might of erotic love, and sought release from its power in some moderation of its excesses through language. The general fascination, for example, of many of these writers with the notion of l'honnête homme, which left its mark so decisively on much of the literature of the period, was dependent upon a successful manipulation of form and style aimed at dispelling, and ultimately purging, the disruptive impulses of l'amour passion.

In a different vein, Mme de Sévigné, in her letters to her daughter, sought to reform and to restructure the love relationship into a more aesthetically and emotionally satisfying experience. So, too, did Jacques Èsprit urge conduct of the most rigorous and repressive inner dialogue as the means to mastery over the undis­ciplined self. So, too, did Saint-Evremond cultivate an emotional distance in his letters of advice that simultaneously allowed for an enticing flirtation with questions of love and sexuality while providing a safety zone of escape that was securely defined by the boundaries of the page on which he wrote. And a novelist such as Mme de Lafayette, in an effort not dissimilar from that of Guilleragues, the author of the Lettres portugaises, used fiction and myth as a means first to emphasize and then to reduce the potential chaos of love. The moralists' effort traverses the classical period, culminating, but also shifting suddenly and radically, in La Bruyère's Caractères.

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