognition of the impotency of the private, inner word, that is of reflexions, upon her emotional state, Mme de Clèves opts for the sole remaining solution, flight: "Il faut m'arracher de la présence de M. de Nemours; il faut m'en aller à la campagne, quelque bizarre que puisse paraître mon voyage" (p. 330). But flight in this universe is tightly constricted, and M. de Nemours has only to visit his sister, whose country home is a neighbor to Coulommiers, in order to reignite the cycle and thereby to be present at the scene of the aveu.

Flight is not an answer to the dilemma, for the locus is at once too restrained, and the heroine is constantly being called back to the even more intimate circle of the court. Feeling these parallel pressures upon her, Mme de Clèves returns to reliance upon the lucid, unequivocal word as a solution to her problem, only this time she chooses discourse not with herself, but with another, her husband.

The question of a sincere confession is not a new one in the history of La Princesse de Clèves. Mme de Chartres had maintained a strict relationship with her daughter, whereby the latter was to keep her mother informed of all the amorous intrigues developing about this newcomer to the court, a counsel the heroine indeed follows until the encounter with Nemours. After the episode at the ball, Mme de Clèves enters into a whole new world, that of the secret, and when she finally resolves to speak openly to her mother, it is too late; Mme de Chartres is on her deathbed, unable to communicate at length. In the early pages of the work, the power of the word is still at its highest peak; Mme de Chartres relies upon it as the sole method of maintaining her daughter in a state of vertu, and yet, when up against the demands and desires of the body, there is a sudden, new silence on the part of Mme de Clèves, and discourse is abruptly cut off or disguised.

The aveu, the confession to her husband is doomed, for it opposes two codes, two universes radically unharmonious, that is the mind and the body, Logos and Eros. It has been questioned whether the aveu is truly an act of courage on the part of Mme de Clèves, or rather its opposite, a wish to place the responsibility for her conduct on someone else. Possibly, it is both. What is more significant, however, is whether, as an act relying upon the power of reasoned discourse, it can successfully combat the body's passion and jealousy. It seems fair to judge it a failure, for the prince

de Clèves, although intellectually esteeming his wife's sincerity, is manifestly unable to control his rage for possession. Her "Fiez-vous à mes paroles" becomes a total impossibility; M. de Clèves' suspicions will arise not out of logic, not out of impassionate reason, but out of his frustrating effort to appropriate Mme de Clèves for himself. Belief, trust, and confidence are of perilously little weight in a world where the humanistic code has been stripped bare. What is sought is complete possession over l'autre--Eros being at once the symbol for that possession as well as for its eventual failure--and words are impotent as agents against this rage.

In the end, it appears that there are really only two alternatives: to succumb as do Mme de Tende and the princesse de Montpensier or to fight, via the honnête code, that is, via resolutions, sincerity, and flight. The latter choice, which may loosely be referred to as an attempt to repress, is unsatisfactory, for the spontaneous drives of the body will not be controlled, mastered by the dicta of the conscience grounded into the format of la parole. The transcendence of the passions which occurs in Corneille's plays reveals itself as totally bankrupt in Mme de Lafayette's moral structure, and the desire for possession, translated through the concept of sexual desire and energies, emerges as the superior force. Descartes' code of générosité, his heavy use of la réflexion is shown to be equally lacking, for as was the case for Mme de Clèves, the interior dialogue,

the reasoning with the self, comes too late. The spontaneous drives of the body have preempted the reign of the mind.

If attempts at repressing fail, as they inevitably do, then the obvious alternative would be that of the two other heroines: to give in. Mme de Tende experiences the totality of her decision; Mme de Montpensier succumbs in intentions only, yet that is enough. Both women are severely "punished," through great suffering and eventual death, and within the context of these two tales, it would appear that a strict Christian moral alone is what prevents a happy conclusion. There is a strong sense of transgression, of having given in to the body, of sin which the Christian ethic can never tolerate, and at the hands of the author, will destroy. A certain impression of such a life-view does indeed permeate the writings of Mme de Lafayette. The erotic is seen as threatening, as demeaning; women are prey to the seductive efforts of the male; transgressions occur which violate the most traditional, religious views. But the full cycle of Mme de Lafayette's thinking is really not complete in either La Princesse de Montpensier or La Comtesse de Tende, for in these two tales, physical desire is merely punished. It is not shown as an empty path to possession as in the far more complex La Princesse de Clèves. The drive to appropriate l'autre, interpreted through erotic longing, emerges as a radical impossibility, and it is to this end that Mme de Lafayette's works are truly directed. Physical possession, so ardently desired, is recognized as being

vastly unable to satisfy the far more intense longing for control.

The theme runs strongly through La Princesse de Clèves, interwoven among others, almost lost at times, but looming up at the end, thereby giving new force to what was earlier not always quite conclusive. The failure of Eros to satisfy on any level beyond immediate gratification is evident early in the marriage between M. de Clèves and Mlle de Chartres, prior even to her first encounter with Nemours:

> M. de Clèves ne trouva pas que Mlle de Chartres eût changé de sentiment en changeant de nom. La qualité de mari lui donna de plus grands privilèges; mais elle ne lui donna pas une autre place dans le coeur de sa femme. Cela fit aussi que, pour être son mari, il ne laissa pas d'être son amant, parce qu'il avait toujours quelque chose à souhaiter au delà de sa possession; et, quoiqu'elle vécut parfaitement bien avec lui, il n'était pas entièrement heureux. Il conservait pour elle une passion violente et inquiète qui troublait sa joie. (p. 26)

The vague, nebulous quality which surrounds this passage, the imprecision of the "quelque chose" is not by accident. Rather, Mme de Lafayette's efforts here seem directed to portraying a still subconscious perception, experienced fully by M. de Clèves but not in a lucid, comprehensive fashion, only within the realm of dim impressions. Having attained full rights and "privilèges" over his wife, whom he adored and desired from their first encounter, having "possessed" her physically, he remains unsatisfied. Although aware from the start that Mlle de Chartres never shared his strong inclination, he undoubtedly anticipated that physical intimacy, achieved in marriage, would establish the intensity of passion he had

sought.

The queen, in her pursuit of the vidame de Chartres, expresses directly, almost violently precisely what was lulling around in M. de Clèves' mind. She offers the most brutal recognition of man's desires, seeking to appropriate the vidame de Chartres exclusively for herself, forever, and will entertain no other attachments for him:

> . . . je le souhaite, parce que je désire que vous soyez entièrement attaché à moi, et qu'il serait impossible que je fusse contente de votre amitié si vous étiez amoureux. . . . Souvenez-vous que je veux la vôtre confiance tout entière; que je veux que vous n'ayez ni ami, ni amie, que ceux qui me seront agréables, et que vous abandonniez tout autre soin que celui de me plaire. (p. 317)

This absolute attachment, this fidelity with no end, is impossible to achieve, for it is truly a confiscation of l'autre, a denial of his autonomy, a wish to thwart his individuality.

But conscious desire to possess is rare in Mme de Lafayette's tales; more frequently, the wish plays itself out at the subconscious level, vaguely perceptible, but hidden. The ultimate failure to appropriate the partner is subconsciously perceived by certain characters long before their involvement with l'autre has become a reality. It has been noted that Mme de Lafayette's works most frequently center upon a trio,[14] the third person serving as the obstacle to the satisfaction of the two others. The trio structure is quite naturally a symbol in itself of the inability of the couple to recreate the "edenic isolation,"[15] that is, blissful solitude à deux, symbol also of the jealousy inherent in

all passion, symbol in brief of the inability to possess. But the banal character of the trio structure is invested with an additional force when the metaphor of "threeness" becomes a subliminal response and obstacle to the mere project of the couple.

M. de Clèves, in a way, falls a victim to these strange, unconscious machinations, for his illness and his subsequent death result not from any real situation, but from his fantasy of Mme de Clèves spending the night with Nemours. Without waiting to hear any precise details from his aide who had observed Nemours at Coulommiers (for indeed, those precise details were lacking, nothing having occurred), he succumbs to a violent illness immediately, almost as if he could no longer endure the pain of not having achieved with his wife the relationship he had so ardently desired. His imagination, evoking fantasies based on the structure of a trio, becomes his sole defense against any further hopes for attaching Mme de Clèves exclusively to his own person, and illness and death are his only way out of the unsatisfactory "coupling" with his wife. Imagination becomes the means to freedom, M. de Clèves' liberation from illusions of "quelque chose . . . au-delà de sa possession," that is, of an existence devoted exclusively to himself.

Basically, the novel Zaïde is too reminiscent of the earlier trends of the romanesque, too different from the nouveau roman of Mme de Lafayette, to enter easily into an analysis. The structure of the work conforms hardly at

all with the new trend of brevity and concision. But certain themes in the set of tales do reappear in all of Mme de Lafayette's writings. The hero, Consalve, who involves himself in a passionate effort to woo Zaïde, very early in the novel constructs for himself an elaborate rationalization of Zaïde's apparent emotional distance. Not able to understand her language, he still perceives through various gestures and reactions that she is in love with another, and the intensity with which he endows this fiction points to a fundamental sense of frustration inherent to many of Mme de Lafayette's principal characters. His imaginary construct serves as a solid barrier to all his hopes, as if in advance, on the subliminal level alone, the perception of the ultimate failure of all coupling is already present.

With Consalve, the story takes another turn and ends with references to a supposedly happy marriage. But his addiction to anxieties over the threat of a rival, a non-existent one, prefigures entirely the situation of Alphonse and Bélasire, whose short tale seems to serve no further end than to demonstrate in precise terms the subconscious blocking of fulfillment. Alphonse is presented as a man with a primary obsession, a fear of jealousy, which guides his life and allows him no serious attachment until he meets Bélasire. In the early part of his relationship with her, he remains tortured with doubts about marriage, preferring "le malheur de vivre sans Bélasire à celui de vivre avec elle sans être aimé" (p. 10). On a conscious level he manages to surmount

these fears, but the subconscious refuses to follow such a facile accommodation, and in a sudden, seemingly inexplicable transition, Alphonse passes from confidence to doubt, the lack of intervention on the part of the author, testifying to the movement away from the conscious and toward the subliminal. Alphonse enmeshes himself in a paroxysm of jealousy for a rival, but he is a dead rival and can pose no threat to the harmony of the couple. But as with Consalve, there is an extraordinary intensity to Alphonse's struggle which belies an almost deliberate attempt at destroying the relationship with Bélasire, as if his psyche, conditioned by a long tradition of suspicion towards marriage, fully anticipated the impossibility of having her, forever, exclusively for himself. Although his conscious mind at this time has seemingly gone beyond his fears and all his efforts are directed toward marriage, in reality his long-standing revolt emerges triumphant over his voluntary decisions. The transition from conscious confidence to subliminal rebellion is almost imperceptible; it is not analyzed nor interpreted by Mme de Lafayette for it is not a movement of reason, but rather a complex impulse of the subconscious. Thus the construct of the false trio serves Alphonse as a potent means to a radical rupture of the relationship.

It is not always through the device of a hypothetical trio that the perception of the ultimate inability to "possess" is manifested. Mme de Clèves eventually fore-

sees how fragile is the duc de Nemours' attachment for her, how time alone will destroy it, how she can never, in fact, retain him. Hers is the recognition that passion can subsist only when barred from total satisfaction. Blockage is requisite. Within the context of La Princesse de Clèves, the fading is seen occurring on the part of M. de Nemours, on the part of the male, and that may well have been Mme de Lafayette's bias, but it is precisely the same course which Alphonse long feared on the part of the woman. It is a pattern perceived as operating within the "other," but that is its psychological base. Metaphysically, it is the recognition of the impossibility of possession.

The princesse de Clèves' problem, Alphonse's problem as well, remain without obvious solution, for the paradox of the life situation will not allow for a compromise. "En face d'une double impossibilité métaphysique,--l'amour ne pouvant être satisfait, en raison des relations qui existent nécessairement entre deux libertés, ni refoulé, du fait qu'il représente une irrésistible expression de nous-mêmes,--il ne reste plus de solution, ou plutôt, il n'en reste qu'une: le suicide. Si la spontanéité ne peut être réprimée, elle peut être supprimée, et la destruction de soi est la seule issue."[16] A sort of self-mutilation occurs; for the princesse de Clèves it is a solitary sacrifice; for Alphonse and Bélasire, the couple unite in an effort to annihilate their potentiality as two. Alphonse's bizarre, subconscious drive to destroy any hopes of marriage is in

the end consented to and surpassed by Bélasire herself. Establishing the standard of repos as being of absolute necessity, Bélasire renounces all further commerce with Alphonse, and going one step further, commits herself to a life without love by entering a monastery. The renunciation is virtually a mutual one in the end, the couple united in a stand against marriage, against love, against the foredoomed attempt at possession. In the interest of repose, of avoiding the tumultuous jealousy which is inseparable from passion (for it announces the failure to possess), the couple will be sacrificed, sacrifices itself, destroys itself voluntarily. Bélasire's retreat is thus a spiritual suicide, a denial of what is most fundamental, spontaneous, and free, a mutilation of her person and equally of Alphonse, for the couple-structure is ruptured.

Mme de Clèves, in an even more extreme stance, chooses not only a spiritual suicide, but a physical one as well, as if recognizing that the only way out of the dilemma of unsatisfied passion is the death of the instrument which is the seat of the longing: the body. The illness which debilitates her, prepares her for death, becomes the means by which she successfully purges her passion. Death installs itself in the place of Eros, in a revival of the Tristan myth. Her choice is essentially the same one as her husband's, that is, a self-inflicted death, a suicide, necessary to obliterate her passion.

There is, as Gabriel Bounoure has remarked, a

strong element of auto-punition[17] implied in both the renunciation of Mme de Clèves and of Alphonse-Bélasire, a self-chastisement for having played the game poorly and lost, of having succumbed to a pattern of living totally contrary to earlier, stricter standards of vertu and défiance. The retreat to the convent may be viewed as an aspiration to purity, to a life beyond the messiness and disorder engendered by love, as a means to moral healing, or as the perfect clôture translating the closing off, the suppression of Eros. All these motives intertwine, quite naturally, and all come back to a more general theme of refusal dictated by aspirations toward repose.

If le repos is essentially here the absence of passion and suffering, then Mme de Clèves and Bélasire are basically opting for a minimal existence, a life characterized by absence rather than plenitude. The theme of repose traverses the moralist writings of the century, originating perhaps in the religious literature (Pascal, Bossuet), but finding room also in the ataraxie of the Epicureans. As such, it becomes not a mere palliative, but rather a force in itself, a force easily attainable, perhaps, when the Cornelian will has faltered. The tranquillity to which Mme de Lafayette's characters aspire is a strange paradox, at once an emptiness and a fulfillment, ultimately, fulfillment in an emotional vacuum.

But if suppression is indeed the accurate word for the self-destructive path which Mme de Lafayette sees as

the sole "out" in a world where passion, desired eternal, rests finite, it is also the right one for her efforts to deny the most traditional forms of romanesque expression. The attack is thus against the double illusion of the myth of passion and of its expression, the précieux novel. Reading through Mme de Lafayette's works, one perceives two distinct movements which compose the structure of the récit. There is the flat, monotonous, monochromatic repetition of certain basic passages: Mme de Clèves' continued efforts to reestablish the continuity of her emotional life, Consalve's slow, steady progression toward Zaïde. Varied only slightly each time, these passages form the foundation of each tale. Less frequently, there are certain flashes of something else, scenes that are throwbacks to the traditional romanesque, sometimes even conte de fée atmosphere. It is as if these latter scenes are there as traps, for no sooner do they surge upon the page than they are destroyed for the illusion which they create.

The early, descriptive pages of La Princesse de Clèves are among the snares; the superlative kings and queens, princes and princesses, dukes and duchesses, are portrayed in all their courtly splendor, only to "fall" rapidly into the most untenable situations far removed from aristocratic appearances. The dancing scene, also, stands out as an "interrupter" of the monotony, a moment when the illusion of harmony is at its peak, the atmosphere of the ball lending a highly romanesque flavor to the moment. The

chateau of Mme de Clèves at Coulommiers is in itself a fantastic leurre, the ideal and familiar place for the satisfaction of passion, the fairy-tale response to the problem. But the scenes at Coulommiers emerge as the antithesis of the romanesque experience. What is woven there is not satisfaction, but rather the powerful destruction of any such possibility, for it is these scenes which are the cause of M. de Clèves' jealousy, illness, and death. Rather than opening onto a field of unlimited charms, of romantic play, they definitively shut out the possibility, the illusion of a marriage between the princesse de Clèves and M. de Nemours. The chateau becomes the locus of death, belying its traditional wonderland symbolism.

This opposition of structures--the monotonous, flat scenes pitted against the momentarily dramatic ones--is little more than the myth confronting the reality, Mme de Lafayette's reality, La Rochefoucauld's, also. The illusion of passion will be destroyed as will its medium, the long, adventure-laden précieux novel. Henceforth, the récit will be short; romanesque-type episodes will be included in order for the illusion to be more systematically destroyed. Considerably more polished in her artistic skills by the time she wrote La Princesse de Clèves, thus able to avoid direct references to her method, Mme de Lafayette offered in her earlier works almost a commentary of her aims. In La Princesse de Montpensier, the first of her tales, she signals her intentions exactly and explicitly:

> Un jour qu'il revenait à Loches par un chemin peu connu de ceux de sa suite, le duc de Guise, qui se vantait de le savoir, se mit à la tête de la troupe pour servir de guide; mais, après avoir marché quelque temps, il s'égara et se trouva sur le bord d'une petite rivière qu'il ne reconnut pas lui-même. Le duc d'Anjou lui fit la guerre de les avoir si mal conduits et, étant arrêtés en ce lieu, aussi disposés à la joie qu'ont accoutumé de l'être de jeunes personnes, ils aperçurent un petit bateau qui était arrêté au milieu de la rivière; et, comme elle n'était pas large, ils distinguèrent aisément dans ce bateau trois ou quatre femmes, et une entre autres qui leur sembla fort belle, qui était habillée magnifiquement, et qui regardait avec attention deux hommes qui pêchaient auprès d'elle. Cette aventure donna une nouvelle joie à ces jeunes princes et à tous ceux de leur suite. Elle leur parut une chose de roman. (p. 10)

In the pursuit of the romanesque, the hero and heroine are caught up in a web of intrigue and adventure, the culmination of which is the scene of the rapt manqué leading to a disheartening end, to the death of Mme de Montpensier. The irresistible trap of the myth of passion, the pursuit of "une chose de roman," the construction of their own roman, are swiftly and brutally destroyed by an author intent on abolishing an entire code, both moral and esthetic. And with the exception of Zaïde, which conforms in structure and even theme far more to earlier traditions than to the "new novel" of Mme de Lafayette, all the tales point in the same direction. Illusions must be dismantled, and to do so, the transmitters of the illusions, the précieux novels must be revealed as sham, for they are not perhaps after all the transmitters, but rather the very creators of the myth. Their so-called verity must fall, and Mme de

Lafayette, recreating romanesque scenes in the middle of vast monotony and pain, successfully reveals the extent of their bankruptcy. And that is undoubtedly why her final work, La Comtesse de Tende, is charged with a strange intensity, with allusions to illegitimate pregnancy and birth, to great suffering, to a pathetic death. It stands as a most definitive slap at the "old way." The chimera is thus laid to rest.

Footnotes

[1]Mme de Lafayette, La Princesse de Montpensier (Paris: Garnier Frères, 1970), p. 15. Subsequent quotations from this work will be noted by page number in the body of the chapter. This will also be true for Mme de Lafayette's other works, although a preliminary footnote for each text will be included in this section.

[2]Georges Poulet, "Madame de Lafayette," Etudes sur le temps humain (Paris: Plon, 1950), p. 122.

[3]Mme de Lafayette, La Princesse de Clèves (Paris: Garnier Frères, 1970), p. 249.

[4]Mme de Lafayette, Zaïde (Paris: Garnier Frères, 1970), p. 54.

[5]Marie-Rose Carré, "La Rencontre inachevée: Etude sur la structure de La Princesse de Clèves," PMLA, LXXXII (May 1972), 475-482.

[6]Jean Racine, Phèdre (Paris: Garnier Frères, 1960), p. 547.

[7]Michel Butor, "Sur 'La Princesse de Clèves,'" Répertoire (Paris: Les Editions de Minuit, 1960), p. 76.

[8]Bernard Pingaud, Mme de Lafayette par elle-même (Paris: Seuil, 1959), p. 90.

[9]Mme de Lafayette, La Comtesse de Tende (Paris: Garnier Frères, 1970), p. 402.

[10]Serge Doubrovsky, "La Princesse de Clèves: une interprétation existentielle," La Table ronde, No. 138 (Juin 1959), p. 46.

[11]Descartes, Les Passions de l'âme (Paris: Gallimard, 1953), p. 66.

[12]Ibid., p. 139.

[13]Doubrovsky, op. cit., p. 43.

[14]Pingaud, op. cit., pp. 66-67.

[15]Marie-Jeanne Durry, Madame de Lafayette (Paris: Mercure de France, 1962), pp. 13-14.

[16]Doubrovsky, op. cit., p. 48.

[17]Gabriel Bounoure, "La perle blanche," Mercure de France, No. 1213 (Novembre 1964), p. 428.

CHAPTER IV

SAINT-EVREMOND

Saint-Evremond's writing experience is surely one of the most curious among those of the moralists. His entire approach defies the Classical rules of order, structure, and impersonality. There is a strong sense of the haphazard, an impression that comic and serious can readily mingle, and especially, a feeling that the direct portrayal and analysis of the self are integrally a part of writing. Moreover, Saint-Evremond attempts to convey that he could just as soon not write as write, that the act of writing is not always "serious"; sometimes, it is only a game, an amusing pastime. How successfully he was able to convince that he did indeed have the option of silence is open to question. Ultimately, it can be said that his seeming nonchalance is little more than a pose, a means to an ironic distance necessary to counteract any "overinvolvement," a means, thus, to emotional freedom.

There is also in Saint-Evremond a sense of disorder that seems to be the outcome of a radically paradoxical situation, set in motion by the confrontation between praise of pleasure and fear of love. Both aspects of his stance

merit study, although the second part, his fear, has only recently been fully appreciated.[1] But these anxieties reflect not only Saint-Evremond's own dilemma, but also that of so many writers of his time, for whom love was viewed as a potentially destructive force, although this uneasiness was expressed through diverse interpretations: religious, mondain, ataraxia. Alone among our writers, Mme de Sévigné positively embraced la passion; yet, in a paradoxical way, through letters to a daughter, even she refused direct participation. Saint-Evremond's reluctance is a fairly complex one, and the two diverging poles--involvement and self-containment--not infrequently in the course of his writings, pull together, coincide, only to split apart once more.

There is, first, his heavy preoccupation with the concept of pleasure. Although, as Victor Du Bled has shown, there were degrees of libertine thought in the seventeenth century, with Saint-Evremond situated definitely along a more moderate line,[2] always reluctant to relinquish a vocabulary of discernment, discretion, and moderation, nevertheless his ideas follow a well-defined, carefully structured conception of pleasure, with the self and its well-being always at the center.

The underlying question which pervaded seventeenth-century French thought--"What shall man do to be saved?"--was the very problem with which Saint-Evremond was also struggling. His answer was at antipodes from that of Pascal

and the Jansenist writers. Christian faith with its renouncement of worldly pleasure and its emphasis on the gift of grace never seduced Saint-Evremond, except perhaps as an emotional strength which he occasionally envied, but always from a distance. Even more vehement than his questioning of abstinence to gain salvation, however, is his forthright attack on a life of metaphysical speculation, as embodied in the ideas of Descartes: "Je ne vis plus que par réflexion sur la vie, ce qui n'est pas proprement vivre; et sans la philosophie de M. Descartes qui dit: je pense donc je suis, je ne croirais pas proprement être."[3] But it was not only to experience sharply his own vitality that Saint-Evremond rejected the meditative, contemplative way of life. Interspersed throughout his works are frequent allusions to man's inability to understand the human condition, to his ultimate blindness in all matters of life and death, of body and soul. Thus, to the eschatological debate of the time, already so deeply ingrained into the century's traditions, Saint-Evremond proposed a response radically different from either Descartes' or the Jansenists': pleasure, here and now. Le plaisir is one of the primary words and themes of Saint-Evremond's writings, and anticipating the eighteenth century, he tried over the years, to create from it a true ideal and an art de vivre to match.

The concept of pleasure in seventeenth-century thought was dominated by the Dutch philosopher Spinoza. Saint-Evremond sojourned twice in Holland, the first time in 1661

and 1662, only briefly, and again for a lengthy period of time, from 1665 to 1669, interrupting his exile in England. It is known that he met with Spinoza. But the question of influence is always a touchy one, and in this case, to create too close a kinship between men whose writing experiences differed so sharply--the Frenchman bordering on the mondain trend of the era, the Dutchman steeped into the greatest depths of philosophical examination--would be erroneously misleading. Spinoza is one of the sternest, most demanding, least permissive of moralists, and he and Saint-Evremond are widely different. Spinoza, moreover, differs markedly from writers like Gassendi who had a direct bearing upon Saint-Evremond's thought. Nevertheless, Spinoza's elaborate formulation of a decided "pleasure principle" seems to have guided Saint-Evremond, if not in a very substantial way, at least then as a preliminary direction. In particular, there is the Dutch philosopher's recognition of the essential unity of things, his refusal to split the world into distinct substances, a belief which the post-Freudian writers have all seized upon:

> On the problem of human happiness, what distinguishes Spinoza from the Western philosophic tradition . . . is his allegiance to the pleasure-principle and his rejection of mind-body dualism. His allegiance to the pleasure-principle brings him to recognize the narcissistic, self-enjoying character of human desire, and hence to recognize that human perfection consists in an expansion of the self until it enjoys the world as it enjoys itself.[4]

Saint-Evremond, while shunning the "hard" consequences of so

much of Spinoza, will nevertheless make use of these concepts of pleasure and fundamental unity.

There are several important ideas in the above selection, not the least of which is the problem of mind-body dualism. The Jansenist writers faced the same dilemma, and their answer was most nearly consistent with centuries of Western tradition, both Christian and Platonic: the persistent denigration of the body. Saint-Evremond offered another solution. Although he was always careful to distinguish his particular brand of "volupté"--a general well-being and sense of fulfillment deriving from the honnête code--from any sense of debauchery, nevertheless, true, bodily pleasure was an integral part of his world. His deep-riding sensuality is most directly and beautifully conveyed in his frequent praise of la bonne chère. Sensual pleasure was most intensely experienced through eating, and he relishes in heady descriptions of succulent fruits and full-bodied wines.

To eat is to feel alive; to detail one's intense enjoyment is to grant a high position to physical gratification. This is not to say that Saint-Evremond relied exclusively upon sensual gratification for achieving happiness. He was always quick to praise the mind's pleasures, too, and it was precisely in this drawing together of two traditionally contrary forces into a composite whole that Saint-Evremond achieved the ideal of both Epicurus and Spinoza. Physical and spiritual need not exclude the other, as the devout

Christian and neo-Platonist writers would have it. Rather, in true honnête style, they may be viewed as complementary forces in a harmonious, balanced life.

Fully cognizant of the potent capacity for loving in all, Saint-Evremond formulated his highly discreet explanation: "Il est certain que la nature a mis en nos coeurs quelque chose d'aimant (si on le peut dire), quelque principe secret d'affection, quelque fond caché de tendresse, qui s'explique et se rend communicable avec le temps."[5] The deliberately vague words, the almost précieux tone of the aphorism cannot hide what Saint-Evremond is alluding to, precisely a "quantum" of affectionate energy, a "love force" which will reveal itself with time but also from underneath a vocabulary of reticence. In order best to develop this concept, Saint-Evremond leans heavily upon a basic life energy, vitality, essential to every human being, and which will be increasingly augmented by this most powerful of all agents, love. His ideas on this subject are, however, expressed in a language charged with extraordinary egocentrism, and "love" in Saint-Evremond's moral universe reflects the growing awareness of "selfness" which permeates the age.

And that is why, in this case, what stands out most clearly in Brown's quote on Spinoza is the attention to an extreme intensification of the "self," that is upon a totally narcissistic life-view. In a far more limited, far more mundane fashion, for Saint-Evremond, too, the self and its pleasure are primary. To dwell as completely as he did

on the pleasure motive within each individual was to say that the self and its gratification are the ultimate morality as well as the ultimate salvation. What he essentially demanded, therefore, was a constant awareness that the individual conscience is sacrosanct, and that exterior, imposed standards should not stand in the way of man's pleasure. It is a highly egotistical tance (in a non-pejorative sense), fully in keeping with what Saint-Evremond sought to gain in the way towards an eventual self-liberation for all.

It is not surprising, therefore, that Saint-Evremond categorically shunned the family's authoritative moral norms which tended to go counter to individual needs. This was particularly so as these standards manifested themselves in the lives of the young women of the age, to whom he was a frequent "counselor." In a letter to one young female acquaintance, he resolutely advises against parental subjugation: "Je ne doute point que l'entrevue de votre sainte Mère, et de toute votre pieuse Famille n'ait été accompagnée de beaucoup de pleurs. Vous aurez donné aux larmes de cette Mère des larmes civiles et respectueuses, comme une Fille bien née. . . . C'est assez d'avoir obéi une fois, et sacrifié votre repos à une complaisance, que peut-être vous ne lui deviez pas. . . . Elle est injuste de vouloir régler vos inclinations. . . . On aime ce qui plaît, et non point ce qui est permis."[6] What Saint-Evremond envisioned was a free and independent spirit, capable of placing its pleasure above the demands of the family, which ran counter

to it. The erotic force or energy which Saint-Evremond had adequately perceived (although he couched it in "discreet" language always), demanded a freedom which the family, as the essential social unit, could not condone.

But the moral authority which the parent seeks to impose upon his children may be embodied, of course, within the spoken or unspoken tenets of the society, where it is perhaps even more nefarious than within the confines of the home. In the well-known letter Saint-Evremond addressed to Mlle de Quéroualle (who was being wooed by the English monarch, Charles II, and who was supposedly torn by her wish to submit and her desire to maintain a chaste reputation), he urges her to become the king's mistress (for political reasons, too, perhaps, although these are unmentioned in the letter). Having weighed virtue against pleasure, he comes out strongly for the latter: "Heureuse qui peut se conduire discrètement sans gêner ses inclinations; car s'il y a de la honte à aimer sans retenue, il y a bien de la peine à passer la vie sans amour. . . . Ne rebutez pas trop sévèrement les tentations en ce pays-ci" (III, 90). In his "decent" language, Saint-Evremond here clearly pits the moral dicta of society against the inner demands of the self, and the inclinations to which he most discreetly refers are precisely those of the body. Social authority, when in opposition to the individual's happiness, must be worn down, a belief unquestionably consistent with Saint-Evremond's thinking. (It must also be said that there is a

strong element of voyeur or "outsider" in the letters to female friends. When he freely offers them his advice, it seems almost as if his pleasure is in "confessing" them, sharing their anguish in a somewhat paternalistic fashion, but of course, without having to become too involved.)

What is needed then, is a constant attention to all forces which act upon the individual, a weighing of their relative importance to his emotional state, and an eventual selection of exactly those which will contribute the most to one's enjoyment, without passing the limits of a self-imposed code of decency and restraint, the mark of l'honnête homme. The love "quantum," that which Saint-Evremond called the "principe secret d'affection," is, viewed within this framework, nothing less than an intensification of life, potent in the ability to counteract obsession with death, to glorify the life force itself. Beyond that, however, it is that which is most intimately and integrally part of the "self," that which will most readily resist control by "outside" standards, and thus for Saint-Evremond, the ultimate symbol of human freedom.

The act of selection requisite to this "sorting out" process demands not only an awareness and understanding of the self, but also a total immersion into an egocentric universe, while the "other" counts only as a force to be analyzed, reckoned with, selected or rejected. Erotic energy, the power of love, is thus easily convertible into a force of control, the honnête homme stepping back from diverse emotional pulls, if they threaten psychic disintegration.

Thus, while counseling his women friends to reject imposed social standards, while urging them to seek the greatest freedom possible, he nevertheless remains fixed upon the theme of control, which as Méré developed it also, is absolutely central to the performance of man in society. Saint-Evremond's attitude is perfectly summed up in a letter to Madame la duchesse de Mazarin, his long-time friend, written at a moment of particular difficulty in her life: "Faites revenir ce temps heureux où toujours Maîtresse de vous-même, vous ne laissiez de liberté à personne qui valut la peine d'être assujettie" (I, 210-211). This ready intermingling of love and power is perhaps more than anything else the mark of "la littérature de l'honnêteté," the sign also of the new priorities, Eros becoming a predominantly social force (control, manipulation, advancement), in a world where the societal alone counts.

In particular, however, it was obvious to Saint-Evremond that a philosophy, however non-structured in appearance, of pleasure, however modest, necessitated an absolute attention to the present. A belief in the full expression of the self demanded a total commitment to "now." Evaluating the moral weight to be attributed to past society versus present, Saint-Evremond was quick to establish the preeminence of the latter:

> Je sais que la Raison nous a été donnée pour régler nos Moeurs: mais la Raison, autrefois rude et austère, s'est civilisée avec le temps; elle ne conserve aujourd'hui presque rien de son ancienne rigidité. Il lui a fallu de

> l'austérité pour établir des Lois, qui pussent empêcher les Outrages et les Violences: elle s'est adoucie pour introduire l'Honnêteté dans le commerce des hommes, elle est devenue délicate et curieuse dans la recherche des Plaisirs, pour rendre la vie aussi agréable qu'on avait tâché de la rendre sûre et honnête. Ainsi, Monsieur, il faut oublier un temps, où c'était assez d'être sévère, pour être cru vertueux, puisque la Politesse, la Galanterie, le Science des voluptés, sont une partie du Mérite présentement. (II, 333)

There is no dream of another social structure more satisfying than the present one, and moral standards of the past cannot be made to apply to the present.

Within an individual life also, the past failed to offer any meaningful substance. A past love, for Saint-Evremond, is a dead love, and conversely, a dead lover belongs only to the past. Exhorting Mme de Mazarin to quit her mourning for a lover who was killed--"les Amoureux sont mortels commes les autres" (IV, 193)--Saint-Evremond sought to achieve a realistic appraisal of time, placing all his value firmly in the present. Death should bring to those who live on not obligation, but freedom, and the intense dedication to the self that Saint-Evremond preached did require an extraordinary facility of emotional disengagement, necessary to maintain the standards of control dictated by the honnête code.

He makes a parallel stand for the future. There is no question of an after-life in his moral outlook, no balancing of present happiness against future salvation. Salvation is here, on Earth. There is no Pascalian wager.

The future is simply demystified. Nor is there any room for future regret, for guilt. Veiled or unveiled threats of Hell are weak compared to the need for love and should not be used as deterrents to the individual's needs: "La peur de la Damnation, l'image de l'Enfer avec tous ses feux, ne lui ôteront jamais l'idée d'un amant" (IV, 277). For Saint-Evremond, there is no mystical force to be reckoned with; there is only the strong feeling of strong passion, and thoughts of an after-life, of possible damnation or salvation, feelings of guilt, are pushed aside, rejected.

The self-oriented, pleasure-seeking individual must, in addition, maintain an attitude of flexible "availability" and disengagement in his social contacts. Pleasure must never become tyranny nor obsession. Again, it is a matter of the self controlling and manipulating outside forces to the end of its own happiness, and subsequently, to increase the number of loves, the amount of loving, violates no code, but only enhances the possibilities of fulfillment. The "quelque chose d'aimant" sets no limits upon its capacity for satisfaction, and thus Saint-Evremond rejects an over-attachment to any one person: ". . . se disposer à n'aimer qu'une personne, c'est se disposer à haïr toutes les autres: et ce qu'on croit une Vertu admirable à l'égard d'un Particulier, est un grand crime envers tout le monde" (IV, 121-122). There is truly something monstrously anti-social in exclusivity, a crime against mankind. But it is more than that. He clearly say the enormous danger to the individual's liberty

in an over-attachment to the "other." This tyranny had to be avoided, and the self remain virtually free to enter and leave relationships as necessary, the vital energy force protected against any encroachment. The emotional vigor must never be violated, the precarious equilibrium between pleasure and restraint remaining more-or-less intact.

But it is particularly the question of infidelity that occupies Saint-Evremond when he speaks of pleasure and tyranny, and it is at this point that his moral goes most clearly and forcefully against traditional, established social standards. As "spiritual adviser" to a seemingly large group of women, Saint-Evremond did not hesitate to counsel freedom from attachments based on standardized norms or simply on time:

> Il n'y a rien de si honnête qu'une ancienne Amitié, et rien de si honteux qu'une vieille Passion. Détrompez-vous du faux mérite d'être fidèle. . . .
>
> Mais que d'ennuis accompagnent toujours cette misérable Vertu! Quelle différence des dégoûts de votre attachment à la délicatesse d'une Passion naissante! Dans une Passion nouvelle, vous trouverez toutes les heures délicieuses: les jours se passent à sentir de moment en moment qu'on aime mieux. Dans une vieille Habitude, le temps se consume ennuieusement à aimer moins. On peut vivre avec des Indifférents, ou par bienséance, ou par la nécessité du commerce: mais comment passer sa vie avec ceux qu'on a aimés, et qu'on n'aime plus? (I, 96)

In the face of the established "virtues" of fidelity and commitment of a permanent nature, Saint-Evremond opted for the individual's chance to move freely within his social universe. In Holland particularly he found the women bound to rigid, fixed standards which kept them faithful to a first

lover: "moitié par habitude, moitié par un sot honneur qu'on se fait d'être constant, on entretient languissament les misérables restes d'une Passion usée" (II, 232). Long tormented by the passage of time (which may well explain the peculiar game of "being old" he so expertly played, even in early middle age), Saint-Evremond rejected and shunned allegiances based upon accumulated days. A relationship whose sole foundation was one of habit was the very antithesis of his ideal rapport, where both partners enjoyed a sense of renewed vitality.

Up until now, it seems clear that Saint-Evremond was engaged, to a greater or lesser degree, in the moral dilemma of his age, of all ages. Where was man to find happiness? And how was he to build a life accordingly? Saint-Evremond's answer fits into a general schema of thought that traversed his century, heir to the scepticism and doubt engendered during the Renaissance. Most specifically, he questioned the Christian reliance upon future salvation, rejected it, and came forth with his answer of modified terrestrial pleasure. He was certainly not alone. But his ideas are not bound into well-structured philosophical treatises, and it is more and more difficult to separate the man's own particular sensitivites from the "moral" he espoused, especially when he readily makes his person so available to us. Thus, what on the one hand appears as an intellectual celebration of freedom from constraint, seems on the other only one man's special battle against pain, against most

especially the obsession with death. And although the emphasis on the life forces was an integral part of the "libertine" philosophy of the time, almost indeed a convention, bit by bit Saint-Evremond's words on the subject take on a surprisingly personal tone, so much so that the more formal, "philosophical" stance is slowly eclipsed.

Unquestionably, a philosophy of terrestrial pleasure could not fail to be distressed by a certain end to that happiness. Or it may be that the obsession with death is the emotional fear that gives rise to the intellectual construct of earthly gratification. In any case, Saint-Evremond sought to allay the death fear by a very deliberate stress on life, and the belief in disponibilité, in the present time rather than in the past or future, in total self-determination, reflects an attempt at firmly rooting the individual into his immediate "selfdom." Actually, it is not the obsession with ultimate death alone that Saint-Evremond sought to diminish, but all the pain in life, all the little deaths that strip man of an essential feeling of well-being.

Among the critics, H. T. Barnwell in particular has done a thorough job of analyzing the question of le divertissement in the writings of Saint-Evremond, showing that pleasure, fun, amusement, served as potent counter-forces to the fear of death and pain.[7] Pleasure, then, is seen as a way of attaining an emotional equilibrium which neither Christian grace nor rational meditation could offer.

That is why the principle of self-fulfillment and self-enjoyment must be maintained at all cost, rising above obligations to one's family and society, why moral authority with its emphasis on what is "due" must be withered away, as a threat to the supremacy of individual determination.

The result of this attitude is much less an extolling of a spectacular bonheur than a calm acceptance of a modus vivendi, where freedom from pain and fear is equated with genuine happiness. There was always within Saint-Evremond the realization that to achieve a complete, total joy, an omnipresent happiness, was a radical impossibility. At best one could hope for a compromise situation, where the absence of pain and unhappiness, the absence especially of the dominating fear of death, would allow for a satisfactory life situation. His parody of the cogito--"J'aime donc je suis"--is simply an affirmation of the desire for life weighted against all forms of pain, against meditation which leads to thoughts of ultimate nothingness. And it is precisely in this equivocal, ambiguous call to pleasure that Saint-Evremond's works begin to separate from the general, free-thinking current of his age and to take on their own unique quality.

The capacity to accept a compromise situation somewhere between joy and pain is why Saint-Evremond seems so willing, so eager to replace love with friendship, to engage in a game where one was easily converted into the

other, where the intense, vibrant feelings of passion could be readily interchanged with the calm felicity of friendship: "Et si je passe de l'amitié à l'amour sans emportement, je puis revenir de l'amour à l'amitié avec aussi peu de violence" (I, 59). His pleasure was never frenzied, but quiet, and the persistent image of the ugly, tired, old man which he so frequently employed in self-description, served to support his need, for such an individual is beyond the love domain, exempt from Eros.

But perhaps more than anything else, more than the clearly formulated theory of "compromise," or at least behind that theory, there remains the question of emotional risk. Clearly the risk for potential psychic and social disintegration involved in the concept of l'amitié is far weaker than that associated with l'amour. No great emotional turbulence is associated with friendship, traditionally, for the sexual component is absent, while l'amour-passion, perhaps more readily than any other force, can undo the stable network of the individual psyche and the collective society.

Thus, the writer who counseled his many correspondents (mostly female) to indulge in sensual enjoyment of the freest nature, who spoke with such feeling on the value of passion in one's life, ultimately, but paradoxically, seems to bow to the conceptions, fears of love which so dominated his time. L'amitié seems to be the furthest point to which Saint-Evremond could comfortably adhere, and even at those times when he gives way to "amorous" sentiments (with Mme

de Mazarin), his posture is pathetically submissive and placating--"Baisez le vieillard, Reine!" (IV, 122)--thus violating all the concepts of emotional independence and detachment he had so readily espoused. But even these supplications seem strangely devoid of emotion and serve only to disparage ironically his own self.

Love enticed him as a philosophical ideal, as the symbol of the pinnacle of pleasure, but in life he gladly yielded in favor of a less demanding relationship. His emphasis on friendship did not violate his strong belief in pleasure, of course; the Epicurean ideal included all forms of physical and mental pleasures. But it did reduce the degree of intensity sought. Even at the rare times that he analyzed the quality of love, his attention was most carried by that aspect which offered the smallest amount of emotional turbulence, by that which most successfuly eliminated confusion of an erotic base:

> Quoique l'Amour agisse diversement selon la diversité des complexions, on peut rapporter à trois mouvements principaux tout ce que nous fait sentir une passion si générale: aimer, brûler, languir.
>
> Aimer simplement, est le premier état de notre Ame, lorsqu'elle s'émeut par l'impression de quelque object agréable. . . . Brûler, est un état violent sujet aux inquiétudes, aux peines, aux tourments. . . . Languir, est le plus beau des mouvements de l'amour; c'est l'effet délicat d'une flamme pure, qui nous confuse doucement. (III, 123)

All his praise goes to the state of languir, for what Saint-Evremond shunned was the tumultuous aspect of love, as too upsetting to a precarious emotional well-being. He enjoyed best a feeling of calm and repose, that same feeling he

obtained from a steady but undemanding friendship, free of the intense, anxious side of passionate love. He often admitted that he would have enjoyed a friendship with a woman if the relationship could have remained unhampered by sexual feelings and by the agitation which frequently accompanies them.

But it is perhaps in his attitude toward women that Saint-Evremond shifts most obviously between two different standards: the philosophical glorification of love and the personal fear. Women troubled him. He liked to point out that some of the most famous men in history lived independently of female company, and he even offered a short praise of homosexuality, surely unusual for his time, as a viable alternative to heterosexual love (IV, 115). But the female character persistently disturbed him, at least as he reveals those anxieties in his writings, and he seems to have been most relaxed towards women when they were not a part of his own, immediate life, hence, when they could pose no threat.

Resolutely pro-Nature when advising female friends, although somewhat removed, Saint-Evremond lashed out against prudery of all forms. In the letter to Mlle de Quéroualle, he wrote: "Mais vous savez trop le monde, pour donner de véritables tendresses aux chagrins des Prudes, dont la Vertu n'est qu'un artifice pour vous priver des plaisirs qu'elles regrettent" (I, 90). Prudery for Saint-Evremond, as also for Molière, was little else than a mask, a poor travesty for women unlucky enough to be deprived of lovers,

camouflaging their bitterness under a blanket of virtue.

For the same reason, he was quick to condemn convent life, where love blooms rather than fades away, where erotic love, or at least the desire for it, surfaces rather quickly: ". . . au lieu de porter au Couvent le dégoût de l'amour, le Couvent vous en fera naître l'envie. . . . Ainsi vous serez consumée de regrets ou dévorée de désirs selon que votre Ame se tournera au souvenir de ce que vous avez pu faire, ou à l'imagination de ce que vous pourrez exécuter" (III, 92). The inevitable result, according to Saint-Evremond, is that passion is converted into religious devotion, and God becomes a new lover (I, 137).

He attacked equally vigorously les précieuses whom he saw as violating the laws of Nature as severely as the prudes. What he recognized in their overly intellectual approach to love is what modern critics have referred to as their sublimation of passion. "Les Jansénistes de l'Amour," as he chose to call them, adopting the expression from Ninon de Lenclos, violated the very foundation of passion by denying its affective power: "Elles ont tiré une Passion toute sensible du Coeur à l'Esprit, et converti des mouvements en Idées" (I, 111). This intellectualization and this deification of love go contrary to Saint-Evremond's belief in sensual gratification and in its "here and now" quality. Any cult of love was repugnant to him, which is undoubtedly why, along with his attack of the précieuses, he also criticized the old vestiges of courtoisie in seventeenth-century

Spanish mores. Ideally, love considered as a game, with set rules to follow, was for Saint-Evremond (unlike the chevalier de Méré), a basic denial of natural instinct. This attitude, however, did not prevent him from writing what must surely be some of the tritest love poetry of the précieux genre, but he saw that as strictly an exercise in style and not as a code of living.

Nevertheless, while vociferously defending Nature's way, while attacking multifold inhibitions and obstacles, Saint-Evremond's own portrayal of the ideal woman and the ideal love is a masterpiece of the very bias he so angrily denounced. In fact, this "portrait" reveals itself as the summation of Saint-Evremond's double stance--the fascination with love and the equally strong fear. The title of the passage alone serves to suggest a most fanciful, ephemeral situation, at best a game: "Idée de la femme qui ne se trouve point, et qui ne se trouvera jamais." The non-existence of such a woman is thereby established before he has even begun the body of the text, while the entire essay is built upon a series of antitheses, word-games, whose member elements cancel out one another, negate, suspend:

> Sa taille est d'une juste grandeur, bien prise, aisée, d'un dégagement aussi éloigné de la contrainte, que de cette excessive liberté. . . . Son Esprit a de l'étendue sans être vaste, n'allant jamais si loin dans les pensées générales, qu'il ne puisse revenir aux considérations particulières . . . [elle est] également ennemie d'un mouvement inutile, et de la mollesse d'un repos, qui se fait honneur du nom de tranquillité, pour couvrir une véritable nonchalance. (II, 243-245).

Saint-Evremond's ideal female is an equilibrium of contrasting components, whose parts he manipulates back and forth, until the whole self disappears in a display of verbiage that negates rather than creates.

But the most striking sets of contrasts are those which describe Emilie's prowess as a woman:

> Elle vous attire, elle vous retient, et vous approchez toujours d'elle avec des désirs que vous n'oseriez faire paraître. . . . On connaît par une infinité d'expériences que l'Esprit s'aveugle en aimant; et l'Amour n'a presque jamais bien établi son pouvoir qu'après avoir ruiné celui de notre Raison. Sur le sujet d'Emilie, nos sentiments deviennent plus passionnés, à mesure que nos Lumières sont plus épurées; et la Passion, qui a toujours paru une marque de folie, est ici la plus véritable effet de notre bon sens. (II, 245-246)

To counteract the fear of loss of reasoning powers, Saint-Evremond proposes a "new" passion, one where sensuality is increased through some vague, spiritual enlightenment, and vice versa. Unable to consider ideal love as preeminently or even partially sexual, Saint-Evremond does not offer nonetheless the standard coupling of Love and Reason, but something more, that is the intermingling of the two, their interpenetration. And ultimately, it is the erotic that emerges as "purified," while the gains for Reason are far less clear, for it was the former, always, that had been the disturbing element.

Emilie attracts at the same time that she repels. There is a hint of sexuality, but it is quickly dispelled as the "purifying light" of reason takes over. The fear of erotic love that had a preponderance of writers in its

grip at that time, seems to have won out in the end also for Saint-Evremond, after all the essays and letters in praise of free, uninhibited expression. Ultimately, Saint-Evremond's ideal emotional experience involved a suspension of the faculties of deep feeling, and the most he can propose is a vocabulary of sensual expression, nullified by a contingent one of reason, sense, and purity. In light of this, it seems fair to suggest that the experience of Saint-Evremond was grounded in failure, that the "libertine" atmosphere of which he was decidedly a part, with its emphasis on physical pleasure never succeeded in totally destroying the strong inhibitory forces which were part of the entire generation.

Footnotes

[1]Leonard A. Rosmarin, "The Unsublimated Libido: Saint-Evremond's Conception of Love," The French Review, XLVI (December 1972), 263-270.

[2]Victor Du Bled, La société française du XVI^e siècle au XX^e siècle (Paris: Perrin et Cie, 1904), 4^e série (XVII^e siècle), p. 172.

[3]Saint-Evremond, Lettres, ed. René Ternois (Paris: Librairie Marcel Didier, 1967-1968), I, 204.

[4]Norman O. Brown, Life against Death (Middletown, Connecticut: Wesleyan University Press, 1959), p. 47.

[5]Rosmarin, op. cit., p. 264.

[6]Saint-Evremond, Oeuvres (Londres: Tonson, 1711), I, 90. Subsequent references to Saint-Evremond's Oeuvres will be included in the body of the chapter, by volume and page number.

[7]H. T. Barnwell, Les idées morales et critiques de Saint-Evremond (Paris: Presses universitaires de France, 1957), pp. 65-67.

CHAPTER V

MADAME DE SEVIGNE

"Elle n'a pas de passion au coeur en écrivant: mettons à part toujours l'amour maternel."[1] Gustave Lanson's earnest desire to relegate Mme de Sévigné's passion for her daughter to a substrate level, reflects his basic preoccupation with the non-essential side of the voluminous correspondence. Lanson is most fascinated by the anecdotal Mme de Sévigné, the part of the letters given over to describing the multifold events of the time--". . . toutes ces anecdotes, ces narrations charmantes ou poignantes, sont un des documents les plus sincères que l'histoire puisse consulter"[2]--and the ambiguous, strange relationship with Mme de Grignan is seen basically as an écart from the epistolary norm.

Certainly, Lanson's taste seems to have fixed Mme de Sévigné and her letters into a mold that only recently has been deemed questionable. Most of the morceaux choisis collections refer constantly to the letters depicting the death of Turenne, the representation of Racine's Esther, and suspecting perhaps that it was at least necessary to allude once to the feelings of Mme de Sévigné for Mme de

Grignan, the editors frequently include the famous episode of the crossing of the Avignon bridge. Seemingly, one reason for easily including the latter piece would be that stylistically, through its reenactment of the little drama, it conforms to the general notion we have of Mme de Sévigné as a tableau painter, gifted in depicting a certain sense of color and movement through the written word.

But in the past few years, critical interpretations have centered on the primary, essential point of the correspondence: the extraordinary mother-daughter relationship. Reading through the three volumes of the letters in the Pléiade edition, it becomes evident immediately that Lanson's approach is extremely limited. In fact, it is much easier to ignore the anecdote and concentrate on Mme de Sévigné's passion, both as she lived it and expressed it. Actually, both aspects of the letters--the personal and the social--merit attention, although most frequently, it appears that the anecdotal serves as a support, or even sometimes as a foil to the one element that overwhelmingly dominates the letters to Mme de Grignan, the expression of the great love.

In terms of the general study we have proposed, it does seem fair to question whether the letters occupy the same kind of position towards society as the works of our other writers. Do they offer a generalized view of man in his universe--both immediate and cosmic? Do they propose a certain code or style of living? Does the introduction

of "je" alter the basic intention of the seventeenth-century moralists: an impersonal negating and subsequent reconstruction of social patterns most necessary to the fundamental well-being of the individual and his society? In reply, it must be said that a very powerful view of life, of living, does emerge from the letters of Mme de Sévigné, and in fact, it is one which goes counter to the major philosophical and religious thinking of the day. Mme de Sévigné identified living with loving.

The Jansenist, Epicurean, and mondain codes are all violated by this other life-view, Jansenism by Mme de Sévigné's heavy emphasis on human love, Epicureanism by her willingness to plunge into a total, highly intense involvement with another, thereby sacrificing repose and emotional liberty, and finally mondanité by her refusal to establish an idiom allowing for the superficial transfer of sentiment without any loss of inner control. Unlike the great majority of Classical moralists, Mme de Sévigné opted, through her letters, for a radical approach to life, radical in that it embraced the passions without fear.

Nevertheless, her stance is not without a certain element of ambiguity. Life as love is not exactly what Mme de Sévigné chose, or it is precisely what she chose if living can be completely synonymous with writing. There is a distinction to be made between stressing her passion or stressing the writing which interpreted it, between Mme de Sévigné primarily as active "lover" or passive poet. Re-

cent criticism has emphasized more-or-less one side at the expense of the other, sometimes forgetting that ultimately the feelings and their expression can be separated only with great difficulty. Roger Duchêne in his Madame de Sévigné et la lettre d'amour accentuates her passion as a living force, so strong that she had to express it constantly, and left without any other means to do so, opted for the letter. His study traces the history of Mme de Sévigné's passionate love for Mme de Grignan. Letter writing is seen as a means to filling in the terrible gap which Mme de Grignan's departure for Provence had created, and beginning with the fateful day, Duchêne skillfully follows the life of Mme de Sévigné's unusually intense love: "Les lettres à Mme de Grignan permettent de suivre les étapes des sentiments de Mme de Sévigné. Après les lents progrès vers une meilleure entente de 1671 à 1676, vient la brusque rupture de 1677 avec jusqu'en 1680, des sursauts et des paroxysmes. Et c'est enfin, dans une sérénité un peu grave, l'accord que seule attriste la pensée de la mort. La preuve de la vérité de l'amour dans les lettres, c'est cette courbe, dessinée au jour le jour, d'une affection s'étalant sur vingt-cinq années."[3]

Where Duchêne is interested primarily in the curb of Mme de Sévigné's love for her daughter and in examining the reasons for such fluctuation, Gérard-Gailly, in his introduction to the Pléiade edition of the letters, offers a Freudian analysis of the passion itself. Duchêne describes from the outside; Gérard-Gailly from the inside. His reading

centers primarily upon certain passages of the letters which rely on an erotic mode of expression, and he concludes: "Passion maternelle! Maternelle, sans doute, mais amoureuse aussi, et passion d'amant pour un autre être humain."[4] His views are reinforced by showing that the more obvious "love" passages were removed by Mme de Sévigné's earliest editors who probably recognized their ambiguous value.

For other critics, notably Jean Cordelier, the love relationship between Mme de Sévigné and Mme de Grignan is viewed as the means through which the former was best able to fulfill a calling as a writer. Cordelier seeks to prove that the passion she experienced was only indirectly tied to Mme de Grignan, via the necessity of writing. Thus she loved the person who allowed her to realize her vocation.[5] Studying the question of language in a different vein, Bernard Bray seeks to show that the erotic language Mme de Sévigné frequently used in the letters to her daughter was the result of a linguistic impasse. She was virtually forced into the lyric note because "la marquise ne disposait d'aucun autre langage pour exprimer la douleur de l'absence."[6] Such an interpretation is of course diametrically opposed to the Freudian analysis of Gérard-Gailly, and the center of focus shifts from the psychological to the socio-linguistic.

All the methods used to analyze the correspondence both succeed and fail in their attempts to understand the strange letters. Roger Duchêne's exhaustive study maintains too strict a parallel between living and writing,

and he is so interested in the gaps between letters, in what mother and daughter were feeling at all times, that he loses track of the problem that Mme de Sévigné's primary identity is precisely through letter writing, hence through the domain of the summary, the deliberate exclusion, not through any consecutive, all-inclusive pattern.

As for Gérard-Gailly's Freudian study, it too, fails at a certain point. Without a doubt, his perceptions do open certain doors, for very frequently Mme de Sévigné's "maternal" love seems decidedly ambiguous. The rivalry with M. de Grignan for control over her daughter, the fascination with Mme de Grignan's physical beauty, the references to kisses and embraces way beyond polite convention, point to a situation that does seemingly reflect desires of incest and sapphism. Mme de Sévigné herself, on occasion, found it useful to clarify that her love was <u>maternel</u>, as if other thoughts had indeed crossed her mind at some point. But the Freudian bent ultimately fails to tell the whole story, for it is shown through the letters that writing was a clear alternative, in fact even sometimes a clear preference, over physical presence, and the love seemed to express itself most satisfactorily for both parties when the written word could interpret it. Hence, a study of psyches and motives cannot reflect the entire problem, for it neglects the very crucial question of the necessity to remain in the domain of written communication, and going one step further, in the domain of the imagination.

On the other hand, the theories stressing the writing experience beyond all else are seemingly belied by Mme de Sévigné herself. Although in reality her great passion may have fared far better when on paper than at any other time, she nevertheless did feel, on a conscious level, at least most of the time, that writing was a mere substitute for Mme de Grignan's presence, that it was only second best: "Quand je ne suis pas avec vous, mon unique divertissement est de vous écrire" (I, 611). On the conscious plane, then, the Marquise perceived that seeing was most desirable, and writing, a palliative. Thus, Jean Cordelier's neat little system transforming "je vivrai pour vous aimer" into "je vivrai pour vous écrire"[7] does seem to stretch the truth a bit. That writing does emerge eventually as a superior alternative to being together is clear through the letters, but only at rare moments was it viewed as such by Mme de Sévigné. Most of the time, she yearned for her daughter's presence. Finally, Bernard Bray, in emphasizing that linguistic patterns alone dictated Mme de Sévigné's expression, cannot sufficiently take into account either the nature of the relationship or the view of living that Mme de Sévigné sought to communicate. Ultimately, it seems quite evident that all aspects involved in Mme de Sévigné's relationship with her daughter must be studied, not only the fundamental ties but also how and why this alliance expressed itself as it did.

It is difficult to ascertain the precise nature of

Mme de Sévigné's feeling for her daughter prior to the latter's departure for Provence, shortly after her marriage. In the face of scholarship suggesting that Mme de Sévigné's love for her daughter was an outgrowth only of Mme de Grignan's marriage and subsequent departure, and thus of a loss of a person who for so many years had been dominated and dependent, other critics have attempted to show that the separation of the two women marked only a heightening of an already forceful passion.[8]

There is really no evidence either way, and it seems fair to question whether an understanding of the years which preceded the 1671 departure to Provence sheds much light on the correspondence itself. The only truly important question --that of Mme de Sévigné's possible desire to dominate her child--can be gleaned readily through the letters themselves, and references to past patterns of behavior do little to clarify that problem. However, by no means was the dependence-independence syndrome the sole, or even primary reason, for Mme de Sévigné's faithful correspondence, a view which might be suggested by an overly detailed account of the years previous to Mme de Grignan's departure.

What is significant is that the departure of Mme de Grignan for Provence on February 5, 1671, (where she was to follow her husband, who had just been named <u>lieutenant-général</u> by the court), was an abrupt move, a shock, one that was to release an expression of intense passion not easily paralleled in that time, perhaps only by the <u>Lettres</u>

portugaises. The opening words of the first letter, written on February 6, 1671, one day after saying farewell to Mme de Grignan, set the note and tone of the twenty-five years of correspondence:

> Ma douleur seroit bien médiocre si je pouvais vous la dépeindre; je ne l'entreprendrai pas aussi. J'ai beau chercher ma chère fille, je ne la trouve plus, et tous les pas qu'elle fait l'éloignent de moi. Je m'en allai donc à Sainte-Marie, toujours pleurant et toujours mourant: il me sembloit qu'on m'arrachoit le coeur et l'âme; et en effet, quelle rude séparation! (I, 189)

Each subsequent separation, following a period of reunion, evokes a similar outcry, and although as she becomes accustomed to the absence of her daughter, Mme de Sévigné consciously attempts to modify her acute misery and to modulate the sharp tones, nevertheless with varying degrees of intensity, the letters are primarily the vivid expression of the anguish engendered by the "eternal" separation. Through a certain process of défiguration that a collection of letters such as these cannot help but give, we are left with the impression that the periods of separation far surpassed in length the number of days when the two women were reunited. It is, however, the reverse that is true; sixteen years, nine months together, eight years, four months apart.[9] But it is not time together or apart, more of one than the other, that is really at stake here. The nature of the feeling was such that each period of separation seemed "forever" to Mme de Sévigné.

The motives governing Mme de Sévigné's correspondence with her daughter are hardly any more clear than the precise

nature of their relationship prior to 1671. At times, it does appear that the Marquise was "engaged in a battle for a resisting heart,"[10] that she sought to maintain her daughter in a state of dependency inconsistent with the newly acquired freedom that marriage and distance had bestowed upon Mme de Grignan. Her frequently haughty, commanding tones suggest that this at least was partially responsible for the highly intense exchange of letters. At certain times--for example, when she unsuccessfully exhorts Mme de Grignan to join her at Vichy and then to return to Paris together for the remainder of the year--it does seem as if a battle of wills was a definite part of the relationship between mother and daughter.

In a variation of the above theme, it could also be postulated that Mme de Sévigné's obsessive passion for Mme de Grignan illustrates perfectly the fascination with an "absent" person, the fascination that Proust described at such length. Thus, Mme de Grignan represents the creature who ultimately escapes total possession, what Albertine was for the narrateur of the Recherche. "Passion proustienne, non pas que la mère de Mme de Grignan ait rien d'une femme damnée . . . mais parce que son aventure apparaît comme l'illustration parfaite de l'analyse que Proust fera de la passion amoureuse, analyse qu'une brève citation de la Recherche suffit à rappeler: 'On n'aime que ce qu'on ne possède pas tout entier.'"[11] In this case, Françoise-Marguerite's portrait, which Mme de Sévigné keeps close to

her throughout the years, and to which she makes frequent reference in her letters, would be the perfect symbol of l'être de fuite, she who is both present and absent, the ideal metaphor for possession and lack of it.

But if precise motivation cannot be determined (for doubtlessly Mme de Sévigné was moved to write by multifold reasons), other question can more readily be resolved. Reading through the letters consecutively, one feels that two very important points stand out: 1) the letters to Mme de Grignan do not fit in at all with the ongoing trends of mondanité and galanterie, and 2) on the writing level at least, Mme de Sévigné's involvement with her daughter was strikingly absolute and total.

That the Marquise's relationship with Mme de Grignan, as she expressed it in her letters, far transcends any notions of simple gallantry or artificial social structures, has been most thoroughly documented by Roger Duchêne in his recent comprehensive study of the letters. La lettre galante certainly enjoyed much favor in seventeenth-century French society, where the salon life cultivated various socially acceptable "masks." Thus, it emerges as an extremely well-perfected means to avoid the more fundamental sentiments of a primarily erotic base, sentiments which were not acceptable, save within the framework of marriage. "Parler d'amour s'avère en conséquence à la fois nécessaire et impossible, sauf précisément par le biais de la galanterie, masque commode et qui permet d'oser beaucoup puisqu'elle est réputée jeu d'esprit innocent, admis et même recommandé

par les conventions de la vie mondaine."[12]

The presence of such a code, or game, is evident in the letters of the Marquise, although certainly not in those to her daughter. Rather, it is in her correspondence with her male admirers that she readily introduces la galanterie, particularly in that addressed to Ménage, her tutor, and to Bussy-Rabutin, her cousin. Those letters are filled with wit and teasing grace, with joking ambiguities and puns. Especially in the letters to her cousin, Mme de Sévigné demonstrates a proclivity for a certain equivocal note, where frequent references of a sexual nature contrast with her very restrained, indignant manner when her cousin, provoked by her banter, steps beyond what the social rules ordered. In the correspondence with her cousin, up until 1658, (in later years, this tone is wholly absent from their commerce), the young Marquise employs an art of double-entendre, of adept word manipulation, with great flair, referring to Bussy-Rabutin once, for example, he who had produced no sons, as "le beau faiseur des filles" (I, 99).

The letters addressed to her daughter never joke about love or passion. Of course, Mme de Sévigné was writing then to someone of her own sex, and even if latent incestuous desires were present, the male-female element was absent. Hence, there is an immediate reduction in any form of coquetterie. But whereas quarrels or misunderstandings with Bussy-Rabutin or Ménage gave rise to a semi-serious, semi-teasing lilt, any disagreement between Mme de

Grignan and her mother was a constant source of pain and bitterness. As Jean Cordelier correctly explains: "Les rapports de la mère et de la fille ont tout d'une véritable liaison amoureuse: craintes sans fondement, jalousie sans cause, ergotages tendres, accusations aussi maladroites que sincères, protestations indignées, qui font de la Correspondance un chef-d'oeuvre de correspondance amoureuse, digne de figurer en bonne place dans toutes les anthologies de lettres d'amour."[13]

Mutual jealousy did indeed exert a strong influence throughout the letters--Mme de Sévigné's envy of Grignan, Françoise-Marguerite's antipathy toward Retz and Corbinelli, close friends and confidants of the Marquise. Mme de Sévigné persistently lashed out at M. de Grignan, feeling that it was indeed her right to regulate even when he slept with his wife, to say nothing of the visits to Paris. On her part, Mme de Grignan seems to have been tormented by worry over her mother's "fidelity": "Avez-vous bien peur que j'aime mieux Mme de Brissac que vous? Craignez-vous, de la manière dont vous me connoissez, que ses manières me plaisent plus que les vôtres? que son esprit ait trouvé le chemin de me plaire? Avez-vous opinion que sa beauté efface vos charmes? Enfin pensez-vous qu'il y ait quelqu'un au monde qui puisse, à mon goût, surpasser Madame de Grignan, étant même dépouillée de tout l'intérêt que j'y prends" (I, 265-266)?

In the opposite vein, there were moments of great tenderness--Mme de Sévigné's pleas to her daughter to take

better care of her health; the frequent self-denigration ("j'ai trouvé mille fois que je ne valois pas l'extrême peine que vous preniez pour moi" [II, 259]) which alternated with periods of frenzied worry when letters failed to arrive on time or when the Marquise believed that Mme de Grignan was somehow in danger, anguish that was frequently without cause. Mme de Sévigné's imagination, her almost masochistic pleasure in torturing herself by creating dreaded adventures, demonstrates that the relationship with her daughter was far too fragile, far too intensely experienced, ever to compare with the cajoling, teasing tone she employed so frequently in her letters to Ménage and Bussy. Irrespective of unconscious desires, Mme de Sévigné in the correspondence with Mme de Grignan, testifies to an overwhelming absorption, which had nothing in common with the gay, uninvolved note of la galanterie.

Furthermore, to read through the letters in their entirety is to become convinced that Lanson's attempt, and others after him to remove from primary consideration the involvement with Mme de Grignan is but a complete misinterpretation of mood. On the writing level at least, which is really all we can judge by, the relationship shows itself to be an absolute, total commitment. Time after time, the Marquise makes reference to the fact that her love, her obsession for her daughter, is in a realm separate from and beyond any other aspect of her life. To permit the development of such emotion, to allow the feelings to attain a

purer state, she frequently sought out absolute solitude:

> Quoique ma lettre soit datée du dimanche, je l'écris aujourd'hui, samedi au soir; il n'est que dix heures, tout est retiré; c'est une heure où je suis à vous d'une manière plus particulière qu'au milieu de ce qui est ordinairement dans ma chambre: ce n'est pas que je sois contrainte, je sais me débarrasser; je me promène seule, et quoi que vous disiez, ma très chère, je serois bien oppressée si je n'avois pas cette liberté. J'ai besoin de penser à vous avec attention, comme j'avais besoin de vous voir. (III, 18-19)

Solitude, however, necessarily depended upon the absence not only of all who were irrelevant to the passion, but also upon the absence of the objet aimé. That a certain amount of fictionalization occurred cannot be in doubt. What the solitude and the free reign of the imagination offered was the preferred formulation of her sentiments. A double explanation can perhaps be offered: being alone allowed for the satisfaction of both the emotional need (constant attention focused on Mme de Grignan) and of the artistic one (perfection of the means of expression). Either way, what is clear is the desire to isolate in order to concentrate best on the obsession at the exclusion of all else.

Countless times throughout the long period from 1671 to 1696, Mme de Sévigné explicitly states the degree to which the passion possesses her:

> . . . enfin tout tourne ou sur vous, ou de vous, ou pour vous, ou par vous. (I, 235)

> . . . je vivrai pour vous aimer, et j'abandonne ma vie à cette occupation. . . . (I, 283)

> C'est une chose étrange que d'aimer autant que je vous aime: on a une attention et une application naturelle et continuelle, qui fait

> qu'en nulle heure du jour on ne peut être surprise sans cette pensée. (I, 685-686)
>
> Quelle possession vous avez prise de mon coeur, et quelles traces vous avez faites dans ma tête! (II, 454)
>
> . . . je pense continuellement et habituellement à vous. . . . (II, 460)
>
> . . . mon coeur est à vous . . . tout vous y cède et vous y laisse régner souverainement. (III, 10)

Even the infrequent recourse to the précieux mode of expression--as in the last example--cannot detract from what amounts to a totality of involvement which left decidedly little room for other emotional demands. The preoccupation with Mme de Grignan, or perhaps more precisely with the image of Mme de Grignan, the almost deification of that image, is one of the most remarkable aspects of the entire correspondence. There develops a strong awareness that the extreme concentration upon her daughter, the quasi-religious fervor with which she endows the other woman's very being, was fundamentally vital to Mme de Sévigné, that this extraordinary effort and immersion was linked to the life flow.

Consciousness of her own body was very much a part of the Marquise's passion. The love for her daughter, or more accurately, the need to participate in a strong, mutual love, is repeatedly tied to her own respiration--"Je souhaite, ma petite, que vous m'aimiez toujours: c'est ma vie, c'est l'air que je respire" (I, 264)--and she truly "experienced it as consubstantial with her own being, with her own identity."[14] What the mail brings and takes away is life itself. As Harriet Ray Allentuch has shown in her

study, separation was seen as a period of mourning, of physical paine: ". . . cette séparation me fait une douleur au coeur et à l'âme, que je sens comme un mal du corps" (I, 201).[15] And reunion was conceived of as a spiritual and physical rebirth: "Quel voyage, bon Dieu! et quelle saison! vous arriverez précisément le plus court jour de l'année, et par conséquent vous nous ramenez le soleil" (II, 259).[16]

In this identification of her love with the life process itself, Mme de Sévigné violates the precepts offered by the Jansenists, the Epicureans, and the mondain writers, all of whom placed another ideal--love of God, ataraxia, social perfection--above the intense emotional involvement absolutely vital to the Marquise's sense of well-being. Even if, in part, the recourse to letter writing reveals a decided preference for an attachment to what is absent, rather than a predilection for a permanent, "present" relationship, (a second marriage, perhaps), nonetheless, the commitment is of a rather different nature from those proposed by the other writers of the age.

The totality of the involvement, however, created certain problems, the most significant of which perhaps is the degree to which Mme de Sévigné altered--consciously or subconsciously--reality, that is the daily realities, to conform to her emotional demands. Time, space, people, all undergo a radical transformation within the context of the letter.

The present is a non-existent moment in the Marquise's

writings to her daughter. The passage of time is viewed within her own special confines, dependent upon her own private relativity:

> Pour cette négligence et cette joie de voir passer les jours les uns après les autres, je la sens en moi et j'y fais réflexion à toute heure. Quand vous êtes ici, il n'y en a pas un que je ne regrette; je trouve qu'ils m'échappent avec une vitesse qui m'attriste. Une heure, un jour, une semaine, un mois, un an, tout cela court et s'enfuit avec une rapidité qui m'afflige toujours. . . . Présentement, ma bonne, que je ne respire que de vous revoir et vous pouvoir garder et conserver moi-même, je voudrois que tout cet intervalle fût passé; je jette les jours à la tête de qui les veut, je les remercie d'être passés. Le printemps et l'été encore me paroissent des siècles; il me semble que je n'en verrai jamais la fin. Je dors vite; et j'ai de l'impatience d'être toujours à demain, et puis de recevoir vos lettres, et puis d'en recevoir encore, et encore d'autres. (II, 572-573)

But more is involved than simply an art of eloquent expression; for Mme de Sévigné the present takes form, meaning, only in relation to the past or future, and is colored completely by either remorse or anticipation. Particularly in the earlier letters to Mme de Grignan, the ones written between 1671 and 1676, she alludes frequently to such states of mind. Thoughts which revolved upon the past are inevitably filled with great sadness of time lost: "Hélas! c'est ma folie que de vous voir, de vous parler, de vous entendre; je me dévore de cette envie, et du déplaisir de ne vous avoir pas assez écoutée, pas assez regardée" (I, 230-231). She turned next to the future, since the past had not fulfilled and the present was suspended, a non-moment: "Il faut pourtant que je vous dise encore que je regarde le

temps où je vous verrai comme le seul que je désire à présent et qui peut m'être agréable dans la vie" (I, 282). And in one very remarkable passage four years later, she showed with what ease she could make the transition from past to future, completely negating the present: "Il est vrai que, depuis trois ans, nous n'avons été que quatre mois séparées, et ce qui s'est passé depuis votre départ. J'ai senti toute la joie de passer les étés et les hivers avec vous; et je sens encore plus le déplaisir de voir ce temps passé, et passé pour jamais, cela fait mourir. Il faut mettre à la place de cette pensée l'espérance de se revoir" (I, 768-769).

The future reveals itself also as the undisputed answer to all problems, and in fact, as a strong counter-force to a reality which was not only unsatisfying, but frequently bitter. Even after a period of reunion that was particularly acrimonious, the future assumes a rosy glow, as Mme de Sévigné almost desperately invests time with qualities of transfiguration. The most recent reunion may have been a disaster, but time alone will change all that, installing a reign of "truth" that the past had failed to realize: "Eh, mon Dieu, ne nous reverrons-nous jamais en nous faisant sentir toutes les douceurs de l'amitié que nous avons? . . . Faisons donc mieux, ma bonne, une autre fois . . . faisons-nous honneur de nos sentiments, qui sont si beaux et si bons: pourquoi les défigurer" (II, 280)? The problem, of course, lies in determining whether the reunion

(in this case, unsuccessful) or the promise of another encounter (judged successful in advance) is the défiguration of the truth. Living versus writing. The essential truth of the relationship, as Mme de Sévigné saw it, was revealed through the letters. That which did not adhere to the image was somehow inaccurate, false, défiguré.

Space, too, acquires new perspectives. That which is "dead" is really most alive. Through the resuscitative powers of memory, places which have a particularly strong association with Mme de Grignan and the past are those sites which most powerfully live with the Marquise: "Il n'y a point d'endroit, point de lieu, ni dans la maison, ni dans l'église, ni dans le pays, ni dans le jardin, où je ne vous aie vue; il n'y en a point qui ne me fasse souvenir de quelque chose de quelque manière que ce soit; et de quelque façon que ce soit aussi, cela me perce le coeur. Je vous vois; vous m'êtes présente . . ." (I, 236).

But letter writing achieves an even stronger transformation of reality. It was necessary, of course, in the correspondence with Mme de Grignan, to have recourse to the outside world, that is to the world beyond Mme de Sévigné and her daughter. But did the Marquise's references truly reflect the ongoing reality? On a double level, it appears that by her particular selection of who was to be mentioned in her letters, she conferred identity, existence even, to a choice few alone, and that her choice was ultimately guided by her passion for her daughter. As Bernard Bray

has shown, the correspondence is an oeuvre close, a perfect reflection of the closed society at its root, and the letters refer constantly to the same basic group of friends, acquaintances, and family, common to both Mme de Sévigné and Mme de Grignan.[17]

And yet the distinction of who enjoys favor--naming--does not stop there. Particularly those friends who are most deeply involved with Mme de Grignan--or who at least give that appearance to her mother--are included in the letters. Mme de Sévigné attempted to render her passion a collective one, to give it a sense of social primacy that it did not, could not, have. She sought to extricate her obsession from the strictly individual by endowing it with qualities of communal preoccupation: "Si je vous disois tous ceux qui vous font des compliments, il faudroit un volume: M. et Mme de Chaulnes, M. de Lavadin, M. le comte des Chapelles, Tonquedec, l'abbé de Montigny, évêque de Léon, M. d'Harays cinq cent mille fois, Jean Fourche, Chésières, etc." (I, 373). Those who refrained from such compliments were far less often alluded to, and the result for the reader--Mme de Grignan and ourselves--is a distinct awareness that Mme de Sévigné transformed her world according to her own, highly limited standards.

This is the problem that is basic and central to the correspondence, and one which at times did not escape Mme de Sévigné herself. Which is "more real"? Living or writing? Furthermore, is it through writing or being together that a

more satisfactory version (vision) of life emerges? Although constantly seeking her daughter's presence, on a conscious level at least, as that which would achieve the greatest fulfillment for herself, Mme de Sévigné, on perhaps a deeper plane, was aware that letter writing offered a viable and maybe more sustaining alternative to living together. In fact, that perception seems to have been shared by Mme de Grignan: "Vous me dites que vous êtes fort aise que je sois persuadée de votre amitié, et que c'est un bonheur que vous n'avez pas eu quand nous avons été ensemble" (I, 226). The preceding was written in 1671, and eight years later, a similar tone still prevails: "Je ne me souviens plus de tout ce qui m'avait paru des marques d'éloignement et d'indifférence; il me semble que cela ne vient point de vous, et je prends toutes vos tendresses, et dites et écrites, pour le véritable fond de votre coeur pour moi" (II, 451). It does appear that those expressions of tenderness may have been more often written than said, and that Mme de Sévigné was more than willing to replace any signs of indifference or hostility--not uncommon during their periods together--with what was the preferred mark, although expressed in writing.

In a paradoxical way, then, absence allowed for a more satisfactory expression of love than did presence, and it can be said that writing did emerge as superior to being together, although on the conscious level, most often, the latter was the expressed, desired goal. But writing was

heavily relied upon to communicate "true" feelings, those superior emotions free of any bitterness, which Mme de Sévigné judged to be the real mark of the relationship with her daughter. That she saw the possibility of achieving the perfection she had mentally established as inherent in her involvement with Mme de Grignan, is evident in the unusual recourse to writing even when her daughter was by her side in Paris. Expressing herself via the written word was a means of achieving both a certain liberty and self-constraint through the working over and manipulation of terms.[18] And it is a rather remarkable piece of writing that the Marquise offers to her child in 1678, while Mme de Grignan was visiting her:

> Il faut, ma chère bonne, que je me donne le plaisir de vous écrire, une fois pour toutes, comme je suis pour vous. Je n'ai pas l'esprit de vous le dire; je ne vous dis rien qu'avec timidité et de mauvaise grâce; tenez-vous donc à ceci. Je ne touche point au fond de la tendresse sensible et naturelle que j'ai pour vous; c'est un prodige. Je ne sais pas quel effet peut faire en vous l'opposition que vous dites qui est dans nos esprits; il faut qu'elle ne soit pas si grande dans nos sentiments, ou qu'il y ait quelque chose d'extraordinaire pour moi, puisqu'il est vrai que mon attachement pour vous n'en est pas moindre. Il semble que je veuille vaincre ces obstacles, et que cela augmente mon amitié plutôt que de la diminuer: enfin, jamais, ce me semble, on ne peut aimer plus parfaitement. (II, 408)

The perfect expression of her sentiments, the harmony, calm, and tranquillity which filter into that expression, can be obtained only through a letter. In choosing to communicate via writing, Mme de Sévigné implicitly states that although the relationship may seem imperfect, especially to Mme de Grignan, in essence, it is sublime. Its true nature is unique, perfect;

the rest is appearance, sham, misunderstanding, a failure to relate. If the communication can be made more satisfactory, so too can the relationship; hence, the recourse is to writing. "Mes lettres sont plus heureuses que moi-même; je m'explique mal de bouche quand mon coeur est si touché" (II, 400).

This problem of what is "more real" is paramount in the letters. There is an ambiguity between absence and presence, imagination and reality, that is difficult to resolve. Aware of the possibility of défiguration, Mme de Sévigné proceeded, nevertheless, to (re)construct an elaborate, complex relationship far more successfully on the written level than on the "living" one. At the center of the correspondence is the altering of time, space, the entire system of relating. Mme de Sévigné stressed the satisfaction of the individual psyche as the preeminent element in the structuring of a life "project," and consequently was governed only by that which could conform to it. The organization of her mental world had to fit the emotional demands she imposed upon it, which of course is the goal of any "moralist" writer. Moreover, her fantasizing, her reconstruction of the world around her through the use of the written word, was exactly the option of an Esprit, of a Saint-Evremond, or of a La Rochefoucauld, although her demands differed considerably from each of the above authors. If we feel more keenly, though, her attempt to transform the universe to certain needs, it is perhaps because her effort was so obviously an intimate one, painted

exactly as such, with ne recourse to an anonymous on. The dream somehow seems more fragile, the attempt to rebuild more vulnerable, because she left herself so exposed.

If, however, the Marquise's struggle resembles in structure those of our other writers, particularly in the firm belief in the power of the word, nevertheless her desire to live through her love and the incessant expression of it, was not at all consistent with the three prevailing "moralist" currents: Jansenism, Epicureanism, and mondanité. The latter two were challenged by her absolute refusal--conscious or subconscious--to be guided by desire for repose or social adaptability. The letters to Mme de Grignan are far too intense ever to be considered as part of the gallant code, and in her refusal to live a present-oriented life, uninvolved, disponible, she clearly violated the precepts of Saint-Evremond and the Epicureans. In both cases, it was the overwhelming totality of her passion--one which left little room for anyone or anything else--that was in opposition to the current vogues. Unlike either the Epicurean or the mondain writers, the Marquise could not be preoccupied with correct form or rules.

Nor do either of the codes seemed to have obviously affected her. This was definitely not the case, however, when it was a question of Jansenism which appears, at first, to have been the greatest obstacle to Mme de Sévigné's involvement with her daughter. Clearly, her love for her child could never be tolerated by the Jansenists, for whom

terrestrial love was viewed as a direct rival to man's love of God. However, the Marquise's intellectual battle with Jansenism can be seen as the socialized form of her own private guilt, and as the sole force--sufficiently structured and well-developed--able to control what she undoubtedly saw as a violent, potentially self-destructive passion. Recourse to the Jansenist ideals was her only means of counterbalancing her obsession, and although its tenets could not destroy her feelings, at least she could use them as a moderating power.

There was within Mme de Sévigné a vague, nebulous guilt concerning her passion for her daughter, although it is impossible to describe the precise motive of that feeling. What does seem clear is that she had grave concern over the emotional demands and sacrifices that the relationship had placed upon both Mme de Grignan and herself. There is also sometimes a hinted reference to her own anxieties over the nature of her love, for example, when she finds it necessary to clarify for Françoise-Marguerite (and perhaps for herself as well) that when she says "amour" she means "amour maternel" (II, 677-678). In any case, whatever the exact cause of the guilt, which runs strikingly through the letters, the most satisfactory <u>exutoire</u> for it was in religious terms.

She thus came to perceive that her sentiments for her daughter were a violation of God's law. Mme de Sévigné was fully aware that in loving, in adoring her daughter as she did, she was going counter to the stern Jansenist prin-

ciples and therefore was not truly surprised when Arnauld d'Andilly scolded her for "idolatry" towards her daughter, and when yet another priest refused her absolution and communion during Pentecost (I, 276, 729). How deeply she was concerned over the reprimands is questionable, as is the entire question of her involvement with Jansenism. What seems most clear is that the rigorous, Jansenist code served as a slight braking force on what would otherwise have been a totally uncontrolled passion. That she felt guilty, as most critics view the situation, for violating the Jansenist principles is not certain; what seems far more probable, judging from certain tones in the letters, is that she experienced a rather strong sense of guilt, and that Jansenism was a sound philosophy for tempering, even only moderately, her obsessive passion.

But the long, emotional struggle with this braking, halting force was not a very successful one. Aware that her feelings bordered on deification, Mme de Sévigné nevertheless failed to make use of the Jansenist tenets in any substantial way. Ultimately, she opted for the idolatry, the worship, and for the free expression of those emotions. By judging and conceding her failure in advance, by stating multifold times that she was too weak to oppose her passion, she thereby allowed for the liberty of living and expressing herself as passionately as she did: "Et quand nous sommes assez malheureux pour n'être point uniquement occupés à Dieu, pouvons-nous mieux faire que d'aimer et de vivre doucement

parmi nos proches et ceux que nous aimons" (II, 643). Jansenism was there to serve as a constant reminder to her of the extent of her involvement, to temper the tendencies toward uncontrol, but it was also prejudged unsuccessful.

The only substantial comfort she obtained from the precepts of Jansenism was through the idea of a Providence which she came to see as "willing" the separation of mother and daughter. But it, too, offered only an échappatoire, a means to emotional equilibrium that she could not easily realize. An increasingly strong reliance upon submission to Providence can be detected over the span of twenty-five years, thus giving rise to a theory of religious conversion.[19] Nevertheless, it seems most accurate to conclude, as has Harriet Ray Allentuch, that the heavy dependence upon the ways of Providence was not only "a substitute for painful thoughts," (hence, a sort of divertissement), but also a means to absolve both herself and especially Mme de Grignan of any responsibility. "If Madame de Sévigné conceived the suspicion that her daughter might not be doing her utmost to arrange the Grignan's permanent return to Paris, she need only push the phantom aside."[20]

Too much time has been devoted, however, to the problem of Jansenism in Mme de Sévigné's life and letters. The strict tenets were primarily a means to self-control. The central problem of the correspondence still remains one of penetrating the nature of its origins and expression. A definite choice of structuring life was made, along grounds

that were at once personal and general. The obsession with Mme de Grignan was individual, try as the Marquise did to endow it with a sense of collective concern. But the basing of an entire adult life upon this passion, the desire to write about it, to interpret it again and again, to explain, to justify, reflects a need whose limits are precisely and persistently intertwined in the double domains of love and language.

Footnotes

[1]Gustave Lanson, Choix de lettres du dix-septième siècle (Paris: Hachette, 1913), p. 482.

[2]Ibid., p. 483.

[3]Roger Duchêne, Madame de Sévigné et la lettre d'amour (Paris: Bordas, 1970), pp. 237-238.

[4]Madame de Sévigné, Lettres, ed. Gérard-Gailly (Paris: Bibliothèque de la Pléiade, 1953), I, 41. All subsequent references to volume and page number will be cited in the body of the chapter.

[5]Jean Cordelier, Mme de Sévigné par elle-même (Paris: Seuil, 1967), pp. 36, 79.

[6]Bernard A. Bray, L'Art de la lettre amoureuse (The Hague: Mouton, 1967), p. 12, n. 18.

[7]Cordelier, op. cit., p. 35.

[8]As examples of the two poles of thought, Cordelier stresses the first interpretation, while Harriet Ray Allentuch, in Madame de Sévigné: A Portrait in Letters, places the accent on the second.

[9]Cordelier, op. cit., p. 33.

[10]Eva Marcu, "Madame de Sévigné and her daughter," The Romanic Review, LI (October 1960), 187.

[11]Cordelier, op. cit., p. 33.

[12]Duchêne, op. cit., p. 54.

[13]Cordelier, op. cit., p. 80.

[14]Harriet Ray Allentuch, Madame de Sévigné: A Portrait in Letters (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins Press, 1963), p. 40.

[15]Ibid., pp. 40-41.

[16]Ibid., p. 42.

[17]Bernard Bray, "Quelques aspects du système épistolaire de Mme de Sévigné," Revue d'histoire littéraire de la France, LXIX (Mai-Août 1969), 500-501.

[18]Duchêne, op. cit., p. 172.

[19]Ibid., p. 235.

[20]Allentuch, op. cit., p. 201.

CHAPTER VI

JACQUES ESPRIT

At no moment of French literary history has Jacques Esprit been favored with critical appreciation. Twentieth-century critics, if they mention at all his work, La Fausseté des vertus humaines, usually dismiss the Jansenist author as being too didactic and consequently of little interest to the modern reader. Even if this were the case, it would not explain why we read and study Montaigne and Descartes whose works are scarcely less "moralizing" than those of Jacques Esprit. Among the seventeenth-century prose writers, Esprit has indeed been virtually ignored. But the reason lies perhaps not in his didactic style, so common to the time, but rather in the position his work occupies in relation to La Rochefoucauld's Maximes. The two writers were close friends over a long period of time, and unquestionably, a mutual influence exerted itself in their writings.[1]

The Maximes is surely the stylistically superior work. Its barbs, its stings, its highly structured, terse sentences overshadow the long-winded and frequently repetitious pronouncements on human behavior in La Fausseté des

vertus humaines. Esprit's book, pontificating, heavily dosed with Jansenist doctrine, becomes a foil against which the critics can better measure La Rochefoucauld's superb finesse. When he is not tightly bound to the author of the Maximes, Esprit is nevertheless grouped among several "moralistes jansénisants"[2] whose ideas are then studied more-or-less collectively.

Our analysis of La Fausseté des vertus humaines is necessarily limited here to the ideas on human relationships, which form perhaps the most vital parts of the work, for terrestrial love constitutes the greatest threat to man's tie to his God. Before entering into that subject, however, it is necessary to situate more fully M. Esprit's work.

Published in 1677 and 1678, the two-volume work lashed out above all at devout humanism. The belief in man's "good nature" is systematically destroyed, as are all notions of the human creature rivaling God for ultimate worth. Man's "virtue" (understood to means his generosity, his kindness, and all other humanistic elements forming the composite homme vertueux), is shown to be an unmitigated sham. Underneath the appearances, below the surface, there are hidden motives, concealed reasons, which have always our own well-being at stake.[3] L'amour-propre, self-interest, is the leit-motif of La Fausseté des vertus humaines, and for Esprit, the central pivot of all human behavior. He who sees himself as "other-oriented" will be deluged by exposés

to the contrary. Man is really a monster of self-interest, and Esprit digs in hard, seizing every opportunity to rip off the mask of virtue.[4] In fact, the criticism which has long centered upon La Rochefoucauld's effort to strip man bare, to reach the irreducible unit of l'amour-propre (a theory disputed in our chapter on the author of the Maximes) would be far more applicable to Esprit, for whom self-interest does constitute the one most fundamental element of human behavior.

What emerges is an attack against man's volonté, what Esprit sees as his wish for strong moral fiber, as well as his bonne volonté, which man believes generously leads him into relationships with his fellow men. Stoicism is laid to rest, as is the flexible Christian doctrine of the devout humanists, offering room for both man and God at its center. Esprit demands a constant stripping bare, a persistent awareness that appearance and reality share nothing at all. Although his center of authenticity is always situated in le coeur, while modern-day psychology postulates a more complex and less regionally specific division (although generally mental) between act and motivation, that is, the subconscious, nevertheless, both reflect a seemingly constant trend in Western thought, the wish to somehow attain the "true" self. Indeed, it appears almost that Jacques Esprit expressed the entire concept of authenticity as fully as contemporary psychology, perhaps with less verbal acumen, but with no greater degree of abstraction.

Modern psychology and psychoanalysis have merely strengthened a culturally significant phenomenon, that of a functioning system independent of and separate from a center of conscious behavior. It has not yet explained, not proven, anything. The supposition of an unconscious remains hypothetical, although centuries of Western thought--through one vocabulary or another--have solidified it enough for us to schematize whole patterns of behavior.

But it would be erroneous to suggest that La Fausseté des vertus humaines is simply a psychic denuding, where fifty-three "virtues" are denounced as false for masking, hiding the one real motivating force in man, his self-interest. What also emerges from the work is a strict effort at not merely regulating, but virtually controlling human behavior at all levels, from thought to act, via the word. It seems quite possible that at some junctures, the severe Jansenist doctrine was in agreement with the prevailing social mood. Critics of the period have suggested that the general turbulence of the second half of the seventeenth century was a disturbing factor to large segments of the French population, and the sense of moral decay was eventually linked, unjustifiably or not, to the flexible complacence of the clergy.[5] The civil disorders had brought about a general awareness of society's fragile vulnerability, and the Jansenist tendency towards control, individual and social, matched the prevailing mood of restraint. For the Jansenist writers, what was needed were not the optimistic ideas which

the Church had so readily espoused as a reconciliation between two totally distinct moral systems (the rivaling prerogatives of God and the self), but a rigorous separation of earthly and divine. In Jacques Esprit's work, there is no transition from one domain to the other, as a study of passages of his work will show.

He devotes no chapter simply to love, since Jansenism could not envision directly any terrestrial competition for adoration of God. Love, then, would not be considered a false virtue; it would simply be hors du jeu. But the truth is that Jacques Esprit does devote several pages to the subject in three different chapters of the second volume: "La Tempérance," "La Modestie des femmes," and "L'Honnêteté des femmes." The first discuss love within a rather general context of sentiment and emotion, whereas the latter two chapters focus specifically on l'amour. It is significant that Esprit is concerned with physical love in these chapters. He leaves platonic relationships for the section on friendship.[6]

His overwhelming preoccupation with les passions is of course hardly novel. The whole era was struggling with the problems of strong emotion, self-control and guilt. Writing on temperance, he pits himself directly against Aristotle, who believed that desires are dangerous only if uncontrolled by a moderating spirit. For Esprit, however, desire, no matter how weak, is dangerous for man's psychic well-being. What he decries most vehemently is the alien-

ation which results from intensely experienced emotion. The individual who allows himself to be governed by the reign of passion denies that which is, for Esprit, most fundamentally human: reason. Within the context of the work, such a shift is basically a deviation from the psychic norm and can be considered therefore only as highly undesirable. Unable to control himself, unable perhaps more importantly, to be controlled, man succumbing to the sway of violent feelings becomes not only asocial but inhuman. As protection against these psychologically and socially destructive impulses, man must combat them from incipience:

> L'expérience apprend à tout le monde que les passions sont séditieuses et déréglées en quelque état qu'on les considère: car si on les considère dans leur naissance, les plus faibles de même que les plus violentes préviennent la raison et n'attendent pas ses ordres pour s'élever. Or c'est un dérèglement manifeste puisque c'est à la raison à donner le branle à toutes les puissances de l'âme, et que pas une ne doit se remuer que par sa direction; que si l'on examine ce qu'elles sont dès qu'elles sont élevées, on voit qu'au lieu d'être souples et obéissantes à la raison, elles lui sont rebelles; qu'elles combattent et qu'elles lui ôtent la liberté de juger, ou corrompent ses jugements. De plus, chaque passion après avoir aveuglé l'homme, l'asservit et l'attache à son propre objet.[7]

The servile state of man ruled by his emotions is rejected by Esprit who seeks to install, or reinstall the reign of lucid reason. (Like Rousseau, a century later, he creates a myth-like fantasy of a golden time before man's essential corruption, an era, for Esprit, when man loved God alone, and the human creature was no rival.) True felicity is calm, sure, steady, and only a <u>vrai Chrétien</u>,

one who abstains from sensual pleasure for love of God, not for a "false" reason such as avarice, can find any happiness.

His attack is a major thrust against the prerogatives of the self and the aristocratic code. As Paul Bénichou shows well, noble society had never considered the censuring of passion, of the passions, as a condition of human worth. For the aristocracy, from the Middle Ages down through the seventeenth century, "virtue" (grandeur of soul and spirit) was not in the denial of the passions, but rather in their full expression. Medieval Christian moralist writers had found it necessary to denounce this "natural" moral, for it was in direct contradiction to the Bible's teachings.[8] In the seventeenth century, a flexible form of Christianity, granting a high place to terrestrial love once freed from its grosser elements, combined with or at least leaned upon the courtois idea of love and its sublimated impulses, and thereby offered a successful compromise between a natural moral and a rigorously Christian one. For Jacques Esprit, no such reconciliation is possible. His is a total rejection of nature's way, and sexual abstinence is requisite.

The fear of the emotions and of their domination is, as we have attempted to show, a constant theme in the literature of the time. One thinks immediately of Racine, too, and of the closed, stifling arenas where his characters, long prisoners of their passions and consequently of their

own bodies, attempt to move about. Esprit's ideas are, however, expressed with none of the poetic drama of Racine. Nor does he ever achieve the biting, acerbic style of Pascal and La Rochefoucauld. What does emerge from his writing is the totality of the denunciation. He proceeds methodically and drives home his point without any relief for the reader. Beginning mildly, calmly, often pretending to be in agreement with all the praise traditionally heaped on a particular vertu, he soon launches into a scathing attack with no respite.

Although the chapter on temperance contains several pronouncements against the dangers of la volupté, Esprit's strongest attack and censure appear in two other chapters: "La Modestie des femmes," and "L'Honnêteté des femmes." In La Fausseté des vertus humaines, the burden and guilt of loving fall directly upon the woman, and Esprit's attitude contrasts sharply with the portrayal of women and love in the novels of the century, direct descendants of medieval courtoisie. The dependent position of women in seventeenth-century French society has been detailed by many critics and scholars, perhaps most thoroughly by Gustave Fagniez. It is not our intention here to repeat that position. But Esprit's ideas are unquestionably more in accordance with prevailing social standards for women than with the romanesque picture. Traditional ideas on woman's submissive role were strong, and as Molière expressed in L'Ecole des femmes, signs of revolt--fine clothing, make-up, flirtations--were vehemently

condemned.

In both chapters, Esprit is eager to explain the close attention he accords to women and their societal role. He clearly states that there are virtues appropriate to men and others that are the lot of women. Modesty is among the latter, for women have a "natural timidity" and coldness which are conducive to such caution (p. 91). The chapter on honnêteté begins by a bitter denunciation of woman's position in society, only to change quickly into a facile acceptance of the status quo:

> Mais peu de gens s'apercoivent que l'amour propre a rendu tous les hommes de vrais tyrans, et que leur tyrannie, qui est cachée dans leur coeur, éclateroit par leurs cruautés si l'impuissance ne retenoit leur férocité et leur violence . . . . Si quelqu'un trouve de la difficulté à croire que le naturel de l'homme est fier, farouche et inhumain, il n'a qu'à jetter les yeux sur tous les endroits du monde; il verra que les personnes riches et puissantes oppriment par tout celles qui sont pauvres et sans appui; il verra que les hommes se prévalent par tout des avantages que leur sexe leur donne sur celui des femmes; qu'ils les traîtent avec tyrannie, les font vivre sous des lois injustes et rigoureuses. . . . Ainsi le joug du mariage qui assujettit aux mêmes lois les femmes et les maris, n'asservit plus que les femmes; ainsi la chasteté qui doit être commune à l'un et à l'autre sexe, est devenue la vertu des femmes et des filles; et c'est ce qui m'oblige à la leur attribuer particulièrement, et à parler de l'honnêteté comme si c'étoit une vertu qui ne fut propre qu'à elles. (pp. 100-102)

A bit too prompt to acceed to the "way things are," Esprit's early criticism dissolves in face of his severe standards for judging women's conduct. Perhaps he felt self-exonerated after his profession of innocence. However, it is easy to penetrate beneath the surface protestation and glean a quick

acceptance of the double standard. Since passion is woman's business, Esprit will offer her ways of protecting herself, and consequently society, against its demands.

It is against the tradition of courtoisie and l'amour honnête that Esprit directs his anger. Seventeenth-century fiction writers are to be held responsible for the current vogue of sentimentality, for the depiction of love as a pure and generous sentiment: "Les Auteurs des Romans ont réussi dans l'entreprise qu'ils ont faite de persuader au monde que les femmes peuvent être galantes vertueusement et faire l'amour avec innocence . . ."(p. 105). For Esprit, this mixed moral of love and virtue is a radical impossibility, for the woman involved in a love relationship is possessed, figuratively and literally. She is no longer governed by reason and is subject to insensate anxiety (hence, removed from virtue, always reasonable and reasoning). Although Esprit never analyzes in detail, as Proust would do much later, the concept of possession, nevertheless his references to an anxious emotional state allude significantly to such feeling: ". . . dire que l'amour est une passion honnête, c'est assurer qu'il est honnête d'être tourmenté par une furie, et de sentir tous les traits de la jalousie, de la rage et du désespoir" (p. 106).

Thus, if she is possessed as if by a demon, a woman in love is also possessed by her very feelings themselves. She loves another being, and such sentiments run contrary to the rigorous Jansenist standards. Terrestrial passion, far

from being innocent, is guilty of the most monumental of crimes: it detracts from divine love. There is no question for Esprit and the Jansenists of viewing love relationships, even chaste, as an imperfect form of divine love. Such affection is a rival, a serious threat to man's devotion to God; energy and time which might be used for religious worship are consumed in unworthy occupations directed toward the "other."

In "L'Honnêteté des femmes," Esprit returns to his leit-motif of self-interest. Enumerating "false" motives for woman's wish to appear virtuous to the world, he methodically destroys whatever pride she may have in her conduct. Outside controls--a sound moral education, fear of punishment, desire to marry and remove herself from parental control--are not sufficient in Jacques Esprit's moral universe. He demands control from within, unmotivated by self-interest, and although his ideas sometimes appear banal, we will see that as his thought develops, it frees itself from empty terms and becomes indeed a potent expression against immodesty.

Thus, he first predictably states that "il n'y a que la modestie des femmes chrétiennes qui soit une vertu véritable" (p. 98). Nevertheless, when he pushes further, what emerges is an absolute demand for self-governance at all moments: "L'on peut . . . dire qu'une femme véritablement honnête ne doit pas seulement imposer silence aux vaines passions, mais aussi les étouffer dès leur naissance, et même les empêcher

de naître. . ." (p. 109). Esprit is now at antipodes from the more-or-less refined love of the courtois novel and from "le christianisme de sublimation" with its emphasis on adoration of saints and mystics. His vocabulary is one of total sexual repression--"imposer silence," "empêcher," "étouffer."

Nor does Esprit stop there. Not only must a woman (he never varies from the emphasis on female conduct after his lengthy self-exonerating introduction) appear so morally severe that no man dares to approach her, she is also responsible for banishing all verbal expressions judged "impure" from her conversation: "Il faut encore qu'une femme véritablement honnête fasse comprendre . . . qu'elle n'entend pas le langage de ces passions, ni les signes qui sont l'office de ce langage" (p. 110).

It is perhaps a result of the Cartesian revolution in the field of language that Esprit's work is so heavily impregnated with allusion to the spoken and written word's enormous force. For him, la parole is concomitant to l'acte, no less powerful nor significant. Esprit clearly saw that the emotional charge of a word is as conducive to "immodest" desire as actions themselves. What he calls des paroles sales were invented by "les voluptueux . . . pour regoûter leur sensualité par leurs entretiens, et pour allumer et irriter leur passion brutale" (p. 83).

Esprit delves even further. The stripping off of "layers" never reaches an end. There is always one more

level, underneath. Authenticity seems to be fleeting, at best. Unsatisfied with dissolving the layer of outer manifestation--first act, then word--Esprit comes to exact absolute control over the thought process, with God alone as judge. Following a semi-Platonic view, he states that thoughts, like words, are images of things, and therefore to be reckoned with as active, powerful forces. The secret language that is thought must be as free of longing and desire as the words and actions which interpret them.

Even with this, he has not reached the final "layer" of the self. "Below" the levels of action, word, thought, there is the motive of all these, and it too must be chaste, pure: "Il ne faut pas se contenter de savoir que leurs moeurs et leurs sentiments sont honnêtes; l'on doit encore tâcher de découvrir, par quel motif elles gardent l'honnêteté, et établir auparavant quel est le motif qui la rend vertueuse" (pp. 115-116). In other words, there can be no distance between action, word, thought and cause. No false motive must interpolate, and God alone shall judge: "Le coeur humain est un grand mystère. Les pensées et les désirs s'élèvent sur sa surface, et peuvent être aperçus. C'est pourquoi il n'y a personne qui ne sache ce qu'il pense et ce qu'il désire; mais le motifs des pensées et des désirs sont cachées dans sa profondeur, qui n'est pénétrée que des yeux de Dieu" (pp. 113-114).

What Jacques Esprit posits here, in his ultimate bow to divine wisdom, is essentially the same control modern

psychoanalysis would see in the authoritative domination by the "super-ego," a construct no less questionable than "the eyes of God." In Civilization and its Discontents, Freud, tackling the same problem as Esprit, that of the conflicting demands between the erotic and the social, hypothesizes a mental process akin to what Esprit had formulated in his work: "The super-ego is an agency which has been inferred by us, and conscience is a function which we ascribe, among other functions, to that agency. This functions consists in keeping a watch over the actions and intentions of the ego and judging them, in exercising a censorship. The sense of guilt, the harshness of the super-ego, is thus the same thing as the severity of the conscience. It is the perception which the ego has of being watched over in this way, the assessment of the tension between its own strivings and the demands of the super-ego."[9]

All this is not to suggest, of course, that Freud and his followers accorded the same moral supremacy, as if by right, to such "authority." They clearly saw the dangers for the individual in denying sexual fulfillment. What we are trying to show here is the similarity of the schematization drawn by seventeenth-century moralist writers and modern psychology. The essential divisions of control and subordination, differing only in context (religious and "scientific"), remain the same.

There is at least one other important similarity between Esprit's ideas and the concepts of twentieth-century

psychology and psychoanalysis. Both schemas seem to show that by stripping off the "layers," by probing "deep down," by peering beneath the surface to reach the hidden motives, we will eventually dispel them. Once a state of psychological transparency is achieved, the individual will return to a healthy state of mind, able to control impulses which may threaten his equanimity. Esprit's book is consequently a careful, explanatory work, showing the way to total self-knowledge, leading the reader step by step from action to motivation, toward ultimate personal frankness. Self-deception can be chipped away, and the individual can achieve heightened awareness, allowing him to govern his strong desires.

Footnotes

[1]Antoine Adam in the fourth volume of his Histoire de la littérature française au XVII[e] siècle, and more recently Louis Hippeau in an Essai sur la morale de La Rochefoucauld have shown the literary and philosophical debts Esprit and La Rochefoucauld owed each other. Hippeau, more than Adam, stressing Esprit's allegiance to Jansenism, tries to demonstrate primarily the great gulf which eventually divided the two writers. In La Religion des Classiques, Henri Busson, laying emphasis on the psychological, rather than relgious bent of La Fausseté des vertus humaines, attempts to prove how close Esprit's ideas were to those of La Rochefoucauld.

[2]Paul Bénichou, Morales du grand siècle (Paris: Gallimard, 1948), p. 161.

[3]The vocabulary of "layers" is extremely important to Jacques Esprit's writings, as it is also to twentieth-century psychology. Perhaps it is the best conceptualization of authenticity, of "true self-ness" that can be offered. Of course, the être-paraître distinction runs rampant through seventeenth-century literature, especially after Corneille. Thus, Esprit's constant use of "layered" vocabulary can be seen as a psychological fabrication, which stuck, and as a variation of a particular socio-literary theme.

[4]As the critics have all carefully explained, the frontispiece of La Fausseté des vertus humaines shows the mask of virtue falling from Seneca's face and hence leaving exposed the true visage of the philosopher. But the man who discovers it, is shown averting his eyes, turning them toward another figure whose name is "Vérité" and who signifies the only true path, Christian virtue and grace. Of course, this goes one step further than the frontispiece of the Maximes where Seneca's unmasked face is the ultimate truth: there is no Christian rival.

[5]Henri Bremond, Histoire littéraire du sentiment religieux en France (Paris: Bloud & Gay, 1916-1933), I, pp. 388-389.

[6]It is perhaps in the chapter on friendship that Esprit is most clearly inspired by his friend La Rochefoucauld. L'amitié is denounced as a false virtue, for self-interest alone prompts us to seek out the companionship of others. What is most interesting in the chapter is the analysis which Esprit offers of Montaigne's close, intense relationship with Etienne de la Boétie, one Esprit perceives as bordering on love feelings.

[7]Jacques Esprit, La Fausseté des vertus humaines (Paris, 1677-1678), II, pp. 25-27. Subsequent citations from this work will be included in the body of the chapter. All quotations are from tome II.

[8]Paul Bénichou, op. cit., pp. 21-22.

[9]Sigmund Freud, Civilization and its Discontents, ed. James Strachey (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1961), p. 83.

CHAPTER VII

THE "LETTRES PORTUGAISES"

"Suis-je obligée de vous rendre un compte exact de tous mes divers mouvements?" The letters of *la religieuse portugaise* are thus abruptly terminated, the final question a sort of metacommentary on the entire project: precisely a delineation of the multiple cross-currents--conscious and subliminal--which filter through the nun's mind, reflecting her one obsession (the betrayal) in shifting, rotating perspectives. The silence which follows is complete; there is no intervening explanation, no addendum, no conclusion by a third party, no hints of the future at all. Unlike *Les Liaisons dangereuses* and *Adolphe*, both works which concentrate upon obsessive passion, and which authoritatively allude to the punishments of the diverse characters, thereby offering a moral stamp, the *Lettres portugaises* fall into an ambiguous silence, total, but as troublesome as the muteness which overtakes *Bérénice*, expressed in Antiochus' withered "hélas," silence without clarification, without conclusion, without poetic order. This ambiguity alone would seem to have demanded critical notice, and yet it is only recently, with the article of Leo Spitzer in 1953, that

the Lettres portugaises have been explored beyond the preliminary level of authenticity and beyond an insidious effort to recreate the tale of the nun in a heavy, supinely romanesque fashion.

It does appear that the long debate over authenticity (Stendhal, Sainte-Beuve, Rilke and various scholars convinced that the letters are indeed those of Mariane Alcaforado, "religieuse à Beja entre l'Estramadoure et l'Andalousie,"[3] thus substantiating the claim of the original publisher, Claude Barbin; Rousseau, Barbey d'Aureyvilly, and other critics sure that the letters are strictly an oeuvre factice) has been decided in favor of the latter group, and that Guilleragues, a seventeenth-century man of letters and friend to Racine, is now the accepted author.[4] A careful reading of Guilleragues' Valentins would rather readily support the case for his authorship as regards the Lettres, so much so do certain basic themes recur. Literary history aside, however, the Lettres portugaises offer a complex web of psychological intrigue, layers of motivation and manipulation, above all, a decided pattern tracing the movement of a passion, inevitable in both its birth and death.

The work is short: five letters to the unfaithful French lover who has abandoned Portugal and his mistress to return to France. It is perhaps the brevity of these letters which inhibits the critical output, but their extraordinary concision is precisely why they are of significance in a study of l'amour-passion in the Classical age. More

than any tragedy of Racine,[5] they observe the demands of unity--the walls of the convent restrict the boundaries of space, and although approximately one year is allowed to elapse, there is never really any sense of time passing, only a monotonous, stagnated repetition, an amassment rather than a continuous flow. Temporally, spatially, everything is limited, closing in upon itself.

The restriction of time and space corresponds perfectly to the reduction in action. Beyond Mariane's obsession there is nothing else: no decor to speak of, local color being almost totally excluded; no delineation of character, the French lover singularly colorless; no action exterior to the diverse movements, impulses of the passion itself. This is, moreover, certainly not a correspondence in the true sense. The reactions of the lover in the few brief lines he sends are never made truly clear--it is only his silence that is revealing. Mariane herself is remarkably without interest, except for her monomania. What emerges from the complete absence of decoration, from this total nudity of situation, is a thoroughly barren, harsh exposure of l'amour-passion, with the incessant monologue repeating its one principal theme of betrayal. Ultimately, there remains only the voice of the passion itself, Mariane's particular drama serving merely as the backdrop.

And yet the Lettres portugaises offer not only the portrait of one struggle against l'amour-passion, but also against the entire myth of passion. The myth is of course

that of Tristan and Isolde, and Guilleragues seems to have been in firm command of the legend. The close alliance between l'amour and la mort, an alliance which Mme de Lafayette did not fail to develop, is of prime importance in the Lettres portugaises, not merely as the private struggle of la religieuse, but also as literary convention which operates as a powerful controlling force within her emotional universe. Moreover, it is understandable that the seventeenth century would find in the Tristan myth a satisfactory expression of the problem of l'amour-passion. In Denis de Rougemont's L'Amour et l'occident a case is made for the medieval formulation of the Tristan legend: "Le mythe, au sens strict du terme, se constitua au douzième siècle, c'est-à-dire dans une période ou les élites faisaient un vaste effort de mise en ordre sociale et morale. Il s'agissait de 'contenir,' précisément, les poussées de l'instinct destructeur: car la religion, en l'attaquant, l'exaspérait."[6] The problem of l'instinct destructeur was strongly at issue in Classical France, and the task--Descartes', Pascal's, Racine's--became one of striving to tame man's irrationality. A revival of the Tristan legend, as legend, that is as literary convention, seems likely in an age overwhelmingly caught up with the attempt at subduing, suppressing unreason.

Passion, then, as a desired ideal, desired even for the suffering inherent to it, functions in the Lettres portugaises at once as a new, private force--Mariane's own particular conflict--and as a conventional one which may

be even stronger--the entire socio-literary tradition of l'amour-passion. As in the Tristan legend, death comes to assume for Mariane the qualities of action and voluntarism which are most thoroughly contradicted by passion, by that which is endured, by that to which we are resigned. Thus, a self-determined demise, a suicide, alone can restore the autonomy of the self. Mariane craves death, or at least attempts to crave it. Her letters are filled with allusions to her failing health, to her wish to "die of grief." And yet, in the end, she assumes a radically new stance, strives to throw off her illness, her passivity, in favor of calming the irrationality which has dictated her every thought since the departure of the lover.

Mme de Lafayette, in La Princesse de Clèves, adhered firmly to the Tristan legend, allowing the heroine to die at the end, but virtually through her own volition, not as a passive agent but as the determining force of her own destiny. Thus Death becomes the sole counterforce to Eros. The nun of the Lettres portugaises, however, chooses her purge not in a transcendent-type of death, but rather through the outlet of her mind, through what Spitzer has seen basically as a Cartesian breaking-down process.[7] In effect, her deductions, her analysis (particularly strong in the fifth and final letter), her eventual acceptance of the nature of her obsession, all testify to a striving to curb the disturbing, irrational element of the psyche. At the end, not only is her passion laid to rest, but along with it the entire

Tristan legend of the Liebestod. Through the sorting out process, Mariane achieves a new freedom, a way out of her own psychic disarray, and most importantly, a way out of the myths handed down by generations.

But although it is necessary to have established first the direction of the Lettres portugaises, to have shown that Mariane's struggle is at once private and collective, that she is battling not only her own passion, but the convention of passion also, nevertheless, it is essential to trace the letters from their beginning rather than to remain fixed on the end passages, important as they may be. There are two principal structures in the five letters, reflecting two different time sequences. (There is really a third time structure, also, that of the reader who is the "recipient" of the letters, and whose forced complicity and guilt in the entire affair are natural results of the letter format.)

There is first of all the interval of the year, or slightly more than that, between the lover's departure for France--a departure which Mariane readily criticizes for its lack of true explanation--and the fifth letter, the final one in the series, which both closes out the past and opens onto the future, in a constant juxtaposition of remorse and anticipation. Within this time span, traceable from one letter to the next and especially noticeable in a contrast between first and last letters, various transitions occur, what Mariane refers to as "divers mouvements,"

and which may be fully analyzed by la religieuse, or which, passing beyond the conscious level of the nun, may be grasped by the reader alone. The central passage, movement, is from celebration of death to reflection upon life, a transition most obvious between the third and fifth letters, but apparent also in the first two letters through reference to fainting, that is to a sort of "temporary" death. As offshoots of this one underlying theme are diverse transitions signaling changes in the emotional state of la religieuse portugaise. Early submission and passivity give way, in the end, to overt anger and aggression; from a sense of "other-worldliness," of transcendence beyond the ordinary life condition, Mariane slowly achieves a new sense of community and reality; finally, the extraordinary emotional turmoil which colors the first four letters, in different shades and gradations, succumbs ultimately to a longing for tranquillity and repose.

But there is something else also, the gradual reenactment of the relationship between Mariane and le chevalier, a sequence which constitutes the second basic structure of the Lettres. The progression of the "love story" itself is in direct opposition to the state of the present relationship, that is, as the events fade into an increasingly more distant past, as the lover establishes his physical and emotional distance from Mariane, she in turn more vividly recreates the drama of their encounters, her erotic souvenirs assume an increasingly sharper coloration. Thus their romance remains

nebulous, vague in the early letters and gradually affects precision and force. Only slowly do we learn of the very secret meetings in the convent, and only slowly is the erotic nature of Mariane's preliminary ties to her lover revealed. In a constant shifting of temporal structure, Mariane moves back and forth between the past--increasingly more fulfilling--and the present with its rapid diminishing of satisfaction.

It is properly the rapid interchange of these two movements that is, that creates, the passion. The keen remembrance of past desire, desire that was then gratified, provokes the sharp descent, repeated multifold times, into a present void of fulfillment. In his analysis of Racine, and particularly in the short section he devotes to the Lettres portugaises as they may have influenced that writer, Charles Mauron reminds that it is only impeded, obstructed love, love that is therefore not realizable, which engenders the "passion" situation. L'amour-passion focuses on objects which are at once absent and present, desired and forbidden. "Le désir bloqué se mue en angoisse, reflue, tourbillonne, se charge de persécution, de magie, de remords."[8] However, Mariane's passion will eventually wither from what Spitzer has called "inanition sentimentale," from lack of direct or indirect sustenance, and in the end she does achieve, or is at least on the way to achieving, a suppression of her feelings. But a more detailed study of the five letters is now necessary in order to trace the nuances and modulations of

Mariane's extraordinary preoccupation.

"Considère, mon amour, jusqu'à quel excès tu as manqué de prévoyance" (p. 39). Our attention is immediately riveted, complicity established from the beginning, and we, along with the French lover, are forced to delve behind this preliminary thrust. Even as the more intimate tu quickly shifts to vous, the first letter remains familiar, cajoling, précieux in its tone. The flirtatious nature of this first communication will gradually give way to reproach, then to anger, but for now la religieuse is eager to establish what she perceives to be the reciprocity of sentiment. The unit of the couple is still strongly present in her mind, intact, and the movement towards emotional distance, separation, towards solitude will come only in a slow, steady progression of awareness. For the time being, the Edenic situation is faithfully maintained: ". . . je suis résolue à vous adorer toute ma vie, et à ne voir jamais personne . . ." (p. 41). Thus Mariane successfully excluded the world, that is her family and her religion.

However, it is particularly the précieux-courtois tone which dominates the first letter, in sentences filled with allusion to an animated, significant (in the original sense) universe: "J'envoie mille fois le jour mes soupirs vers vous, ils vous cherchent en tous lieux . . ." (p. 39). The ruling image is the Ovidian eye, the eye where love lodges, and in an extension of the theme, where grief, too, resides. The entire introductory section is a well-designed game playing

upon the eye metaphor:

> Quoi! cette absence, à laquelle ma douleur, toute ingénieuse qu'elle est, ne peut donner un nom assez funeste, me privera donc pour toujours de regarder ces yeux dans lesquels je voyais tant d'amour, et qui me faisaient connaître des mouvements qui me comblaient de joie, qui me tenaient lieu de toutes choses, et qui enfin me suffisaient? Hélas! les miens sont privés de la seule lumière qui les animait, il ne leur reste que les larmes, et je ne les ai employés à aucun usage qu'à pleurer sans cesse, . . . (p. 39)

Although the intense passion does communicates itself in this section, as in the entire letter (the sense of obstacle, of blockage already anticipated by Mariane), it is on a decidedly reduced level, and the nun's ties to her lover are revealed through metaphor-charged language. The whole letter, as Spitzer points out, is viewed as a caress[9]--"Adieu, je ne puis quitter ce papier, il tombera entre vos mains, je voudrais bien avoir le même bonheur"--and her suffering is still minimal enough to be expressed in terms of pleasure--"Adieu, aimez-moi toujours; et faites-moi souffrir encore plus de maux" (p. 42).

But the consistent use of précieux imagery points to more than mere optimism on Mariane's part. She emerges as dominated by the myth of l'amour-passion, that is, by the myth of passion as a desired, sought-after ideal, superior to any other life choice. Guilleragues' careful choice of metaphor, his overly lyric tones bordering on the banal, testify not only to Mariane's naïveté, but also to a sense of her control by a potent code. Mariane is surely determined to love, determined by love, but it is almost as if

determinism is here viewed as a seduction by powerful myths.

By the second letter, however, the coquettish tone has virtually disappeared, and Mariane's progression toward the crisis becomes increasingly stronger, charged now with bitterness and rancor. She has adopted the traditional posture of the female subjugated by the male, and her outcry is molded by this role of submission. It is not her pride which dictates her words, nor any sense of fear of punishment (this element is singularly absent from the work), but only her overwhelming preoccupation with the betrayal. The anguish is couched in metaphors of the woman-slave, and while the image communicates ideally the extreme limits of her depressive anxiety, it also echoes back to a long, literary tradition, (in the same way that later, the allusion to a nun as the most perfect mistress, free from terrestrial preoccuaptions, will recall the medieval theme of the clerc as ideal lover[10]): "Ah! j'envie le bonheur d'Emmanuel et de Francisque; pourquoi ne suis-je pas incessamment avec vous, comme eux? je vous aurai suivi, et je vous aurais servi de meilleur coeur: je ne souhaite rien en ce monde, que vous voir" (p. 45).

The persistent self-humiliation becomes increasingly more difficult to read, so much does la religieuse bow to the illusory perfections of her chevalier, her adoration bordering on idolatry, the cult of the lover replacing the one for God. Mariane herself announces a singular indifference for religion: ". . . je suis ravie d'avoir fait tout

ce que j'ai fait pour vous contre toute sorte de bienséance; je ne mets plus mon honneur et ma religion qu'à vous aimer éperdument toute ma vie, puisque j'ai commencé à vous aimer" (p. 45). This chant repeated in various fashion throughout the letters, becomes almost a litany of adoration, religious expression constantly intermingling with erotic, private desire. In an almost direct appropriation of Christ's words to his God, she exclaims at the end of the second letter: "M'avez-vous pour toujours abandonnée" (p. 46)? Indeed, the entire theme of abandonment, situated in this sacred decor, seems to exist frequently on a level of sacrilege.

The second letter also marks the birth of two concepts subliminally perceived by Mariane, fundamental, however, to the work. It is now that the first substantial explanation of the relationship is offered, and the vocabulary and images, before molded by <u>préciosité</u>, thereby reducing their power, now assume an obviously erotic base:

> Mes douleurs ne peuvent recevoir aucun soulagement, et le souvenir de mes plaisirs me comble de désespoir: Quoi! tous mes désirs seront donc inutiles, et je ne vous verrai jamais en ma chambre avec toute l'ardeur et tout l'emportement que vous me faisiez voir? mais hélas! je m'abuse, et je ne connais que trop que tous les mouvements qui occupaient ma tête et mon coeur n'étaient excités en vous que par quelques plaisirs, et qu'ils finissaient aussi tôt qu'eux; il fallait que dans ces moments trop heureux j'appelasse ma raison à mon secours pour modérer l'excès funeste de mes délices, et pour m'annoncer tout ce que je souffre présentement: mais je me donnais toute à vous, et je n'étais pas en état de penser à ce qui eût pu

> empoisonner ma joie, et m'empêcher de jouir pleinement des témoignages ardents de votre passion; je m'apercevais trop agréablement que j'étais avec vous pour penser que vous seriez un jour éloigné de moi. (p. 44)

As the distance separating the encounters grows, the memories become increasingly more vivid. Mariane experiences not only the diminishing of a reality found most satisfactory, but in reverse progression, a crystallizing of her emotional brûlure. Thus she (re)creates her excitement through words, for they are all that subsist of the relationship, the sole elements which can, she believes, sustain her passion. The attempt at creation, at transforming her experience into "literature," is truly the only means open to Mariane for "loving."

Finally, the second letter firmly establishes precisely the limits of the role of the lover in the nun's world. The lack of a clear portrait, the scarce bit of information offered on him, was not by chance. Rather, if the person was depicted minimally, this decision translates the nature of Mariane's involvement: the Augustinian amabam amare. The letter's concluding section definitively closes out any other possibility: ". . . faites tout ce qu'il vous plaira, mon amour ne dépend plus de la manière dont vous me traiterez" (p. 46). Her passion reveals itself as functioning totally independently of the lover's reactions, that is, it has now assumed a quality of complete autonomy, a trait which will prevail throughout the remaining letters. In the end, of course, Mariane's free-

dom is only from herself, from her rigid, self-created existence. Moreover, as the passion comes to function separately from the world of the lover, the concept of "writing" assumes an even greater role and each letter becomes ever more difficult to close.

One sentence, in particular, serves to illustrate the general mood and tone of the third letter: "Je ne sais ni ce que je suis, ni ce que je fais, ni ce que je désire: je suis déchirée par mille mouvements contraires" (p. 48). Some searching light, critical, questioning, has begun to operate, and Mariane has at least broken ground in her appraisal of the situation. The movement towards "uncoupling" is fully in action as she separates herself from the lover, the increasing distance in space (as the chevalier continues his home voyage), corresponding to the distance she now perceives in their emotional states. But she is also questioning the nature of her own attachment. Although in the final words of the letter, Mariane returns to the passive, submissive state that has long been holding sway, nevertheless, there is a heightened awareness of her continued detachment from the person of her lover, if not yet from her passion itself. "Traitez-moi sévèrement! Soyez plus difficile à contenter! Mandez-moi que vous voulez que je meure d'amour pour vous. Et je vous conjure de me donner ce secours, afin que je surmonte la faiblesse de mon sexe, et que je finisse toutes mes irrésolutions par un véritable désespoir" (pp. 49-50). This very strong demand that the lover now

force Mariane to new heights of feeling translates her own confusion, as the nun slowly begins to perceive that she is freeing herself from the binds of the relationship.

Thus la religieuse now comes to perceive that the expression of her despair exceeds, surpasses the feeling itself. At the same time, she feels urges toward life--". . . je fais autant de choses pour conserver ma vie que pour la perdre" (p. 49)--which contradict what she believes would be an attitude more in keeping with the pose of the abandoned mistress. Convinced that she should seek death, as ordered by tradition, Mariane recognizes, nonetheless, that a part of her yearns toward life, that even her passion is one means of realizing an intense existence, and thus concludes: ". . . je déteste la tranquillité où j'ai vécu avant que je vous connusse" (p. 50). In the love affair with the French soldier she had emerged from a non-existence, symbolized rather obviously by the cloître, and which she is now reluctant to give up, only to return to solitude and sexual repression. Thus the letters take on great meaning for her, as the means not only to make the passion endure, but also as the transition back to the néant from which she was abruptly removed for a short time. But that transition is not yet wholly achieved, and for the present, the important reference to letter-writing itself--"mon désespoir n'est donc que dans mes lettres" (p. 49)?--remains primarily an allusion to creation, to art, to a pleasure entirely divorced from the chevalier himself.

Writing is no longer only an outlet for Mariane, that which interprets an inner state. Rather, it has assumed its own independent justification, has gone beyond that passion itself, in that it has prolonged what Mariane recognizes as the forced limits of her own feelings. Without writing, then, there is nothing, and the inability to close the third letter (there are five adieux all followed by more words), translates her dilemma. The final sentence, paradoxically, is nothing less than an opening: "Ah! que j'ai de choses à vous dire" (p. 50).

Mariane's fourth letter, the longest of the series, demonstrates her new understanding of the limits of love, and she now seems fully aware for the first time that a passion develops from obstacle, from refusal, from the partner's "no." In a sense, this understanding legitimizes the chevalier's coldness and distance, for Mariane herself had too readily said "yes," although she twists further to claim that he therefore never should have seduced her, knowing how vulnerable she was. The reproaches, however, fade as she allows herself to relive the entire first encounter and subsequent seduction, and clothes her description in the most romanesque terms, exciting herself again as she recreates the day she first saw her lover executing some difficult maneuvers on his horse. As she pushes forth in her efforts to revive the past, by necessity she is thus forced into a deliberate exclusion of the present:

> . . . mais je suis sans cesse persécutée avec un extrême désagrément par la haine et par le dégoût

> que j'ai pour toutes choses; ma famille, mes amis et ce couvent me sont insupportables; tout ce que je suis obligée de voir, et tout ce qu'il faut que je fasse de toute nécessité, m'est odieux; je suis si jalouse de ma passion, qu'il me semble que toutes mes actions et que tous mes devoirs vous regardent. (p. 54)

It is, of course, not only the present time she is excluding, but rather the entire network of societal pressures exhorting Mariane to quit her narcissistic universe. In the final lines of the above quote ("je suis si jalouse de ma passion"), the truly autonomous nature of her world assumes its full measure. The passion itself, and not the chevalier long since departed, is definitively recognized as the force behind the monomania. Each letter is a stimulus for the next, and recreation of the past affair through writing replaces any other possible form of existence: "Pourrais-je survivre à ce qui m'occupe incessamment, pour mener une vie tranquille et languissante? Ce vide et cette insensibilité ne peuvent me convenir" (p. 54). This overwhelming preoccupation with her narcissistic passion leads her to admit that she cannot conclude, that she cannot stop writing, for each halt in the flow of words is a recognition of the emotional vacuum awaiting her, each end is a descent back into the passion-free society which surrounds her. Hence, she concludes that, "j'écris plus pour moi que pour vous . . ." (p. 58).

From the start, the fifth and final letter will be "different," announced so by la religieuse herself: "Je vous écris pour la dernière fois, et j'espère vous faire

connaître, par la différence des termes et de la manière de cette lettre, que vous m'avez enfin persuadée que vous ne m'aimiez plus, et qu'ainsi je ne dois plus vous aimer . . ." (p. 61). While in part the general content of the last missive repeats several themes earlier established, notably that her involvement functions independently of its supposed source, the lover--"J'ai éprouvé que vous m'étiez moins cher que ma passion" (p. 62)--nevertheless, certain new tones aggressively assert themselves. The theme of vengeance appears for the first time, Mariane imagining the satisfaction derived from the possibility of delivering the chevalier into her parents' hands, or from that of taking, one day, a new lover. Significantly, for the first time, the Frenchman is dismissed by Mariane, but since his departure is an already established fact, the discharge can only be symbolic: "Je vous renverrai donc par la première voie tout ce qui me reste de vous" (p. 61). This sudden assertion of aggressiveness, this burst of anger, this attack on the lover, all are accompanied by increased lucidity on the part of the abandoned mistress, and in particular there is a deepened understanding of the precise nature of her obsession: ". . . j'étais jeune, j'étais crédule, on m'avait enfermée dans ce couvent depuis mon enfance, je n'avais jamais vu que des gens désagréables, je n'avais jamais entendu les louanges que vous me donniez incessamment . . ." (p. 68). The sense of refoulement which emerges from the above confession is at the heart of Mariane's dilemma, and the couvent is the

ideal metaphor for such repression.

Thus, the fifth letter will be properly the means of rebellion, Mariane finally accepting, although almost against her will ("Que ne me laissiez-vous ma passion?"), the lover's abandonment. Henceforth, she will be guided by life yearnings--the suicide idea is absent here--and it will be precisely the new lucidity and reasoning process which will allow for her liberation. All thoughts are now directed toward the cure, however arduous that it may be. That the task will indeed be difficult, that Mariane's present resolutions cannot be definitively ascertained are feelings present throughout the letter; there is a persistent vacillation between a desire for silence and one for continued words. Perceiving that her new movement towards liberation, towards also emotional solitude, towards a life without her passion is still only nascent, hence fragile, <u>la religieuse</u> falls back readily into the temptations of the old pattern, that is into a monologue without end. "Je veux vous écrire une autre lettre, pour vous faire voir que je serai peut-être plus tranquille dans quelque temps" (pp. 67-68). But the final section of the letter concludes on a different note: ". . . mais je ne veux plus rien de vous, je suis une folle de redire les mêmes choses si souvent, il faut vous quitter et ne penser plus à vous, je crois même que je ne vous écrirai plus; suis-je obligée de vous rendre un compte exact de tous mes divers mouvements" (p. 69)?

So even though the resolution is not yet firm, the

seed is planted now for Mariane's freedom. However, the liberation which she seeks--a liberation which will paradoxically return her to the restraints of the convent--is less from the person of her lover than from the self-imposed shackles of her correspondence, from the solipsism which translated itself through the written monologue. By the end, indeed from the beginning, but most obvious in the concluding letter, all that remains are the words, and the final recognition is that even they have failed to maintain the force of the passion.

The direction which Mariane will now choose, although never directly stated, still emerges fairly clearly. What is most certain is that she rejects any sort of transcendence. Tristan and Isolde's Liebestod, Héloïse's movement towards spiritual purification,[11] Mme de Clèves' descent into illness and death, are not the options of la religieuse portugaise. Rather, hers is a decision firmly grounded in the emotional and metaphysical framework of the seventeenth century.

In her strivings to achieve a new emotional freedom, one which will by necessity force her back into the convent and family, thus really liberating her only from herself, Mariane envisions precisely the goal of her efforts. She yearns now for repose, for tranquillity: "Je connais bien que je suis encore un peu trop occupée de mes reproches et de votre infidélité; mais souvenez-vous que je me suis promis un état plus paisible, et que j'y parviendrai" (pp. 68-69).

Yearnings for emotional peace, for tranquillity, constitute one of the major currents of the Classical moralist literature. The influence of Jansenism cannot be overlooked, although it is significant that the theme appears frequently in Saint-Evremond's works, a writer who at least consciously divorced himself from the heavier mood of the century. Descartes, Bossuet, Pascal, Méré, Mme de Lafayette, Saint-Evremond, all were caught up in a vast-sweeping trend toward emotional repose, toward strict effort at controlling irrationality, from Descartes' well-structured, compact beast-machine theory[12] to Saint-Evremond's gamesmanship. Thus Mariane's letters come also to reflect this fundamental problem, and by the end of her correspondence, the struggle between reason and irrationality is fully absorbed.

It is, however, unfathomable that any study dedicated to unreason, madness, disorder not penetrate to determine precisely the fear which lurks behind any metaphysical formulation of the problem. In the seventeenth century, the fear focused on the emotional chaos engendered by l'amour-passion. If the body appears as that element most obviously "absent" from Classical literature, it is nonetheless paradoxically that which is most "present." Eros is at the center of Racine's tragedies (the monster, animal metaphors --a structure currently receiving considerable attention-- of Phèdre, for example, are among its strong images), and is at the heart, too, of Mme de Lafayette's fiction, although again, clothed in order and control. In the Lettres

portugaises, the aspiration towards control appears as a decided reaction against Mariane's sexual awakening, and in this context the role of the convent itself is revealed as of considerable importance.

Quite clearly, it is not really that the _couvent_ functions as a striking inhibition of a religious nature. Mariane readily assures the _chevalier_ that her ties to her religion are limited, at least in comparison with the emotions which bind her to him. There is, moreover, no fear of divine wrath, of punishment. But this does not mean that the convent is without significance; rather, the overwhelming sense of enclosure inherent to the convent setting is the ideal metaphor for translating Mariane's dormant state prior to the encounter with the Frenchman. Her bitter cry in the first letter, an outburst which contrasts with the generally teasing tone--"que ne me laissiez-vous en repos dans mon cloître" (p. 41)?--states perfectly her condition before and after the love affair. The arrival of the French soldier was very much her Pandora's box. The convent is not omnipresent throughout the letters, but by the end, its power has reemerged as a strong, controlling force, in the form of Mariane's sudden new remorse. Her passion is dying, on its way to being successfully cloistered, no longer a threat to Mariane nor to the society which envelops her.

It seems, then, as if Mariane and her obsession have been swallowed up, obliterated even, by an imposing

structure, given concrete form through the couvent. But as has been previously shown, Mariane's battle is twofold, against the private obsession, against also the collective myth of l'amour-passion. The acts of destruction which occur in the final letter, or at least the menace of those acts, the urge to deliver the French soldier into her parents' hands, the desire to burn his letters and mementos, and the final, abrupt movement into silence, are impulses which counteract both Mariane's private anxiety and the legend of love. In swiftly moving, analytical language, la religieuse is extricated from the grips of her obsessive passion, and from the entire tradition of erotic love as a much desired ideal. Her repression is thus total.

However, if Mariane's movements to free herself are tied in part to certain conventions, social and literary in nature, then it would appear that many themes of the Lettres portugaises would be decidedly conventional also. We have seen that the limits of Mariane's anguish are defined by her referential system, a system dependent upon a constant juxtaposition of private depression with literary convention. She perceives her own entanglement in terms of a certain tradition, craving death, for example, not only as a release, but as the correct form the battle must assume. This yearning, however, is persistently worn down by her concomitant struggle towards life, an existential choice which she correctly views as violating the code.

Guilleragues, it should be noted, is also the author

of sixty-four Valentins, whose intention is clearly explained in the "Au Lecteur":

> Il y a longtemps qu'on a inventé le jeu des Valentins; mais on les a faits depuis peu en vers: voici ceux qui me sont tombés entre les mains. Il faut pour bien composer le jeu des Valentins, mettre le nom de trente hommes et celui de trente femmes, dans soixante morceaux de papier séparés, et copier séparément le nom d'un homme et celui d'une femme, on tire deux madrigaux, pour voir ce qu'ils disent l'un à l'autre. Si ce sont des choses tout à fait éloignées, ou tout à fait vraisemblables, les effets différents du hasard peuvent être quelquefois assez agréables, et j'espère que cette diversité d'épigrammes sur toute sorte de sujet te divertira.[13]

The intention is quite clear; at stake, is a game--by necessity structured, with pre-determined rules--whose strategy demands easy recognizability. Convention is at a premium, for it is absolutely necessary that familiarity, generality submerge the particular. Curiously enough, in the thirty-two pieces directed to men by women, the basic themes of the Lettres portugaises are readily duplicated. Abandonment is the background for both works, but even in their detail the two correspond. Thus, Mariane's early, précieux desire to be duped finds a corollary in the Valentins: "Vous voulez rompre notre affaire./Hélas, cet aveu sincère/M'accable de désespoir;/Trompez-moi, je vous en conjure,/Et continuez de me voir:/Du moins abusez-moi, parjure" (p. 101).

In a similar fashion, Guilleragues writes his epigrams to point to disillusionment, to fatality, to weak excuses for departures, to anxiety over a lover's lies.

And Mariane's final resolution toward self-control is mirrored in yet another piece: "Puisque je ne suis plus aimable,/Il faut tâcher de n'aimer plus aussi" (p. 110). Thus, tradition-laden themes of betrayal, of female masochism, of beguilement, of fate, and of death, all enter into an "original" work such as the Lettres portugaises and into a heavily contrived one like the Valentins. The easy conclusion would be that Guilleragues was simply limited in his expression, that he could barely move from "play" into something more "serious." But his use of convention in the letters is not in order to define, to explain Mariane's upset state; rather, it functions as the expression that la religieuse herself adopts in her struggle. Tied in by her own set of reactions to the betrayal situation, she is also bound by the tradition of writing her feelings, of translating passion into literature. Seeking to conform, she naturally has recourse to conventional language.

Yet her efforts are truly in vain, and the results fall far short of the expectations. Mariane's is a double failure, for she is a double victim, one who is successfully manipulated by the chevalier, but also by myth-making. In the end, she is definitively abandoned, unable even to deceive herself. And her one creation, the letters, have failed her as well, able neither to sustain her passion nor to translate it into original art, freed from convention and capable of generating a heightened existence.

That is why there is no ultimate transcendent death, no transcendence of any sort, only the lucid acceptance of her solitude, and that is why the ending is not a conclusion, but only a rupture, a breaking off into silence. It is a termination which corresponds, curiously enough, to that of Racine's Bérénice, a tragedy based precisely on an inability to say adieu (Antiochus and Titus both experiencing this difficulty). The word itself, just as in the Lettres portugaises, assumes an ironic importance, for closure of any sort is impossible. When finally Bérénice assumes control and utters her adieu, it is the entire tragedy which is accompanying her into the Orient, into silence. There can be no true "conclusion," nothing but a cessation, and the rupture-end is as necessary to Guilleragues' work as to Racine's. Tragedy and letters are thus banished. There is no other way out, except to stop writing; otherwise, the play continues, and so do the letters. A cut-off must occur, and does.

It is thus not only to her passion that Mariane is bidding adieu (significantly, when the rupture does occur at the end of the fifth letter, there is no pronouncing the word, for it was in itself too literary a stance for Mariane; her release had to be achieved by different means), but to art, for it has proved an unsatisfactory alternative, not able to sustain her passion nor subsist on its own without turning in a labyrinth of convention. Early in the letters, Mariane perceived that her death, a suicide, would

be ultimately more authentic than her words--"mon désespoir n'est donc que dans me lettres" (p. 49)?--that there was something not genuine in this creation. But thoughts of death revealed themselves, too, as strictly conventional, and Mariane's final decision, to stop writing, is truly the only authentic one. Silence alone can halt the cycle.

Footnotes

[1]Guilleragues, Lettres portugaises, ed. F. Deloffre et J. Rougeot (Paris: Garnier Frères, 1962), p. 69. All subsequent citations will be by page number in the body of the chapter.

[2]Claude Aveline, Et tout le reste n'est rien (Paris: Mercure de France, 1957).

[3]F. C. Green, "Who was the author of the 'Lettres portugaises'?" Modern Language Review, XXI (1926), 160.

[4]Guilleragues, op. cit., intro., vi-vii.

[5]Leo Spitzer, "Les 'Lettres portugaises'," Romanische Forschungen, LXV (1953), 96.

[6]Denis de Rougemont, L'Amour et l'occident (Paris: 10/18, 1962; original edition, Plon, 1939), pp. 17-18.

[7]Spitzer, op. cit., pp. 126-127.

[8]Charles Mauron, L'Inconscient dans l'oeuvre et la vie de Racine (Aix-en-Provence: Publication des Annales de la Faculté des Lettres, 1957), p. 260.

[9]Spitzer, op. cit., p. 101

[10]Ibid., p. 115.

[11]Ibid., p. 110.

[12]Erica Harth, "Exorcising the Beast: Attempts at Rationality in French Classicism," PMLA, LXXXIII (January 1973), 19-24.

[13]Guilleragues, Valentins, ed. F. Deloffre et J. Rougeot (Paris: Garnier Frères, 1962), p. 81. Subsequent references will be included by page number in the body of the chapter.

CONCLUSION

It seems fair at this point to question the success of the moralists' venture, for it constitutes an effort at total debunking and therefore must be evaluated in terms of desired ends. Although this attempt at battling the disorganizing forces of loving can be viewed as one general trend, each writer, as we have shown, offers an elaborate formulation of means to combat most successfully what they all perceived as an inherently disruptive, alienating psychological position. That which particularly marks the writings of the decades that closely followed la Fronde, is a yearning toward emotional repose and stability, and although this is not an effort to bind historical events to literary production, nevertheless, there is surely something to be said for the overwhelming desire of order which permeates this body of literature.

In any case, and whatever the combined psychological and social climate of the time may have encouraged, there is a decided leaning toward control of the self, a drift which is perhaps most acutely felt in a writer such as Saint-Evremond, but is obvious also in the letters of a Mme de Sévigné, intently caught up in the most powerful of emotional involvements, yet nonetheless seeking to reorder

the chaos and imperfections of the "raw" relationship, to tranquillize, through the medium of written language.

Yet each "system" devised by our writers is in some way vulnerable, open to attack, or at least to question. There is even an instinct to open revolt against some of their conclusions, a feeling that the reliance upon the structured system of language to control, to master, can be completely turned around, inverted, and that language can be used as the tool of eroticism, rather than as its opponent. The eighteenth century declining, to say nothing of the contemporary world, did indeed offer exactly that possibility, in a seemingly direct thrust against the reticence of the Classical moralist experience.

The alliance between language and repression, or going even further, between language and suppression, a union which the seventeenth-century writers cultivated in diverse forms, is certainly not impregnable and deserves direct questioning, even if this is a luxury afforded by modern psychological gleanings. It is perhaps the close intertwining of the private and public in this literature, the belief that an "inner self" could be denied its expression unless that corresponded perfectly to the demands of the societal, which is most open to questioning. But there are other limitations in the entirety of the moralist literature, at least as it approached the difficult question of the nature of love.

Of the writers studied here, Mme de Lafayette and

Guilleragues, the author of the Lettres portugaises, offer perhaps the most somber conclusions to the dilemmas which are posed in their works. But more than a facile "pessimism" emerges from these novels, a term which adds a sense of moral grandeur which may well not be present. Mme de Clèves' rush to the grave, the confinement (self-imposed) of her final days, reflect firstly the recognition that her attempt to use language--"Fiez-vous à mes paroles"--is doomed to futility. The power of words reveals itself as nil, for in this universe Eros and Logos exist as two separate and distinct codes. But on another level, the retreat to the convent, and to all that the nunnery summons up, can be viewed as a radical denial of the life forces. Silence, death become the sole means to "freedom," but in this choice there is reflected a strong sense of passivity, a refusal of energy, a resolution determined not by the ethics of heroism and will, but rather by a desire to renounce, to give up. What replaces the battle waged by Mme de Clèves is a strange, disquieting emotional vacuum, not victory, but defeat.

Similarly, the Lettres portugaises, while offering the hope of a will bought back, of a regained volonté, through first, impulses toward death, and later, through a radical breaking off of the correspondence, nonetheless depict an ultimate decision testifying to a renouncement. Mariane will return only to the embryonic existence she had led prior to the encounter with the chevalier. Her

victory is strangely a Pyrrhic one: while liberating herself from the binds of an unreciprocated love, Mariane is only free to return to the shackles imposed by the convent life. One prison is traded for another. The final choice of silence, the abrupt rupture of the discourse, demonstrate at once a "win" over a destructive passion, but also a "loss," of vitality. The sense of moral quarantine which is the mark of the convent, reemerges at the end as if to signal the retreat into dormancy, into a somnambulic existence, whose primary "virtue" is an absence of erotic energy, of life. Death, or its stand-in, silence, thus come to reflect, ultimately, a refusal of engagement.

The reluctance to opt for a stance of energy, of commitment, is visible also in La Rochefoucauld's Maximes, through their closing out of virtually any reference to a potent, dynamic love. The maxim writer remains fixed upon the disintegration of love, upon its stagnation. This negation, however, is limited in scope. Even what La Rochefoucauld perceives as the negative side of passion, appears only as images of withered, dying tissue. He consistently refuses to push to a dynamic refusal, to an energy-charged nihilism. The destruction of love within the pages of the Maximes proceeds along lines of decay and decomposition, the ideal slowly torn apart not by a biting, forceful slash, but rather by a vocabulary of languor and disease. A violent, aggressive attack, which might assume the totality of the consequences of negating is never forthcoming. Even

while projecting the image of disillusionment, of a world free of myth-making and of romantic seduction, the picture of an untroubled society must emerge. A compromise, allowing for the undisturbed continuum of the social order, must be secured, with the result that the Maximes refuse to assume totally their bitter prognosis. Degeneration, not energy, prevails.

But perhaps most important of all, in an appraisal of the limitations of the Classical moralist experience, is the question of factitious, artificial man. The moralist writers we have grouped here, to one degree or another, all leaned heavily upon the concept of perfecting an "outer self," capable of using, controlling erotic energy as a means to enhancing a public image, while maintaining intact the composed "inner self." Throughout this body of literature, the moralists fixed upon a battle of the private and the public, put into opposition their contrasting demands, and thus established a system of rivaling prerogatives: to give into the disorganizing life of passion is to renounce the need for social equilibrium. What results is nothing less than elaborately formulated means to repression, to denial of the spontaneous energies of the body. Hence, the emergence of l'honnête homme, incarnation of the societal, "new" man.

This effort at creating a social "double," is seen also in modern "moralist" literature. Nietzsche, for example, carefully cultivated the notions of masking, but

also vociferously demonstrated to what degree the demands for social perfection and conformity could easily produce a contrived, false self, behind which repressed feelings, turned to hatred, could dominate. And so this remains finally the fundamental problem of the writers explored in this essay: the failure to perceive the dangers of masking. And when these perils are understood, rarely, as in a writer like Mme de Lafayette, the sole alternative is a death-craving wherein all life forces can be annihilated.

One work in particular, written at the end of the eighteenth century, stands out as a monumental repudiation, although doubtlessly inadvertent, of the Classical moralists' task: Laclos' Les Liaisons dangereuses. In fact, at every turn this complex and unique work seems to oppose the seventeenth-century moralist experience. The passivity of the Classical writers' ideal, the concept of retreat, the notion of decay and decompostion, are forthrightly banished in Laclos' epistolary novel. La marquise de Merteuil comes to symbolize a tight binding together of will and sexuality, of energy and eroticism.[1] Her aggressiveness, her violence even, stand in direct opposition to the omnipresent seventeenth-century nunnery. Nothing in Les Liaisons dangereuses is concealed, the private and the public have become one and the same.

This linking of what our writers perceived as two distinct selves, or at least as two disjointed parts of one self, is the primary point of rupture with the past. Erot-

icism, at least for the Marquise who is the main focus of the novel, screams for recognition, scorns the retreating posture of the Classical age, asserts itself without any limits, and above all, is shown functioning as the pivotal point of the society of letter writers. The principal characters are all drawn together, thus forming a social circle, through sexual alliances. Societal man is erotic man, and the idea of a "different," imposed self is totally alien to Laclos' vision.

But even more significant is the emphasis upon words, upon a direct consciousness of language, which runs throughout Les Liaisons dangereuses, as it does through the moralist literature. We have seen that the Classical writers sought to weaken the chaos of passion through a deliberate emphasis upon language. This effort is two-fold: attention in their works to the power of the word itself as an agent to combat passion; secondly, the very act of writing about love, of analyzing it, is a means to structuring, to ordering. Laclos' novel also displays an intense awareness of words, of language, in this case, as with the moralists, of written language. (Obviously, it can be said that an attempt such as that of the chevalier de Méré, to write what he refers to as oral communication--les Discours, les Conversations--only heightens the consciousness of language at work.) The letters which compose Les Liaisons dangereuses comprise, each one separately and all together, a mark of intimacy between the correspondents.[2] Language has thus

become the principal means to convey erotic energy, reflecting perfectly the acts, or desires, which it interprets. Writing letters is the most authentic way in Laclos' universe (concomitant to the act of love itself) of expressing love, passion, and mirrors the totality of that passion itself. The violence of this energy is now to be genuinely communicated, transmitted, through words.

Thus, antagonistic elements, or what was at least expressed as such in the Classical moralist writers, language and love, are now joined in intimate, authentic expression. The distance our moralists sought to establish exists no longer, nor is death (suicide) seen as the sole solution to a linguistic impasse. Rather, l'amour-passion in Laclos' work assumes all its intensity and violence, which the word, which language, is charged to carry.

To see the full consequences of that process, it would be necessary to reach up to Proust and beyond, a task which we do not propose to undertake here. Our attempt is to show that the final years of the eighteenth century (as opposed to the earlier ones and to a work such as Manon Lescaut) establish more firmly perhaps than ever before the principle of language as equally potent, or more potent even, than act. Language will no longer be used as the tool to challenge, to order, to structure spontaneous impulses, but rather becomes the means to interpret, and beyond that, to create them.

Footnotes

[1] Choderlos de Laclos, Les Liaisons dangereuses, preface by André Malraux (Paris: Le Livre de poche, 1958), preface, p. 16.

[2] Tzvetan Todorov, "The discovery of language: Les Liaisons dangereuses and Adolphe," Yale French Studies, No. 45, p. 116.

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