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 "over-involvement," a means 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 understood. Saint-Evremond's reticence is complex, and the two diverging poles—involvement and
self-containment—not infrequently in the course of his writings pull together, then coincide, only to split apart once more.

There is, first, his heavy preoccupation with the concept of pleasure. As Victor Du Bled has shown, there were degrees of libertinist thought in the seventeenth century, with Saint-Evremond situated definitely along a more moderate line, 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 that pervaded seventeenth-century French thought—"What shall man do to be saved?"—was the problem with which Saint-Evremond also was struggling. His answer was at antipodes from that of Pascal and the Jansenist writers. Christian faith, with its renunciation of worldly pleasure and its emphasis on the gift of grace, never seduced Saint-Evremond, except perhaps as an emotional strength that he occasionally envied, but always from a distance. Even more vehement than his questioning of abstinence to gain salvation, however, is his denigration of 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." But it was not only to experience more fully 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 that of 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 he tried over the years to create from it a true ideal, with 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 in the greatest depths of philosophical examination—would be misleading.

Spinoza is one of the sternest, most demanding, least permissive of moralists, and he and Saint-Evremond are widely different. The Dutch philosopher, moreover, differs markedly from writers like Gassendi, who had a direct bearing upon Saint-Evremond's thought. Nevertheless, Spinoza's elaborate formulation of a "pleasure principle" seems to have guided Saint-Evremond, if not in a very substantial way, at least then as a preliminary direction. Of particular significance is the Dutch philosopher's recognition of the essential unity of things, his refusal to split the world into distinct substances, a belief, moreover, that the post-Freudian writers have 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.

Saint-Evremond, though shunning the "hard" consequences of much of Spinoza's thought, nevertheless makes 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 honnitée code—from any connotation 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 relished 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. The physical and the spiritual need not exclude each other, as the devout Christian writers would have it. Rather, in the true style of l'honnêteté, they may be viewed as complementary forces in a harmonious, balanced life.

Saint-Evremond was fully cognizant of the potent human capacity for loving, a belief he expressed, nevertheless, with utmost discretion: "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." 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" that 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, essential to every human being and which
will be augmented by 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" that permeates the age.

This is why Brown's passage on Spinoza is significant, in that it calls attention to extreme intensification of the self. In a more limited and 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 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 stance (in a non-pejorative sense), fully in keeping with what Saint-Evremond sought to gain in the way toward an eventual self-liberation for all.

It is not surprising, therefore, that Saint-Evremond categorically shunned the family's authoritative moral norms that 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, après avoir exigé de vous une si dure obéissance, 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 de-
mands of the family, which ran counter to self-fulfillment. The erotic force or energy that Saint-Evremond had perceived (although he always couched it in “discreet” language) demanded a freedom that the family, as the essential social unit, could not condone.

But the moral authority that the parent seeks to impose upon his children may be embodied within the spoken or unspoken tenets of the society, where it is perhaps even more potent 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” (3:90). 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. (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, in sharing their anguish in a somewhat paternalistic but distant fashion.)

What is needed, then, is a constant attention to all forces that act upon the individual, a weighing of their relative importance to his emotional state, and an eventual selection of those that 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 an understanding of the self but also a total immersion in an egocentric universe, whereas 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, l'honnête homme or l'honnête femme 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 on the theme of control, which is central to the performance of man in society. Saint-Evremond's atti­tude is summed up in a letter to madame la duchesse de Mazarin, his longtime friend, written at a moment of par­ticular difficulty in her life: "Faites revenir ce temps heureux, où toujours Maitresse de vous-même, vous ne laissiez de liberté à personne qui valut la peine d'être assujettie" (4:210-11). 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, in a world where the societal predominates.

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." Evaluat-
ing 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, la Science des voluptés, font une partie du Mérite présentement. (2:333)

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 fails to offer 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 comme les autres" (4:193)—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 l'honnêteté.

He makes a parallel stand for the future. There is no question of an afterlife 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 with 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" (4:277). 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 afterlife, of possible damnation or salvation, are pushed aside and 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 or obsession. Again, it is a matter of the self controlling and manipulating outside forces to the end of its own happiness; hence, increasing 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 réduire 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" (4:122). There is something monstrously antisocial in exclusivity, a crime against mankind. But it is more than that. He clearly saw 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 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 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 morale 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 attachement 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? (1:96)

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 that kept them faithful to a first lover: "moitié par habitude, moitié par un sot honneur qu'on se fait d'être constant, on entretient languissamment les misérables restes d'une Passion usée" (2:232). 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 skepticism 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. 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 sensitivities 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 is on the other only one man's special battle against pain, against obsession with death. And although the emphasis on the life forces was an integral part of the "libertine" philosophy of the time—indeed, almost a convention—bit by bit Saint-Evremond's words on the subject take on a surprisingly personal tone.

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 in 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 the pleasure theory served as a potent counterforce to the fear of death and pain.\(^7\) Pleasure, then, is seen as a way of attaining an emotional equilibrium that 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 spectacular happiness than the calm acceptance of a *modus*
vivendi, where freedom from pain and fear is equated with genuine bliss. 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 that leads to thoughts of ultimate nothingness. In this equivocal, ambiguous call to pleasure, Saint-Evremond’s works begin to separate from the general, free-thinking current of his age and to assume 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 is easily converted into the other, where the intense, vibrant feelings of passion can 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” (1:59). 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 of greatest significance for this study is the question of emotional risk. Clearly, the danger for potential psychic and social disintegration involved in friendship is far weaker than that associated with love. No great emotional turbulence is associated with friendship, traditionally, for the sexual component is absent, whereas 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 bows to the conceptions of love that dominated his age. Friendship is 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!" (4:112)—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 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 desired emotional intensity. Even during the rare times that he analyzed the quality of love, Saint-Evremond was moved by that aspect which offered the smallest amount of emotional turbulence, by that which most successfully 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 âme, lorsqu'elle s'émeut par l'impression de quelque objet 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. (3:123)

His praise goes for languishing, because Saint-Evremond shunned 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 from 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 agitated, sexual feelings.

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, unusual for his time, as a viable alternative to heterosexual love (4:115). 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 toward women when they were not a part of his own life.

Resolutely pro-Nature when advising female friends, although somewhat distant and removed, Saint-Evremond lashed out against prudery in all forms. In the letter to Mlle de Queroualle, 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” (1:90). Prudery for Saint-Evremond, as 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 quickly: “Au lieu de porter au Couvent le dégoût de l’Amour, le Couvent vous en fera naître l’envie. . . . Ainsi vous serez consommée 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 ne pourrez exécuter” (3:92). The inevitable result, according to Saint-Evremond, is that passion is converted into religious devotion, and God becomes a new lover (1:137).
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" (1:111). This intellectualization and deification of love go contrary to Saint-Evremond's belief in sensual gratification and its "here and now" quality. Any cult of love was repugnant to him, which is undoubtedly why, along with his attack on the précieuses, he also criticized the vestiges of *la courtoisie* in seventeenth-century Spanish mores. Love considered as a game, with set rules to follow, was for Saint-Evremond 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, though vociferously defending Nature's way, though 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 of it. The title of the passage alone serves to suggest a most fanciful, ephemeral situation: "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 Saint-Evremond has even begun the body of the text, and the entire essay is built upon a series of antitheses whose member elements cancel out one another:

Sa Taille est d'une juste grandeur, bien prise, aisée, d'un dégagement aussi éloigné de la contrainte, que de cette ex-
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 that 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 le plus véritable effet de notre bon sens. (2:245-46)

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 or unwilling to consider ideal love as preeminently or even partially sexual, Saint-Evremond does not offer only the standard coupling of Love and Reason, but rather the intermingling of the two, their interpenetration. And ultimately it is the erotic that emerges as "purified," whereas 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. Ultimately, Saint-Evremond's ideal emotional experience involved a suspen-
sion 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 that were part of the entire generation.

6. Saint-Evremond, Œuvres, 7 vols. (London: Tonson, 1711), 1:90. Subsequent references are to this edition, and will be found in the text.