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The purpose of this study was to investigate the use of nature in the poetry of Saint-Amant. The study was encouraged by the recently renewed interest of scholars in the work of Saint-Amant as well as by new scholarly studies on the subject of nature in early seventeenth-century French literature.

Background chapters provide material supportive of the study itself. The first chapter investigates nature in the work of major poets of the early seventeenth century in order to characterize its general use throughout the period studied. The second documents the critical appraisal of Saint-Amant from the seventeenth through the nineteenth centuries and discusses the important twentieth-century scholarly studies of his life and work.

Essentially according to Françoise Gourier's system of classifying Saint-Amant's poetry, selected poems were then studied with attention to the natural elements detected in them in order to characterize the forms and functions of nature throughout his poetry.

It was concluded that Saint-Amant's use of nature follows conventional trends as well as shows a considerable originality. It was also shown that this particular facet of Saint-Amant's writing reflects tendencies seen throughout his poetry which characterize him as a poet of the baroque tradition.

NATURE IN THE POETRY OF SAINT-AMANT

by

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INTRODUCTION

France experienced during the seventeenth century the great classical period of its literature, and for many years the literary achievements of the century were estimated in terms of the classical tradition. This tendency on the part of literary critics and historians unfortunately led to the misjudgment of nearly a half-century of writing. The poetry of the classical period, which extended roughly from 1660 to near the turn of the century, is characterized by a rigid doctrine of style and content. The classical doctrine is based on the idea that art is an imitation of nature, which is understood to mean in this case "human nature." Literature, being an art, must then reflect the internal condition of human beings and must be universal in its application. In order to achieve this universality, the content of writing must be based on unchanging moral principles and truths; it must appeal to the intellect (raison) and to the standards of good taste (bon sens). The style must be noble in order to reflect the principles upon which poetic art is founded. Vocabulary must be carefully selected to avoid any vulgarism or any expression which might disguise or obscure the expounded truths. The poet Nicolas Boileau-Despréaux (1636-1711) was the greatest exponent of this doctrine, and his Art poétique (1674) its manifesto. Boileau's influence was so great that it brought virtual obscurity to those

poets in the earlier part of the century whose writing did not conform to this doctrine, and it blinded critics to their importance for over one hundred years.¹

Another factor contributing to the misestimation of the poets of the first half of the seventeenth century is the difficulty encountered by literary historians in categorizing them. Their poetry is in fact characterized by a considerable multiplicity of styles, subjects and themes. This variety confounded historians whose aim was to trace the development of French literature through conscious movements and regularized developments of genres and techniques. This point of view started to change during the 1920's when historians began to evaluate this period in terms of its own

¹Nicolas Boileau, Oeuvres complètes de Boileau, ed. Françoise Eschal (Paris: Editions Gallimard, 1966). Boileau admired a few poets of the early years of the seventeenth century, most notably François de Malherbe (1555-1628). Of Malherbe, he has this to say, for example:

Enfin Malherbe vint, et le premier en France,
Fit sentir dans les vers une juste cadence,
D'un mot mis en sa place enseigna le pouvoir,
Et reduisit la muse aux regles du devoir.
Par ce sage Ecrivain la Langue réparée
N'offrit plus rien de rude à l'oreille épurée.
Les Stances avec grace apprirent à tomber,
Et le vers sur le vers n'osa plus enjamber.
Tout reconnut ses lois, et ce guide fidele
Aux Auteurs de ce temps sert encor de modele.

(p. 160)

Malherbe was in fact a literary theoretician and an early exponent of many of the traits of Classicism. In the matter of technique, which he considered foremost in the writing of poetry, he developed a set of strict rules to counteract the stylistic liberties of the Renaissance poets. Although he had disciples and enjoyed considerable success as court poet to Henry IV, he was evidently not widely popular.

qualities and not as a function of the literary production of the years following 1660. An appreciation has developed for the poetry written between 1580 and 1660, and a new concept of the poets of this era has formed. Historians noticed among these poets a similarity of sentiment, sensibility and taste. The name Baroque was borrowed from the history of art and architecture and applied to the literature of the period. In the plastic arts, the term "baroque" indicates a liberated, fluid, usually very ornate style; it is a style full of energy and the desire to assert. In literary terms, it indicates the similar dynamic qualities seen in the other arts. Baroque poetry dwells on the instability of the world, the mutability of time and the vicissitudes of life. Its recurrent themes are inconstancy in love, the fickleness of fortune, and the unpredictability of fate. The baroque poets employ a correspondingly varied number of stylistic devices to elevate and emphasize these themes. They favor figurative language and make frequent use of paradox, hyperbole and double entendre. They show a fondness for symbols such as the movement of water, for images derived from dreams, and for allusions to the grotesque.

The differences between the poetry of the classical period and that of the baroque can best be judged in terms of the differences between the fundamental aesthetics of the two. The classical formulas appeal to the rational side of human nature and are often judgmental in attitude. The

baroque formulas appeal to the emotions. They aim to give sensual pleasure and are rarely moralistic. The classical mode desires to stabilize the individual through the depiction of the truth (le vrai) as a universal concept; the baroque seeks to portray the extremes of human characteristics and to exaggerate reality. The Classical must always be believable (vraisemblable) and serious; the Baroque can be imaginary and fanciful. Although the grandeur of the Classical overshadowed the Baroque for over a century, until the romantic movement began searching for more varied elements in literary art, the Baroque is seen in a new light today as a valid mode of artistic expression.²

²Philip John Yarrow, The Seventeenth Century, 1600-1715 (New York: Barnes and Noble, Inc., 1967), esp. chaps. 2, 3, 6 and 15.

NATURE IN EARLY SEVENTEENTH-CENTURY FRENCH POETRY

The tendency to appraise seventeenth-century French literature in terms of the classical tradition led inevitably to inaccurate assumptions about certain aspects of the poetry of that time. It was believed for a long time that the poets of the century were indifferent to the exterior world, because those whose writing developed along the lines of Classicism show little appreciation for nature and natural settings. Since the doctrine of Classicism requires that art reveal the internal state of man, only the problems of man and his moral and intellectual development were of concern to the classical poets. They rejected the external world as a source of inspiration, for they could not believe that natural phenomena speak to mankind in any way which can reveal to him the true nature of his being. Their desire to regularize and stabilize poetic format could likewise find no example in the constantly changing world. The baroque poets, however, saw in their universe a reflection of the variety and complexity of their states of mind and artistic tendencies. The world provided them with an endless supply of symbols and images with which to exemplify their treatment of the unstable and unpredictable facets of life. These two different and distinct approaches to nature characterize the dichotomy of the literary aesthetic and poetic production of the earlier years of the seventeenth century.

It has been in relatively recent years that scholarly investigation has produced studies devoted specifically to the question of nature and its role in baroque and pre-classical French poetry. Though numerous articles had previously treated the subject in general terms, Grace Morley's publication in 1926 of her doctoral thesis presented the first comprehensive study.³ The purpose of the work is stated in its preface: "Je me propose d'étudier comment, de 1600 à 1660, le sentiment de la nature s'est exprimé en France dans la société, dans la littérature et dans l'art mon intention est de montrer que le sentiment de la nature était plus important qu'on ne le croit en général."⁴ Morley actually presents a study of the aesthetic sensibility towards nature and its various manifestations in particular cultural aspects of the period in question. The bulk of the work is devoted to the literature of the period, and it is in this area that the author is most successful in substantiating her thesis. The work in fact falls short in its development of a full comparative examination which the dimensions of its subject should entail. It does, however, provide sufficient information from which the necessary parallels can be deduced. The author does succeed in

³Grace Louise McCann Morley, Le Sentiment de la nature en France dans la première moitié du dix-septième siècle (New York: Burt Franklin, 1972).

⁴Morley, p. 7.

defining and validating a sentiment which lies at the base of a considerable portion of the artistic production of the era. The work remains the authoritative treatment of this subject and has been reprinted as late as 1972.

The most complete study of nature in the poetry of the baroque age appeared in 1969.⁵ Its author, Gilbert Delley, does not believe that a documentation of the existence of an aesthetic sensibility provides a full explanation of the function of nature in the poetry of the era. He approaches the poetry through the various images and motifs which are specifically derived from or closely associated with the natural world. Each image or motif is studied in detail with examples drawn from the works of the particular poets who used it. Delley's approach is a stylistic analysis of the specific aspects of nature as they appear in the poetry, and his aim is to define each aspect and characterize its use in terms of the literary trends of the period in question. His treatment of both minor and major poets succeeds in demonstrating the extent to which nature inspired and substantiated the poetic production of the age. Delley concludes that the poets of the French Baroque do not use nature in any way intended to enlighten the reader. They are not trying to interpret the universe as a whole or present a

⁵Gilbert Delley, L'Assomption de la nature dans la poésie lyrique française de l'âge baroque (Berne: Herbert Lang, 1969).

new concept of it. Their use of nature is therefore stylistic. They were simply wishing to select motifs easily recognizable by the reader, but presented in a new and original form.⁶

The work of the poet François de Malherbe (1555-1628) has been cited most frequently to exemplify French poetry of the early years of the seventeenth century. Reacting against the liberties of language and style taken by the poets of the Renaissance, Malherbe developed a system of strict regulations governing poetic composition. His aim was to establish in French verse the one quality which he considered foremost in all poetry: clarity. To achieve this clarity, the poet must limit his vocabulary to words in standard usage and make his syntax conform to normal spoken language. The poet must also restrict the content of his writing to material within the experience of the general reader. In essence, Malherbe wanted to rid poetry of any aspect which would impede immediate comprehension by those who would read it.⁷

The most important result of Malherbe's doctrine relevant to this study is the voluntary suppression of personal sentiment and, consequently, the exclusion of a sensibility for nature from writing. In his own writing,

⁶Delley, pp. 316-317.

⁷Yarrow, pp. 25-32.

Malherbe is mainly concerned with people and their actions, usually in an historical context. He rarely exhibits an interest in the natural world, and on occasion actually expresses a decided preference for man-made environments:

Beaux et grands bastimens d'eternelle structure,
Superbes de matiere et d'ouvrages divers,
Où le plus digne Roy qui soit en l'univers,⁸
Aux miracles de l'art fait ceder la nature;

Malherbe is describing a country residence and it appears that the buildings are more attractive to him than the surrounding countryside. He sees a timeless beauty in their construction and comments upon the quality of materials and decoration. They are architectural representations of man's ability to make nature conform to his standards of beauty. The description is of Fontainebleau where the court of Henry IV took occasional residence. Malherbe, being official poet to the court, was usually in its company. It must have been with some resignation that he left the city, as evidenced by this verse written from Fontainebleau in 1608:

Toute la cour fait cas du sejour où je suis,
Et pour y prendre goust je fais ce que je puis,⁹
Mais j'y deviens plus sec, plus j'y voy de verdure.

⁸ François de Malherbe, Oeuvres poétiques de Malherbe (Paris: Editions Jouaust, 1877), p. 225.

⁹ Malherbe, p. 226. Malherbe is actually expressing a taste which was to become the mode later in the seventeenth century, and which was most manifest in the development of the formal garden and the highly artificial quality of its beauty. See Morley, pp. 35-46.

It is quite clear from this passage that the poet did not share the court's taste for the country and its untamed vegetation.

More extensive descriptions of nature and natural phenomena do appear occasionally in the poetry of Malherbe, usually functioning as décor in the longer narrative poems. In his most famous poem, Les Larmes de Saint Pierre (1587), Malherbe includes a rather lengthy description of the morning of the Crucifixion. Although the poet displays no real feeling for the natural setting, he does render it with a remarkable visual sensitivity, the detail of color having a particularly precise descriptive quality:

Tandis la nuit s'en va, ses lumières s'étaient,
Et déjà devant lui les campagnes se peignent
Du safran que le jour apporte de la mer.¹⁰

The coming of day is treated in a much more artificial manner. Dawn is depicted by the conventional personification of "Aurore" who here is watering a pot of dead flowers from a cruet filled with tears. The sun appears as a charioteer, despondent on this particular occasion and loathe to make his necessary journey. To conclude the section, however, Malherbe returns to a less artificial setting:

Au point accoustumé, les oiseaux, qui sommeillent,
Apprestez à chanter dans les bois se réveillent;
Mais, voyant ce matin des autres différent,
Remplis d'étonnement, ils ne daignent paroistre,

¹⁰Malherbe, p. 212.

Et font à qui les voit ouvertement cognoistre
De leur peine secrette un regret apparent.¹¹

The idea of this entire section of the poem is that nature as witness to an event of universal importance responds accordingly. Malherbe possibly believed that by indicating this response among ordinary creatures he would succeed in creating a more poignant representation of his idea. The emphasis falls nevertheless on the event itself; the natural elements, whether rendered conventionally or realistically, are selected to underscore its consequences. Although Malherbe demonstrates no particular fondness for the natural world, he does, on occasion, employ details derived from natural settings when they serve to emphasize his subject. Malherbe was the most prominent and influential French poet of the first quarter of the seventeenth century, and his poetic innovations were assimilated in later years into the doctrine of Classicism. Thus from its very beginnings, the classical mind reveals a somewhat hostile attitude toward a feeling for nature and its expression in poetry.¹²

The two most important disciples of Malherbe were François Maynard (1582-1646) and Honorat de Racan (1589-1670), both of whom developed into prominent poets during the first quarter of the century. Of the two, Maynard remained

¹¹Malherbe, p. 213.

¹²Morley, pp. 64-69.

the more faithful to Malherbe's doctrine. His primary concern is court life and its social setting, and his treatment of it is intellectual, often satirical. He shares with the master poet a similar disregard for the natural world. Although he does occasionally praise country life, he regards it more as an escape from a society which he disdained than as a retreat into a natural environment which he especially admired. When natural elements do appear in his verse, they are treated in a conventional manner.¹³

Racan was less influenced by the doctrine of Malherbe, especially with regard to the exclusion of personal sentiments from poetry. His most famous poem, Les Bergeries (1619), is a long dramatic poem and belongs to a type of pastoral poetry highly popular in its time.¹⁴ Racan follows the conventional format, but through certain characteristics of his verse reveals a personal attachment to the country which is absent from most other examples of pastoral poetry. Although he does not present extensive descriptions of the countryside, he depicts with striking realism the peasants and the daily routines of their country life. He frequently interpolates into the peasants' dialogues expressions referring to the beauties of their natural environment.

¹³Morley, pp. 97-98.

¹⁴For a general discussion of pastoral poetry, see Yarrow, p. 65.

These expressions generally transmit such sincerity that we easily read into them the sentiments of the poet himself.¹⁵ In his religious poetry, Racan expresses the belief that God's bounty is reflected in the beauties of nature. The world as created by God provides mankind not only a beautiful environment in which to live and work but also the resources necessary for his physical maintenance.¹⁶ Racan's realism and emotional sincerity are the characteristics of his poetry which make it unique in the pre-classical tradition.

The two most important French poets of the early seventeenth century who developed independently of Malherbe's influence were Mathurin Régnier (1573-1613) and Théophile de Viau (1590-1626). Régnier, a great admirer of the Renaissance poets, believed that spontaneity was more important than technique in the composition of poetry and that the poet's personal beliefs and feelings were his best sources of inspiration. His main interest was the society of his day, and he devoted his talents almost entirely to the criticism of the people and institutions which constituted it. His method was satire, and his treatment was highly realistic.¹⁷ Nature figures very little in this approach, and its use in Régnier's poetry is negligible.

¹⁵Morley, pp. 98-103.

¹⁶Morley, pp. 98-103.

¹⁷Yarrow, pp. 32-35.

Théophile de Viau, of all the poets writing during the first quarter of the seventeenth century, was by virtue of his temperament and aesthetic inclination the most opposed to Malherbe. Although he admired Malherbe, he wished to remain independent of the older poet's influence:

Malherbe a tres-bien fait, mais il a fait pour luy,

 J'approuve que chacun écrive à sa façon
 J'ayme sa renommee et non pas sa leçon. . .¹⁸

Unlike Malherbe, Théophile disdained court life:

La coustume et le nombre autorise les sots,
 Il faut aymer la cour, rire des mauvais mots,
 Acoster un brutal, luy plaire, en faire estime:¹⁹
 Lors que cela m'advient je pense faire un crime.

He advocated spontaneity in art:

Je veux faire des vers qui ne soient pas contraincts,
 Promener mon esprit par de petits dessains,
 Chercher des lieux secrets où rien ne me deplaise,
 Mediter à loisir, resver tout à mon aise,
 Employer toute une heure à me mirer dans l'eau,
 Ouyr comme en songeant la course d'un ruisseau,
 Ecrire dans le bois, m'interrompre, me taire,
 Composer un quatrain sans songer à le faire.²⁰

He also believed, as the above citation might suggest, that nature is the true guide to all human endeavor:

J'approuve qu'un chacun suive en tout la nature:²¹
 Son empire est plaisant et sa loi n'est pas dure.

¹⁸Théophile de Viau, *Oeuvres poétiques*, ed. Jeanne Streicher (Genève: Droz, 1967), I, 9-10.

¹⁹Viau, I, 8.

²⁰Viau, I, 12.

²¹Viau, I, 85.

In the matter of art, however, the perfection of the natural world remains unapproachable:

La Nature est inimitable
 Et dans sa beauté véritable
 Elle esclate si vivement
 Que l'art gaste tous ses ouvrages,
 Et luy fait plustost mille outrages
 Qu'il ne luy donne un ornement.²²

Thus Théophile viewed the natural world not only as a perfect environment for creativity and regeneration but also as a source of poetic inspiration. It is not surprising that one finds considerable attention given throughout his poetry to natural settings and phenomena.

In many instances, especially in his early work, Théophile's treatment of natural subjects is highly conventional. His ode, "Le Matin," for example, begins with the usual personifications of the dawn as "Aurore" and the sun as a charioteer emerging from the sea. The remainder of the poem is devoted to the depiction of various creatures, their response to the coming of day and the resumption of their normal daily activities. Although the poet selects realistic subjects, his descriptions of them bear the traits of conventionality. He notes the birds' reaction, for example, in the following manner:

Les oyseaux d'un joyeux ramage
 En chantant semblent adorer

²²Viau, II, 42-43.

La lumiere, qui vient dorer
Leur cabinet et leur plumage.²³

The birds actually appear more human than animal in their "cabinet," and even more so by their response of adoration. Except for the one detail of color, there is nothing in this passage to affect the reader's imagination. Occasionally, Théophile surpasses the conventional mannerisms and succeeds in creating remarkably imaginative and realistic scenes.

La Maison de Sylvie (1624)²⁴ contains many descriptions of natural settings which display Théophile's ability to create such scenes. One example must suffice:

Les rayons du jour esgarez
Parmy des ombres incertaines
Esparpillent les feux dorez
Dessus l'azur de ces fontaines.
Son or dedans l'eau confondu,
Avecques ce cristal fondu,
Mesle son teint et sa nature,
Et seme son esclat mouvant
Comme la branche au gré du vent
Efface et marque sa peinture.²⁵

The description is of sunlight passing through foliage and falling upon a pool where it shimmers upon the surface of the water and becomes diffused beneath it. Théophile succeeds in blending these natural elements by insisting on their

²³Viau, I, 15.

²⁴The title of this poem refers to a forest pavilion belonging to Henry II, duc de Montmorency, Théophile's patron and protector. The pavilion was located on the Montmorency property at Chantilly where Théophile spent some time in 1623. He was often in the company of the duke's wife, Marie-Félice des Ursins, the "Sylvie" of the poem. See Viau, II, xviii-xix and 135-136.

²⁵Viau, II, 165.

fluid qualities: "ombres incertaines," "feux dorez," "cristal fondu." He creates the sensation of insouciant movement with the adjective "esgarez," the verbs "esparpillent," "mesle," "sème," and the expression "au gré du vent." This depiction of the harmony of natural forms and movements produces an atmosphere of serenity which reflects the poet's own state of mind. Carefully and concisely constructed, the passage follows relatively normal patterns of syntax, creating a natural rhythm which accentuates the natural beauty of the description. Théophile's sensitivity to the beauties of the natural world and his remarkable ability to translate his feelings into poetry have led to his recognition as the foremost nature poet of the baroque tradition.

Elements of nature appear to some extent, therefore, throughout French poetry of the early part of the seventeenth century. Used by poets of both the pre-classical and baroque currents, they exist in a variety of forms and function in various ways. In less original contexts, they constitute a mere stylistic device, serving as décor or as material illustrative of a larger theme. Similarly, they may appear in a religious or animistic function, expressing the poet's view of the world as a reflection of the spiritual or creative forces of the universe. Most often, the use of nature simply reflects a taste for country life and falls within the pastoral tradition. In this way, it functions as the setting for a rural scene in which the

activities of the inhabitants develop as the central interest of the poetry. These conventional uses of nature are most often associated with pre-classical trends, and are exemplified in the work of such poets as Malherbe and Racan.

The poets of the baroque tradition tend to demonstrate a more acute sensibility for the natural world, a tendency revealed in their more precise and realistic depiction of natural elements. Occasionally, as in the poetry of Théophile, natural phenomena constitute the subject of the poetry itself, revealing a fondness for the sensual qualities of the natural world. This fondness for nature as an environment conducive to creative activity and as a source of poetic inspiration actually exists as a portion of the baroque aesthetic. Although the use of nature is not unique to any particular trend, poet or genre, it occurs in greater quantity and in its most original aspects in the work of the poets of the baroque tradition. The poetry of Marc-Antoine Girard de Saint-Amant (1594-1661), generally linked to the baroque current, is interesting in that it displays most of the aspects of nature seen throughout early seventeenth-century French verse and is in this way representative of the poetry of an age.

SAINT-AMANT AND HIS CRITICS

Saint-Amant, though highly esteemed by his early contemporaries, was severely ridiculed by Boileau and almost forgotten until the nineteenth century when the romantic movement developed a renewed interest in his work. His early popularity is evidenced by the numerous editions of his works. A total of seventeen editions of his Oeuvres appeared during the seventeenth century, one being posthumous. A quantity of his poetry also appeared separately in various recueils of the period. Another indication of his success is the existence of several of his works translated into other languages. For example, La Solitude (ca. 1617), Saint-Amant's most famous poem, was translated into English as early as 1654 by Katherine Phillips, and his Rome ridicule (1643), a very popular satire, appeared in an appropriately Italian and French bilingual edition in 1666.²⁶

There are a number of critical references to Saint-Amant's poetry appearing in the writings of his contemporaries. Nicolas Faret, an intimate friend of Saint-Amant, was privileged to compose the preface to the first edition of the poet's works in 1629. Although we may suspect him of some degree of prejudice, Faret gives in his preface a fair judgment of Saint-Amant's abilities as a poet: "[Saint-

²⁶ Françoise Gourier, Etude des oeuvres poétiques de Saint-Amant (Genève: E. Droz; Paris: Minard, 1961), pp. 7-8.

Amant a] toutes les grandes qualitez requises à un vray Poëte. Ses Inventions sont hardies & agreables; Ses Pensées sont hautes & claires; Son Elocution est nette & vigoureuse; Et jusques au son & à la cadence de ses Vers il se trouve une harmonie qui peut passer pour soeur legitime de celle de son Luth."²⁷ The extent of this compliment enlarges if we consider the fact that Saint-Amant was very gifted as a lute-player and that his abilities as a musician were largely responsible for his earliest fame.²⁸ Théophile de Viau, also a close friend of Saint-Amant and a fellow poet, makes a similar comparison between his abilities as a musician and as a poet:

S. AMAN sçait polir la rime
Avec une si douce lime
Que son luth n'est pas plus mignard . . .²⁹

Théophile pays tribute here to Saint-Amant's facility in creating pleasing rhymes. His appraisal is important in that it constitutes an acknowledgment by one serious poet of a particular technical skill in the work of another.

The poetry of Saint-Amant did not meet with universal acceptance and approval, however. Tallement des Réaux

²⁷ Marc-Antoine Girard de Saint-Amant, *Oeuvres*, I, ed. Jacques Bailbé; II-IV, ed. Jean Lagny (Paris: Didier, 1967-1971), I, 16 (hereafter cited as *Oeuvres*).

²⁸ Jean Lagny, *Le Poète Saint-Amant (1594-1661), essai sur sa vie et ses oeuvres* (Paris: A. G. Nizet, 1964), pp. 42-43.

²⁹ Viau, II, 132.

(1619-1692), though he attributes the poet with having a certain génie, attacks Saint-Amant's character as well as his work: "Il a du genie, mais point de jugement; il ne sçait rien et n'a jamais étudié; au reste, fier à un point estrange, qui se loüe jusqu'à faire mal au coeur En sa jeunesse il fasoit beaucoup mieux; mais il n'a jamais eu un grain de cervelle, et n'a jamais rien fait d'achevé."³⁰ These statements have little validity today, as they are entirely too oblique and possess little concrete criticism of the actual writings of the poet. Tallement's judgments carried considerable weight in the seventeenth century, however, and his statements could have had considerable effect upon public opinion of Saint-Amant.

The most damaging seventeenth-century criticism of Saint-Amant came after his death, and it is indeed fortunate that he enjoyed a long and relatively successful career during his lifetime. Like Tallement, Nicolas Boileau attacked Saint-Amant both as a man and as a poet; his condemnation was severe and succeeded in ruining a seemingly well-established literary reputation. In his "Première Satire" (1665), Boileau states that:

Saint-Amant n'eut du ciel que sa veine en partage;
L'habit qu'il eut sur lui fut son seul heritage;
Un lit et deux placets composoient tout son bien,

³⁰ Gédéon Tallement des Réaux, Les Historiettes, eds. MM. de Monmerque et Paulin Paris (Paris: J. Techner, 1854-1860), III, 309-310.

Ou, pour en mieux parler, Saint-Amant n'avoit rien.
 Mais quoi, las de traîner une vie importune,
 Il engagea ce rien pour chercher la Fortune,
 Et tout chargé de vers qu'il devoit mettre au jour,
 Conduit d'un vain espoir il parut à la Cour.
 Qu'arriva-t-il enfin de sa Muse abusée?
 Il en revint couvert de honte et de risée;
 Et la Fièvre au retour terminant son destin,
 Fit par avance en lui ce qu'auroit fait la Faim.³¹

This attack against Saint-Amant's person is not only extreme, but it is also unjust. There is no evidence that he was ever in want, and his reputation at court was based on his abilities as a conversationalist and musician prior to the appearance of any of his poetry.³²

Boileau refers to Saint-Amant in his Art poétique, again attacking the personal conduct of the poet and adding specific references to his work. In the first part of his composition, Boileau traces a brief history of French verse, noting some of the important poets and their contributions. Then he says:

Mais souvent un Esprit qui se flatte et qui s'aime
 Méconnoist son genie, et s'ignore soy-même.
 Ainsi Tel autrefois, qu'on vit avec Faret
 Charbonner de ses vers les murs d'un cabaret,
 S'en va mal à propos, d'une voix insolente,
 Chanter du peuple Hebreu la fuitte triomphante;

³¹Boileau, p. 15.

³² Samuel L. Borton, Six Modes of Sensibility in Saint-Amant (The Hague: Mouton, 1966), pp. 20-21. Borton suggests that Boileau is making a specific reference in this passage to the embarrassing failure of the aging Saint-Amant's "La Lune parlante," a poem composed for the occasion of Louis XIV's ascension to the throne and in order evidently to gain favor at the new court.

Et poursuivant Moïse au travers des deserts,
Court avec Pharaon se noyer dans les mers.³³

The reference is obviously to Saint-Amant, his friend Faret, and their tendency to frequent the cabarets. Specifically, he attacks what he believes to be a lack of inspiration and an act of insolence on the part of the poet in his dealing with biblical material. The poem in question here is Moyse sauvé, Saint-Amant's one attempt at epic poetry. Boileau found this poem particularly offensive, and in the section of his Art poétique dealing with the epic and its qualities he gives this advice:

N'imitez pas ce Fou, qui décrivant les mers
Et peignant au milieu de leurs flots entr'ouverts
L'Hebreu sauvé du joug de ses injustes Maîtres,
Met pour le voir passer les poissons aux fenestres,
Peint le petit Enfant qui "va, saute, revient,
Et joyeux à sa mere offre un caillou qu'il tient."
Sur de trop vains objets c'est arrester la veuë.
Donnez à vostre ouvrage une juste etenduë.³⁴

³³Boileau, p. 157.

³⁴Boileau, p. 175. The passage which Boileau finds questionable is from the section of Moyse sauvé describing the parting of the Red Sea:

Là, l'enfant esveillé, courant sous la licence
Que permet à son âge une libre innocence,
Va, revient, tourne, saute, et par maint cri joyeux
Temoignant le plaisir que reçoivent ses yeux,
D'un estrange caillou, qu'à ses pieds il rencontre,
Fait au premier venu la precieuse montre,
Ramasse une cocquille, et, d'aise transporté,
La presente à sa mere avec nufveté;
Là, quelque juste effroy qui ses pas sollicite,
S'oublie à chaque objet le fidelle exercite,
Et là, près des rempars que l'oeil peut transpercer,
Les poissons esbahis le regardent passer
[Marc Antoine Girard de Saint-Amant, Oeuvres complètes,
ed. Ch.-L. Livet (Paris: P. Jannet, 1855), II, 214.]

Boileau feels that the poet's use of description interrupts and spoils the narrative and that his choice of detail is of inherently poor quality. The particulars of Saint-Amant's narrative detract from the nobility of theme demanded by the classical doctrine of epic poetry.

Boileau's criticism of Saint-Amant was answered by Charles Perrault (1628-1703) during the debate of the Ancients and the Moderns. Perrault insists that such details are perfectly permissible in a poem such as Moyse sauvé, the Bible itself having set the precedent: "David parle de ce mesme passage des Hebreux: il dit que les montagnes en tressaillirent de joye comme des moutons, et les collines comme des agneaux . . . on ne scauroit la condamner, ou il faut condamner toute la Poësie, à qui rien n'est de plus ordinaire que de donner de l'estonnement, non seulement aux animaux les plus stupides, mais aux choses inanimées."³⁵ Perrault not only defends the poet in this passage, but also the principles of art represented in his writings. This defense of the principles of the Moderns led Perrault to conclude: "Saint-Amant: c'est à mon gré un des plus aimables Poëtes que nous ayons . . . Est-il rien de plus agreable que sa "Solitude," que sa "Pluye" et que son "Melon?"³⁶

³⁵Charles Perrault, "IV^e Dialogue," cited in Borton, p. 22.

³⁶Charles Perrault, "IV^e Dialogue," cited in Borton, p. 22.

Boileau makes minor concessions to Perrault's judgment in his "Reflexion VI" (1694):

Ce Poëte avoit assez de genie pour les ouvrages de débauche, et de Satire outrée, et il a mesme quelquefois des boutades assez heureuses dans le serieux: mais il gête tout par les basses circonstances qu'il y mesle. C'est ce qu'on peut voir dans son Ode intitulée "la Solitude" qui est son meilleur ouvrage, où parmi un fort grand nombre d'images tres-agreables, il vient presenter mal-à-propos aux yeux les choses du monde les plus affreuses, des crapaux, et des limaçons qui bavent, le squelete d'un Pendu, etc. . . .³⁷

Boileau reduces his criticism of the matter of detail to a question of taste, but only where it concerns poetry of lesser forms. In the matter of the epic Moyse sauvé, he is relentless in his attack:

Il n'y a que Monsieur P. au monde qui puisse ne pas sentir le comique qu'il y a dans ces deux vers, où il semble en effet que les poissons ayent loué des fenestres pour voir passer le peuple Hebreu. Cela est d'autant plus ridicule que les poissons ne voyent presque rien au travers de l'eau, et ont les yeux placez d'une telle maniere, qu'il estoit bien difficile, quand ils auroient eu la teste hors de ces remparts, qu'ils pussent bien découvrir cette marche.³⁸

Boileau insists almost scientifically that the details in question are not realistic and therefore do not conform to one of the basic tenets of the classical doctrine, vraisemblance. His use of the adjective "comique" re-emphasizes his belief that Saint-Amant has included material unsuitable to the epic form "au lieu de s'étendre sur tant de grandes

³⁷Boileau, p. 517.

³⁸Boileau, p. 517.

circonstances qu'un sujet si majestueux luy presentoit."³⁹
 In essence, Boileau criticizes the content of Saint-Amant's epic for its depiction of ordinary persons and the technique for its preoccupation with details. Based on the authority of ancient texts, Boileau's dictates became a standard formula of criticism accepted for almost one hundred years. Until the twentieth century, critics have approached Saint-Amant by way of Boileau either to reaffirm or to refute his judgments.

Saint-Amant's popular acceptance as a poet certainly continued during the latter years of the seventeenth century, his work having received considerable attention during the debate of the Ancients and the Moderns. The eighteenth century, however, took little notice of him or of his work. The few references to him are encyclopedic in nature, and, largely because of the lack of interest in lyric poetry during this period, his work had become simply a literary rarity.⁴⁰

It is certainly Théophile Gautier (1811-1872) to whom we owe the successful rehabilitation during the nineteenth century of Saint-Amant's reputation as a poet. In his Les Grotesques, he has this to say of Saint-Amant: "Ce que l'on sait de la vie de Saint-Amant se borne à fort peu de chose . . .

³⁹Boileau, p. 517.

⁴⁰Gourier, p. 10.

. . . Ce que Boileau en dit est un conte inventé à plaisir et qui ne mérite pas la moindre créance"41 He refutes Boileau's judgment of Saint-Amant's economic and social status by noting that the poet's close ties to the nobility, his membership in the Académie Française and his extensive travels would preclude a state of poverty and social exclusion. Furthermore, he adds: "Il n'est pas vrai non plus qu'il vint à la cour pour se produire lui et ses vers; il y avait déjà longtemps que ses oeuvres étaient imprimées et que sa belle ode "à la Solitude" lui avait fait un nom mérité. Saint-Amant, quoi qu'en dise Boileau, obtint beaucoup de succès."⁴²

Gautier was also greatly appreciative of Saint-Amant's poetry and was able to point out inherently redeeming qualities of his art which Boileau had ignored: "Sa rime est extrêmement riche, abondante, imprévue et souvent inespérée. --Son rythme est nombreux, habilement soutenue et menagé. --Son style est très-varié, très-pittoresque, très-imaginé, quelquefois sans goût, mais toujours amusant et neuf."⁴³ Although he concedes somewhat here that some of the verses of Saint-Amant are unacceptable as regards their "taste," Gautier does not reject the entirety of the poet's work on

⁴¹Théophile Gautier, Les Grotesques (Paris: G. Charpentier, 1882), p. 151.

⁴²Gautier, p. 154.

⁴³Gautier, p. 157.

the basis of these few verses. He also defers in part to Boileau's condemnation of the poem Moyse sauvé, noting nevertheless that the poem was quite successful "quoiqu'il soit loin d'être un ouvrage irréprochable."⁴⁴ His opinion of the descriptive passages in the poem is, however, directly opposed to that of the seventeenth-century critic. Gautier insists that "la partie descriptive y est extrêmement brillante et fait passer sur beaucoup de défauts. Le descriptif est l'endroit où Saint-Amant excelle entre tous autres."⁴⁵

With whatever concessions made to seventeenth-century criticism, Gautier's estimation of Saint-Amant as a poet can best be deduced from the following statement: "Quoiqu'il en soit, Saint-Amant est à coup sur un très-grand et très-original poète, digne d'être cité entre les meilleurs dont la France puisse s'honorer."⁴⁶ Due in part to the nineteenth-century tendency to refute the underlying principles of Classicism, Gautier's appraisal of Saint-Amant met with general acceptance and initiated a new interest in the poet and re-evaluation of his work.

The first complete edition of the works of Saint-Amant appeared in 1855 under the editorship of Charles Livet and

⁴⁴Gautier, p. 165.

⁴⁵Gautier, p. 165.

⁴⁶Gautier, p. 157.

was a milestone in scholarship for two important reasons.⁴⁷ First, it provided in one body all the known poetical works of Saint-Amant for the critical appraisal of the reading public and future scholars alike. Secondly, it gave via Livet's "Notice" the first real biography of the poet, which served more than any other document to date to rectify the generally distorted opinion of his life. As did most previous Saintamantiana, the "Notice" also contained a fair amount of critical material refuting Boileau's attacks upon the poet. This material attracted, somewhat surprisingly, rebuttal from at least one nineteenth-century literary figure.

Charles Augustin Sainte-Beuve (1804-1869), writing in 1855, compliments Livet on his scholarship in general: "Je voudrais . . . louer M. Livet de son zèle à faire connaître nos vieux poètes [et] l'encourager à poursuivre ces travaux d'une intéressante érudition domestique," and on his edition of Saint-Amant in particular: "L'édition est faite avec grand soin, accompagnée de notes explicatives, et précédée d'une biographie très-complète de Saint-Amant."⁴⁸ He is not nearly so generous, however, with his compliments to the poet in question. After attributing Saint-Amant

⁴⁷Marc-Antoine Girard de Saint-Amant, Oeuvres complètes, ed. Ch.-L. Livet (Paris: P. Jannet, 1855). (Hereafter cited as O.C.).

⁴⁸Charles Augustin de Sainte-Beuve, Causeries de lundi (Paris: Garnier Frères, 1852-1862), XII, 146.

with "ayant verve, mouvement et une sorte d'originalité,"⁴⁹ he proceeds through liberal quotations from Tallement and Boileau to concur with their judgments of the poet. Considering the poetry itself, he has this to say of La Solitude: Si nous nous demandons aujourd'hui, en relisant "la Solitude," ce que vaut pour nous cette ode et quel rang elle mérite dans le trésor lyrique de notre poésie, nous trouvons qu'elle a perdu. Elle ne satisfait point l'homme de sensibilité et de goût"⁵⁰ He continues from this point with an analysis of the poem, indicating the various details which he finds particularly distasteful and echoing Boileau's disapproval. He rejects finally the premise of the poem, saying: "Je n'y trouve ni la solitude du chrétien et du saint . . . ni la solitude du poète et du sage; ni celle de l'amant mélancolique et tendre; ni celle du peintre exact et rigoureux. Il n'y mêle aucune idée morale ni aucun sentiment fait pour toucher, et lorsqu'il s'écrie en terminant 'Oh! que j'aime la Solitude! C'est l'élément des bons esprits,' il ne l'a pas suffisamment prouvé"⁵¹ Sainte-Beuve's viewpoint is essentially that of a Romantic, yet he concurs with the Classics in his ultimate evaluation of the poet and remarks that Saint-Amant, like the other "grotesques de

⁴⁹Sainte-Beuve, XII, 146.

⁵⁰Sainte-Beuve, XII, 147.

⁵¹Sainte-Beuve, XII, 151.

l'art" of his time, was eclipsed by the era of Louis XIV and its brilliance.⁵²

Paul Durand-Lapie published in 1898 a book devoted to the life, work and times of Saint-Amant.⁵³ Although its projected scope far exceeds its actual content, Durand-Lapie's study provides a more extensive biography of the poet than does the Livet edition and includes some additional poetry. The author's approach is primarily biographical with quotations from the verse of Saint-Amant interspersed in the text to verify certain points. More recent scholarship has superseded the work of Durand-Lapie and has corrected some of his errors. It remains noteworthy, however, as the first truly scholarly investigation of the work of Saint-Amant and the baroque period in general.

The nineteenth-century rediscovery of Saint-Amant and the subsequent studies of his life and work have led to the production of a quantity of twentieth-century scholarship. In addition to numerous publications dealing with specific aspects of Saint-Amant's poetry, there have appeared in recent years several definitive general studies of the poet and of his work. Françoise Gourier's Etude des oeuvres poétiques de Saint-Amant (1961) is the first fully documented

⁵² Sainte-Beuve, XII, 159.

⁵³ Paul Durand-Lapie, Un Académicien du XVII^e siècle: Saint-Amant, son temps, sa vie, ses poésies, 1594-1661 (Genève: Slatkine Reprints, 1970).

study of the complete works of the poet. Gourier catalogs the poetry according to eleven "genres d'inspiration,"⁵⁴ justifying her classifications with generous quotations from the poet. She notes the specific qualities of Saint-Amant's poetry which lend it to this type of classification and discusses his contribution to each of these "genres" in the development of seventeenth-century French poetry. Because of its thorough documentation of previous scholarship and its useful system of classification, this work provides a basis for study of nearly any aspect of the poetry of Saint-Amant.

In 1964, Jean Lagny, the most outstanding of all Saint-amantists, issued a new biography of the poet. Entitled Le Poète Saint-Amant: essai sur sa vie et ses oeuvres, it follows the basic format of the Durand-Lapie work of over sixty years earlier. Lagny, however, denounces Durand-Lapie in his preface, attacking his method, his scholarship, his lack of documentation, and his general ignorance of the subject itself. He insists that the earlier work did more harm than good, in that it perpetuated a highly exaggerated if not totally false portrait of the poet. Of his own work, Lagny says: "Certes, la figure de Saint-Amant telle qu'elle ressortira des pages qui vont suivre sera souvent ramenée à des proportions moins avantageuses . . . mais il faut le prendre comme il fut . . . Ces considerations ne doivent

⁵⁴Gourier, p. 15.

nullement empêcher, cela va de soit, de regarder Saint-Amant comme une des plus authentiques poètes de son temps, pour ne pas dire un des plus grands."⁵⁵ Since the life of the poet will not concern us specifically in this study, it should not be necessary to discuss the particular errors of the earlier biography and their subsequent corrections. It should be noted, however, that Lagny elevates the poet's personal demeanor to a somewhat higher position than that to which Boileau had relegated him. As for Saint-Amant's social position, Lagny confirms that it was not quite so exalted as Gautier had believed. This "normalization" of the man complements the appreciation of the poet, and Lagny's work ultimately achieves its goal of rectifying and clarifying the long-misunderstood life of Saint-Amant.

More than a century of curiosity and scholarship surrounding the life and work of Saint-Amant culminated between 1967 and 1971 with the publication of a critical edition of his works. Edited by Jean Lagny and Jacques Bailbé, the four volumes contain succinct biographical and historical introductions, chronologies of the poems, notes on variants among manuscripts, explanations of obscure references within the poetry and full indexes. It is regrettable that the editors found it impossible to include the Moyse sauvé, a modern text of which is so urgently wanting, and it is hoped that an

⁵⁵Lagny, p. 8.

edition of the poem conforming to the standards, if not to the format, of the new Oeuvres will appear. However incomplete, the Lagny-Bailbé edition represents the renewed appreciation within the twentieth century of Saint-Amant and of his work.

NATURE IN THE POETRY OF SAINT-AMANT

Saint-Amant, like other poets of the baroque tradition, was much opposed to Malherbian influences on French poetry. Although he left no unified work on literary theory, certain statements contained in his prefaces and in his poetry itself reveal some of his ideas concerning poetic composition. In the "Advertissement" to the first edition of his works, he minimizes the importance that Malherbe had accorded the imitation of Greek and Latin poets, confessing his own ignorance of the classical languages: "Dieu mercy, ny mon Grec, ny mon Latin me feront jamais passer pour Pedant."⁵⁶ The poet may instead find his inspiration among modern writers, though originality is superior to any imitation. The poet should look therefore to the immediate reality of the world around him and to his own experiences for the best sources of poetic inspiration.⁵⁷ Saint-Amant's intention was to create a diversity in the content of poetry by widening the scope of its substance. He also believed that a variety in content could be enhanced by a variety in poetic expression: "Il faut sçavoir mettre le sel, le poivre & l'ail à propos en cette Sauce, autrement au lieu de chatouiller le goust . . . on ne touchera."⁵⁸ Varied expression cannot be realized

⁵⁶Oeuvres, I, 21.

⁵⁷Oeuvres, I, 19-24.

⁵⁸Oeuvres, II, 156.

through a restriction of vocabulary, as Malherbe would have, but rather through a wide gleaning from many sources for one's language elements. The writer is cautioned, however, not to take these liberties without first acquiring a full knowledge of the language: "Si l'on n'est Maistre absolu de la Langue . . . voire mesme jusques aux moindres vetilles, je n'y conseilleray jamais à personne de l'entreprendre. Je m'y suis pleû de tout temps, parce qu'aymant la liberté comme je fais, je veux mesme avoir mes coudées franches dans le langage."⁵⁹ Freedom in the matter of inspiration and versatility in expression have in the mind of Saint-Amant one aim: "Le principal but de la Poësie doit estre de plaire."⁶⁰ These statements qualify Saint-Amant, in terms of his own century, as an entirely "modern" poet and place him in the avant-garde of a debate which was to characterize French literary thought for nearly a quarter-century.⁶¹

Although Saint-Amant made no definite statement regarding the role of nature in poetic inspiration, or even his own sensibility for the natural world, a close examination of his poetry reveals a considerable quantity and variety of nature poetry. The appearance of natural elements

⁵⁹Oeuvres, II, 157.

⁶⁰Oeuvres, II, 155.

⁶¹La Querelle des Anciens et des Modernes (1687-1716). For a general discussion of this debate, see Yarrow, pp. 346-348.

in Saint-Amant's poetry certainly originated with his innate sensibility for the beauties of the natural world, but this sensibility must have been stimulated to a considerable degree by his broad experience. Probably more than any other poet of his day, Saint-Amant was a traveller, and he equated his experiences in the world with a formal education: "La diversité des choses merveilleuses que j'ay veuës dans mes Voyages, tant en l'Europe qu'en l'Afrique & en l'Amerique, jointe à la puissante inclination que j'ay euë dès ma Jeunesse à la Poësie m'ont bien valu un estude."⁶² He also used his background as a traveller to justify to some extent the quantity of natural elements included in his poetry: "Et je m'assure que ceux qui n'ont pas tant voyagé que moy, et qui ne sçavent pas toutes les raretez de la nature pour les avoir presque toutes vues comme j'ay fait, ne seront point marris que je leur en apprenne quelque particularité."⁶³ These statements also explain to some degree the poet's preoccupation with detail, that particular facet of his style which became a debated point among his critics.⁶⁴ Modern critics have also devoted much attention to nature in Saint-Amant's poetry and his ability to render realistic descriptions of natural scenes and phenomena. Françoise Courier,

⁶²Oeuvres, I, 21.

⁶³O.C., II, 146.

⁶⁴See notes 34 and 45 of this paper.

in particular, groups within her classification of his poetry a dozen poems under the rubric "Poèmes inspirés par la nature."⁶⁵ She fails to characterize, however, the importance of the use of natural elements throughout the entirety of Saint-Amant's work. Her classification provides, nevertheless, an excellent point of departure for the study of nature in his poetry.

Among the poems of Saint-Amant which are inspired by natural scenes or phenomena are found some which follow conventional patterns and others which are highly original. In "Le Palais de la volupté," for instance, Saint-Amant exhibits a conventional taste for order and control in his surroundings:⁶⁶

Icy la mesme Symmetrie
 A mis toute son industrie
 Pour faire en ce Bois escarté
 Le Palais de la Volupté.
 Jamais le vague Dieu de l'Onde,
 Ny celuy des clartez du Monde,
 N'entreprirent rien de plus beau,
 [On y voit]
 Tous les beaux traits que la Nature
 Admire dans l'Architecture,

 Tout y suit la raison supresme,
 Et le dessein en chaque part
 S'y rapport aux reigles de l'Art.⁶⁷

⁶⁵Gourier, pp. 169-183.

⁶⁶Cf. Malherbe, p. 225.

⁶⁷Oeuvres, I, 177-178. The subject of this poem is a "maison de plaisance" which belonged to Henri de Gondy, duc de Retz, Saint-Amant's patron, and was located at Princé. See "Notice" in Oeuvres, I, 177.

The bulk of this poem is concerned with interior settings and their representation, but in another poem, his "Sonnet à feu Monsieur Des-Yveteaux," Saint-Amant exhibits a similar taste for nature controlled in an exterior garden setting:

Que de ton beau Jardin les merveilles j'admire!
 Que tout ce qu'on voit, que tout ce qu'on sent
 A d'aymables rapports avec le doux accent
 De ce divin Cyseau qui chante et qui souspire!⁶⁸

There is nothing truly remarkable in this treatment void of tangible detail. The poet nevertheless reveals a sensibility for all the sensual elements, the sights, smells and sounds, inherent in an external natural environment. The particular visual characteristic of the scene which is most attractive to the poet is, interestingly, the disorder of the branches of the trees:

Que les tresors feuillus de ces rameaux divers,
 Formant un beau desordre en leurs ombrages vers,
 Me charment les esprits et me comblent de joye!⁶⁹

This passage more closely approaches true description, by virtue of the details of shade and color. Saint-Amant's ability to render visually realistic descriptions is better exemplified, however, in his poetry dealing with natural phenomena.

⁶⁸Oeuvres, III, 180. This walled garden was located in Paris itself, a possible explanation for Saint-Amant's attraction to its rustic aspects, which form a contrast to the more formal aspect of the city. It belonged to Nicolas Vauquelin des Yveteaux, a close friend of the poet. See "Notice" and note 7 in Oeuvres, III, 180.

⁶⁹Oeuvres, III, p. 181.

"Le Soleil levant" treats a favorite subject of poets of the era and begins with the usual apostrophe to the dawn personified as "Aurore:"

Jeune Deesse au teint vermeil,
 Que l'Orient revere,
 Aurore fille du Soleil,
 Qui nais devant ton Pere,
 Vien soudain me rendre le jour,⁷⁰
 Pour voir l'objet de mon amour.

Saint-Amant also introduces a traditional theme at this point, that is, his desire to see the coming of day in order also to see his beloved. This theme remains undeveloped, however, until the very end of the poem. Instead, there follows a series of tableaux in which various animals respond, each in its own way and for its own reasons, to the appearance of the sun:

L'Aigle dans une aire à l'escart
 Estendant son plumage,
 L'observe d'un fixe regard,
 Et luy rend humble hommage,
 Comme au feu le plus animé,
 Dont son oeil puisse estre charmé.

Le Chevreuil solitaire et doux
 Voyant sa clairté pure
 Briller sur les feuilles des houx,
 Et dorer leur verdure,
 Sans nulle crainte du Veneur,
 Tasche à luy faire quelque honneur.

Le Cygne joyeux de revoir
 Sa renaissante flamme,
 De qui tout semble recevoir
 Châque jour nouvelle ame,
 Voudroit pour chanter ce plaisir
 Que la Parque le vint saisir.

⁷⁰Oeuvres, II, 5-6.

Le Saulmon dont au renouveau
 Thetis est despourveuë,
 Nage doucement à fleur d'eau,
 Pour jouir de sa veuë,
 Et monstre au Pescheur indigent,
 Ses riches escailles d'argent.⁷¹

There is nothing truly original in this basically descriptive approach,⁷² but Saint-Amant succeeds in affecting the reader's imagination by introducing some rather unusual animals, the eagle and the salmon specifically, and by depicting them in fairly precise detail. These tableaux are representationally somewhat static, though each animal is captured in a relatively normal pose. The individual descriptions are certainly based on the poet's personal observations, but the scene as a whole is entirely imagined. It would be impossible to assemble naturally in the same field of vision all the animals and their habitats depicted in this passage. The effect of this melding of reality and imagination is a universality of scope in which man and his concerns form only a small part. The central interest of the poem is therefore the observably benevolent effect of a normal natural occurrence upon a variety of creatures. The poet depicts these effects through details drawn from his broad personal observations and combined in a highly imaginative fashion.

⁷¹Oeuvres, II, 10-11.

⁷²Cf. Viau, I, 13-15.

"La Pluye," by its depiction of the countryside and interest in peasant life, is linked with the pastoral tradition in poetry. The realism of the treatment of its subject, however, removes it from an expected conventionality. The subject of the poem is a sudden thunderstorm following a period of severe drought, and it is introduced with a description of the coming of the storm:

En fin la haute providence
 Qui gouverne à son gré le temps,
 Travaillant à nostre abondence,
 Rendra les Laboureurs contens:
 Sus, que tout le monde s'enfuye,
 Je voy de loing venir la pluye,
 Le ciel est noir de bout en bout;
 Et ses influences benignes
 Vont tant verser d'eau sur les Vignes,
 Que nous n'en boirons point du tout.⁷³

The beginning of the poem is characterized by a mood of anticipation, indicated by verbs in a future tense or mode. A certain tension is thus created around the idea of the impending storm and further accentuated by the rather ominous image of the sky "noir de bout en bout." An attitude of thankfulness and relief apparent in the first line of the poem is substantiated by the subsequent description of the parched countryside.

L'ardeur grilloit toutes les herbes,
 Et tel les voyoit consumer
 Qui n'eust pas creu tirer des gerbes
 Assez de grain pour en semer:
 Bref la terre en cette contrée,

⁷³Oeuvres, I, 137-138.

D'une beante soif outrée,
N'avoit souffert rien de pareil . . . 74

This attitude displays the poet's sympathy for the plight of the farmers, and introduces a human element which becomes the central interest of the poem. The poem closes with two remarkably realistic tableaux depicting some of the inhabitants of the countryside and their reactions to the downpour which has finally arrived:

Regarde à l'abry de ces Saules
Un Pelerin qui se tapit;
Le degout perce ses espales,
Mais il n'en a point de dépit:
Contemple un peu dans cette Allée
Thibaut à la mine hallée,
Marcher froidement par compas;
Le bon-homme sent telle joye,
Qu'encore que cette Eau le noye,
Si ne s'en osterat-il pas.

Voy delà dans cette campagne
Ces Vignerons tous transportez,
Sauter comme Genets d'Espagne,
Se demenants de tous costez:
Entens d'icy tes Domestiques
Entrecouper leurs chants rustiques
D'un frequent battement de mains;
Tous les coeurs s'en epanouissent,
Et les Bestes s'en réjoüissent,
Aussi bien comme les humains.⁷⁵

The substance of these tableaux is far removed from the static representationalism seen elsewhere in Saint-Amant's nature poetry. It constitutes instead an immediate reality filled with a quantity of activity to which the poet is an attendant witness. The verbs "regarde," "contemple," "voy"

⁷⁴ Oeuvres, I, 138.

⁷⁵ Oeuvres, I, 140-141.

and "entens" lend an air of spontaneity and invite the reader to share the scene more closely. They also draw his attention to the many sounds inherent in the scene as well as to the visual aspects.⁷⁶ Sustained throughout the poem is a tone of joyful exuberance, heightened by the vigorous quality of the verse itself.

Françoise Gourier believes that the realistic quality of the descriptions in Saint-Amant's poetry is often spoiled by the simultaneous appearance of lengthy mythological references and an overabundance of preciousness.⁷⁷ Her idea is exemplified to some degree in the two poems discussed directly above. The mythological beginning of "Le Soleil levant" has already been noted. In "La Pluye" also, Saint-Amant uses mythological references to characterize certain natural phenomena. A rainbow, for example, is depicted in this way:

Desja l'humide Iris estale
 Son beau demy-cercle d'opale 78
 Dedans le vague champ de l'Air.

Certainly "beau demy-cercle d'opale" perfectly and economically captures the curvilinear form, multi-colored aspect and prismatic quality of a rainbow. The reference to

⁷⁶Christopher D. Rolphe, Saint-Amant and the Theory of "Ut pictura poesis" (London: Modern Humanities Research Association, 1972), p. 23.

⁷⁷Gourier, p. 172.

⁷⁸Oeuvres, I, 138.

"l'humide Iris," especially in the context of an operative force, seriously distracts from an ultimately realistic effect. The most obvious use of preciousness within these two poems is found in "Le Soleil levant" where a butterfly is represented as a messenger of love:

Là dans nos jardins embellis
 De mainte rare chose,
 Il porte de la part du Lys
 Un baiser à la Rose,
 Et semble en Messager discret,
 Luy dire un amoureux secret.⁷⁹

This treatment contrasts somewhat with the depiction of the other animals, which are captured in a more contemplative attitude, and effects a shift in the established tone of the poem. This transition actually creates a mood more accommodating to the love theme recurring at the end of the poem. These elements of mythology and preciousness are not quite so evident, however, in the poetry of Saint-Amant which is less associated with conventional genres and more original in inspiration.

As a group, the four sonnets depicting the seasons can be classed among the most originally inspired of Saint-Amant's nature poems. Although the subject and form of these poems are traditional, they generally surpass an expected conventionality by virtue of their unusual settings. The first sonnet, "Le Printemps des environs de Paris," is

⁷⁹Oeuvres, II, 12.

the exception. Its focus is on the season most frequently encountered in poetry, and its setting is unsurprising:

Zephyre a bien raison d'estre amoureux de Flore;
C'est le plus bel Objet dont il puisse jouyr,
On void à son éclat les soins s'esvanouyr
Comme les libertez devant l'Oeil que j'adore.

Qui ne seroit ravy d'entendre sous l'Aurore
Les Miracles volans qu'au Bois je viens d'ouyr?
J'en sens avec les fleurs mon coeur s'espanouyr,
Et mon Luth negligé leur veut respondre encore.

L'herbe sousrit à l'Air d'un air voluptueux;
J'apperçoy de ce Bord fertile et tortueux
Le doux feu du Soleil flatter le sein de l'Onde.

Le soir et le matin la Nuict baise le Jour;
Tout ayme, tout s'embraze, et je croy que le Monde
Ne renaist au Printemps que pour mourir d'amour.⁸⁰

The description is characterized throughout by elements of mythology and preciousness. Two natural details commonly associated with springtime, the breezes and the flowers, are introduced in the first line by a mere reference to their mythological names. Furthermore, they are not depicted visually, but rather in an amorous attitude. This is a typically précieux tendency which is maintained throughout the poem, as each natural element is captured in a reciprocally "loving" relationship with another. Saint-Amant similarly expresses in the seventh and eighth lines the conventional feelings of rejuvenation normally associated with this season. The addition of the personal element, "mon Luth negligé," reveals a certain sincerity which

⁸⁰ Oeuvres, III, 147-148.

offsets somewhat the pervading artificiality of the poem. In effect, the poet is expressing a feeling of harmony and communion with the natural world. His method of presentation suggests that he is not interested in painting a realistic scene, but rather in creating an impression based on his own sentimental attitude toward this season.

In the second sonnet, "L'Esté de Rome," Saint-Amant is more directly concerned with the depiction of a physical reality:

Quelle estrange Chaleur nous vient icy brûler?
Sommes-nous transportez sous la Zône-torride?
Ou quelqu'autre imprudent a-t'il lasché la bride
Aux lumineux Chevaux qu'on voit estinceler?

La Terre en ce Climat, contrainte à panteler,
Sous l'ardeur des rayons, s'entre-fend et se ride,
Et tout le Champ romain n'est plus qu'un sable aride
D'où nulle fresche humeur ne se peut exhaler.

Les furieux regards de l'aspre Canicule
Forcent mesme le Tibre à perir comme Hercule,
Dessous l'ombrage sec des joncs, et des roseaux:

Sa qualité de Dieu ne l'en sgauroit deffendre;
Et le Vase natal, d'où s'escoule ses eaux,
Sera l'Urne funeste, où l'on mettra sa cendre.⁸¹

In this poem, the wholly artificial elements are limited to the mythological references in the first quatrain (to the sun as a chariot), in the tenth line (to the demi-god Hercules) and in the last tercet (to the river Tiber as a god). The classical allusion appearing at the very end of the poem is rather artificial in itself, but its aptness in

⁸¹Oeuvres, II, 122-123.

this particular poem renders quite a pleasing effect. The remainder of the poem is devoted to the depiction of the intensity of the hot weather. The earth appears to be a trapped victim unable to breathe the stifling air. The heat is like a strange invader whose vicious look is sufficient to crack and warp the terrain and dry up the rivers. There are amazingly few visual details in this presentation, the paradoxical "ombrage sec des joncs, et des roseaux" being the most effective. The poet succeeds nevertheless in creating a very realistic environment through the highly suggestive quality of his vocabulary and through the indirect personification of the earth and the heat. In this way, he is able to transmit to the reader the total atmosphere of the scene. In effect, the reader is made to "feel" through suggestion the oppressive heat of the Roman dog days.

Saint-Amant concentrates on creating a visually luxurious tableau in the next sonnet, the title itself, "L'Autonne des Canaries," drawing the reader's attention to its exotic setting:

Voycy les seuls Côtiaux, voycy les seuls Valons
Où Bacchus et Pomone ont estably leur gloire;
Jamais le riche honneur de ce beau territoire
Ne ressentit l'effort des rudes Aquilons.

Les Figues, les Muscas, les Pesches, les Melons
Y couronnent ce Dieu qui se delecte à boire;
Et les nobles Palmiers sacrez à la Victoire,
S'y courbent sous des fruits qu'au Miel nous esgalons.

Les Cannes au doux suc, non dans les Marescages,
Mais sur des flancs de Roche y forment des boccages
Dont l'Or plein d'Ambroisie éclatte et monte aux Cieux.

L'Orange en mesme jour y meurit et boutonne;
 Et durant tous les Mois on peut voir en ces Lieux
 Le Printemps et l'Esté confondus en L'Autonne.⁸²

The first quatrain establishes the basis for the description which follows by creating a calm tropical environment undisturbed by the frigid winds of colder climates. The central stanzas of the poem basically comprise a catalog of tropical plants and fruits of which the names alone conjure a scene of abundant forms, colors, textures, odors and tastes. This richness is amplified in the last tercet which details the rapid development of the fruit as well as its simultaneous appearance in several stages of maturation. The poet chooses to render most precisely the taste of the various fruits, adding a dimension of sensual gratification to complete the idea of the plenitude of nature in the tropical world.

Few poets have expressed an appreciation for wintertime, and none in a more enticing manner than Saint-Amant in

"L'Hiver des Alpes:"

Ces atomes de feu, qui sur la Neige brillent,
 Ces estincelles d'or, d'azur, et de cristal,
 Dont l'Hiver, au Soleil, d'un lustre oriental
 Pare ses Cheveux blancs, que les Vents esparpillent:

Ce beau Cotton du Ciel, dequoy les monts s'habillent,
 Ce pavé transparant, fait du second metal,
 Et cet Air net, et sain, propre à l'esprit vital,
 Sont si doux à mes yeux, que d'aise ils en pétillent.

⁸²Oeuvres, III, 149-150.

Cette Saison me plaist, j'en ayme la froideur,
 Sa Robbe d'innocence, et de pure splendeur,
 Couvre en quelque façon les crimes de la Terre:

Au prix du dernier chaut ce temps m'est gracieux;
 Et si la Mort m'attrappe en ce chemin de verre,
 Je ne sçaurois avoir qu'un Tombeau précieux.⁸³

The poem opens with a brilliant description of the dazzling effect of sunlight striking the fallen snow and highlighting individual snowflakes which glisten prismatically against the soft white background. Throughout the poem a frigid atmosphere is created by the suggestive quality of the vocabulary. "Cristal," "lustre," "pavé transparent," and "chemin de verre" reproduce the hard, reflective aspect of the ice; the phrases "d'or" and "du second metal" suggest not only the color of these metals, but also the cold, metallic sheen of the snow itself. The poet's approach to this season and locale is quite personal. He finds this frozen environment healthful and invigorating. Even the prospect of death, a concept frequently associated with winter, holds a certain attraction for him.

Each of these sonnets forms a complete tableau which succeeds on its own merits, but which can be best appreciated in the context of the group. Within this group of poems, there are striking contrasts not only in the depicted locales, but also in the general psychological effects upon the reader. Saint-Amant succeeds in capturing a particular

⁸³Oeuvres, II, 124-125.

quality inherent in each season: the sensuality of spring, the oppressiveness of summer, the abundance of autumn, and the invigorating chill of winter. He accomplishes this by depicting each season in a locale where it is displayed at its ultimate and by employing a highly evocative vocabulary which communicates certain atmospheric qualities as well as the visual elements of each scene. The originality of this approach has as its source the poet's broad experience as a traveller. Coupled with his attention to careful observation, it allows him to depict each subject with considerable precision in order to achieve an optimum effect.

In the works discussed thus far, nature functions both as the poet's source of inspiration and as the subject of the poetry itself. These works constitute true nature poetry and display Saint-Amant's acute sensibility to the beauty of the external world. Gourier fails to note, however, that this sensibility is in evidence in much of Saint-Amant's poetry which is not directly inspired by natural scenes or phenomena. In these poems, nature has secondary but nevertheless important functions. In her chapter entitled "Poèmes gastronomiques et bachiques,"⁸⁴ Gourier groups a number of poems which reveal Saint-Amant's hedonistic tendencies. Two of these poems are interesting from the point of view of the natural elements found in them.

⁸⁴ Gourier, pp. 85-97.

The first of these is "Le Melon," a poem of over three hundred lines devoted almost entirely to the depiction of a mythological banquet on Mount Olympus. The poem opens, however, in the reality of the poet's own room:

Quelle odeur sens-je en cette Chambre?
 Quel doux parfum de Musc et d'Ambre
 Me vient le Cerveau resjouir⁸⁵
 Et tout le Coeur espanouir?

It is immediately obvious that the poet possesses a remarkable olfactory sense. The unknown odor pervades his whole being and initiates a quest for its source which is ultimately rewarded:

C'est un MELON, où la Nature,
 Par une admirable structure,
 A voulu graver à l'entour
 Mille plaisans chiffres d'Amour

 O Dieux, que l'esclat qu'il me lance,
 M'en confirme bien l'excellance!
 Qui vit jamais un si beau teint?
 D'un jaune-sanguin il se peint:
 Il est massif jusques au centre,
 Il a peu de grains dans le ventre;
 Et ce peu-là, je pense encor
 Que ce soient autant de grains d'or:
 Il est sec, son escorce est mince,
 Bref, c'est un vray manger de Prince.

 Il rend une douce liqueur,
 Qui me va confire le coeur,
 Mon appetit se rassasie
 De pure et nouvelle Ambroisie;
 Et mes sens, par le goust seduits,⁸⁶
 Au nombre d'un sont tous reduits.

Except for the précieux representation of the convolutions of its rind as "chiffres d'amour," the melon is pictured in

⁸⁵Oeuvres, II, 14.

⁸⁶Oeuvres, II, 15-17.

a highly realistic manner. Every detail as to its color, odor, texture, taste and general appearance is accurately and tangibly noted. The reader is brought into close sensual contact with the fruit, he is invited to share in the poet's self-indulgence, and his appetite is whetted for the extravagance of the Olympian feast which occupies the remainder of the poem. In this poem, the natural element functions as a realistic point of departure for a purely fantastical recitation.

The inspiration for the poem, "La Vigne," comes from Saint-Amant's enjoyment of wine, probably his favorite natural commodity. The setting is a country home where he and some of his friends have gathered to sample the local product. The poem is addressed to the owner of the property:

Je n'ay rien treuvé de si beau
Comme ta maison de Coybeau.
.....
Non pas pour ces claires fontaines,
Qui par des routes incertaines
Se fuyant et se poursuivant,
Sous l'ombrage frais et mouvant
De mille arbres qu'elles font croistre
Et qu'en elles on voit paroistre,
Accordent au chant des oyseaux
Le doux murmure de leurs eaux:
Non pas pour ces longues Allées,
Où de branches entremeslées
De Lauriers, de Charmes, de Buis,
De Cyprés, de fleurs, et de fruits,
Se forment des murailles vives,
Qui par leurs distances captives
Font des chemins plus gracieux
Que n'est celui qu'on voit aux Cieux:
Non pas pour ce divin Parterre,
Où le soing de la Nature enserre
Cent mille fleurs, qu'à voir briller

Quand elle veut s'en habiller,
 On prendroit pour des pierreries,
 Qui des drogues les plus cheries,
 Dont l'odorat est amateur,
 Auroient l'agreable senteur:
 Mais pour ce Costau de Vigne,
 Qui seul est de ma Muse digne,
 Et que je veux si bien louer,
 Que Bacchus le puisse advouer. ⁸⁷

The poet intentionally contradicts himself in this passage. By detailing the features of the property which supposedly least appeal to him, those which are not "digne de sa muse," Saint-Amant succeeds in creating a scene of sensual luxury unequaled anywhere in his poetry. Every nuance of movement, sound, fragrance and color inherent in the locale is noted by the poet. He interweaves them into a rich, harmonious tableau which provides a bountiful setting for the central activity of the poem. The luxuriousness of this scene enhances if not inspires the poet's indulgence in wine-drinking. He concludes that the virtues of the vineyard should be praised not by his verse, but by the tasting of its product and the singing of a song.

In the above poems, nature virtually assumes the role of an accomplice to man's sensual indulgences. It provides not only a congenial setting in which he can enjoy himself, but also the material source for his physical gratification.

⁸⁷ Oeuvres, I, 250-252. This poem is addressed to Jean Troussier, seigneur de la Gabetièrre et de Pontmenard, whose house at Coëbo (Coybeau) Saint-Amant visited in 1627. See "Notice" and note 8 in Oeuvres, I, 250.

Elsewhere in Saint-Amant's poetry, nature serves to sustain man in less hedonistic endeavors. Two poems contained in Courier's chapter, "Poésies amoureuses,"⁸⁸ show man in relation to his world on a more emotional level. The short poem, "Plainte sur la mort de Sylvie," is an extended apostrophe in which the poet addresses a passing stream:

Ruisseau qui cours après toy-mesme,
 Et qui te fuis toy-mesme aussi,
 Arreste un peu ton Onde icy,
 Pour escouter mon dueil extremesme;
 Puis quand tu l'auras sceu, va-t'en dire à la Mer
 Qu'elle n'a rien de plus amer.⁸⁹

The source of the poet's sorrow, which he declares more bitter than the ocean, is the death of his beloved at an early age. The stream cannot stop its course, as he has implored it to do, nor does it offer him any consolation. He can only endure his suffering and leave the stream to continue in its course:

Adieu Ruisseau, repren ton cours,
 Qui non plus que moy ne repose;
 Que si par mes regrets j'ay bien pû t'arrester,
 Voila des pleurs pour te haster.⁹⁰

This treatment is highly sentimental and is based on a proposition which is too contrived to make it touching. The exaggerated quality of the final image especially negates any poignancy inherent in the theme of youthful

⁸⁸Gourier, 69-83.

⁸⁹Oeuvres, I, 152.

⁹⁰Oeuvres, I, 153.

death.⁹¹ Nature, nevertheless, has a specific thematic function in the poem. It is at once a reflection of the poet's mental and emotional state and a mute witness to his suffering.

In "La Plainte de Tirsis," the grief-stricken protagonist similarly seeks a refuge in nature:

Dans l'horreur d'un Bois solitaire,
Où malgré l'oeil du jour, regne en tout temps la nuit,
TIRSIS, loing du Monde qu'il fuit,
Ne pouvant plus se taire
Chantoit en pleurs, le doux et triste Sort
Qui le livre à la Mort.⁹²

Tirsis' "doux et triste Sort" is an unrequited love from which he is literally dying. Nature, however, does not remain exactly mute toward his suffering:

Comme il achevoit cette plainte,
Un long cry de Hybou, douloureux et tremblant,
D'un mortel effort l'accablant,
Le fit paslir de crainte;
Et maint Aspic siflant autour de luy
Redoubla son ennuy.⁹³

The sounds which surround him in the woods where he has sought to escape the troubles of the world only intensify his already agitated state. Similarly, he can only recognize in the visual aspects of his surroundings those which symbolize his inevitable fate:

⁹¹Bailbé questions Saint-Amant's seriousness in this poem, suggesting that the exaggerations constitute a possible parody. See note 18, Oeuvres, I, 153.

⁹²Oeuvres, II, 127.

⁹³Oeuvres, II, 128.

Le tronc noir et sec d'un Erable,
 Par le courroux du Ciel foudroyé depuis-peu,
 Ne luy presageoit en son feu
 Qu'une fin miserable:
 Tous les Objets y sembloient conspirer,
 Et luy la desirer.⁹⁴

The charred trunk of a maple tree struck by lightning symbolizes for Tirsis his own life burned up by the fire of his passion. In this poem, Saint-Amant selects the more hostile aspects of a deserted forest to depict the tormenting thoughts and feelings of man alone in a troubled state. The natural world, like life itself, often contains unpleasant aspects.

Much of Saint-Amant's contemplative poetry is also based on the idea of retreat into nature. In "La Solitude,"⁹⁵ the poet is alone in an isolated place:

O que j'ayme la Solitude!
 Que ces lieux sacrez à la Nuit,
 Esloignez du monde et du bruit,
 Plaisent à mon inquietude!⁹⁶

He finds solace for his troubled spirit in this quiet, deserted spot. He also feels a certain harmony with the many physical aspects of his surroundings, which he depicts with considerable detail. For example, he gives this

⁹⁴Oeuvres, II, 129.

⁹⁵Gourier includes this poem in her chapter, "Poèmes inspirés par la nature" (pp. 176-182). We feel that the largeness of its theme separates it from the purely representational poetry which exemplifies the other poems classed under this rubric, and have thus classed it as contemplative poetry.

⁹⁶Oeuvres, I, 33-34.

description of a tidal marsh:

Que j'ayme ce Marests paisible!
 Il est tout bordé d'aliziers,
 D'aulnes, de saules, et d'oziers,
 A qui le fer n'est point nuisible!

 De pipeaux, de joncs, et de glais,
 Où l'on voit sauter les grenouilles,
 Qui de frayeur s'y vont cacher
 Si tost qu'on veut s'en approcher.

Là, cent mille Oyseaux aquatiques
 Vivent, sans craindre en leur repos,
 Le Giboyer fin, et dispos
 Avec ses mortelles pratiques;

Jamais l'Esté, ny la froidure
 N'ont veu passer dessus cette eau
 Nulle charrette, ny batteau
 Depuis que l'un et l'autre dure.
 Jamais Voyageur alteré
 N'y fit servir sa main de tasse;
 Jamais Chevreuil desespéré
 N'y finit sa vie à la chasse;
 Et jamais le traistre hameçon⁹⁷
 N'en fit sortir aucun poisson.

Saint-Amant notes with his usual exactness the varieties of vegetation surrounding the pond and the types of animals living there. The idyllic quality of this setting is heightened by the poet's suggestion of its having remained unchanged by time and undisturbed by humanity. The sea is also visible to the poet. Saint-Amant, one of the few poets of his day who appreciated the sea,⁹⁸ captures its ever-changing aspects:

⁹⁷Oeuvres, I, 37-39.

⁹⁸See Gourier, p. 178.

Que c'est une chose agreable
 D'estre sur le bord de la Mer,
 Quand elle vient à se calmer
 Apres quelque orage effroyable!

Tantost, l'onde broüillant l'arene,
 Murmure et fremit de courroux,
 Se roullant dessus les cailloux
 Qu'elle apporte, et qu'elle r'entraîne.

Tantost, la plus claire du monde,
 Elle semble un miroir flottant,
 Et nous represente à l'instant
 Encore d'autres Cieux sous l'onde . . . 99

The sky reflected on the surface of the calm water and the gentle rhythms of the waves washing against the stones transmit the peacefulness of the sea after the storm. The poet finds this serene aspect of nature intellectually and imaginatively stimulating:

Je ne cherche que les deserts,
 Où rêvant tout seul, je m'amuse
 A des discours assez diserts
 De mon Genie avec la Muse

O que j'ayme la Solitude!
 C'est l'Element des bons Esprits,
 C'est par elle que j'ay compris
 L'Art d'Apollon sans nulle estude . . . 100

The central idea of "La Solitude" is closely linked with Saint-Amant's sensibility to nature. He believes that a self-imposed isolation within a peaceful, natural setting can be a vital source of inspiration to the creative powers of man.

⁹⁹Oeuvres, I, 44-46.

¹⁰⁰Oeuvres, I, 46-47.

The inspiration for "Le Contemplateur" is even more directly philosophical than that seen in "La Solitude." The subject of the poem centers on Saint-Amant's reflections during a walk through surroundings similar to those in the previous poem. As he views the various aspects of the natural locale, his thoughts turn to a philosophical explanation of the world, and he develops a sense of direct communion with the cosmos:

Tantost faisant agir mes sens
 Sur des sujets de moindre estofe,
 De marche en autre je descens
 Dans les termes du Philosofo:
 Nature n'a point de secret,
 Que d'un soin libre, mais discret,
 Ma curiosité ne sonde,
 Ses cabinets me sont ouvers,
 Et dans ma recherche profonde 101
 Je loge en moy tout l'Univers.

The marvels of the universe can, in fact, be seen in nature's minutiae. The contemplation of a firefly, for instance, draws this exclamation from the poet:

O bon Dieu! m'escriay-je alors,
 Que ta puissance est nompareille,
 D'avoir en un si petit corps
 Fait une si grande merveille!
 O feu! qui tousjours allumé,
 Brusles sans estre consumé! 102

This exclamation reveals a religious sentiment on the part of the poet, and the poem develops along purely religious lines as the natural details remind Saint-Amant of various biblical

101 Oeuvres, I, 53.

102 Oeuvres, I, 59.

passages. The spectacle of the sea, for instance, conjures in his mind a vision of the Flood:

Là, par fois consultant les Eaux
 Du sommet d'une roche nuë,
 Où pour voir voler les oyseaux
 Il faut que je baisse la veuë

Là dessus me representant
 Les tristes effets du Deluge,
 Quand au premier logis flotant
 Le genre humain eut son refuge,
 Je fains un portrait à mes yeux
 Du bon Noé chery des Cieux¹⁰³

Similarly, the sunrise reminds him of the Creation:

Je l'observe au sortir des flos,
 Sous qui la nuit, estant enclos,
 Il sembloit estre en sepulture;
 Et voyant son premier rayon,
 Beny l'Autheur de la Nature,¹⁰⁴
 Dont il est comme le crayon.

Through a rapid association of ideas based entirely on the image of the sun, Saint-Amant relates the second coming of Christ, the final judgment of mankind, and the Apocalypse. This long, highly detailed and phantasmagoric vision occupies the largest section of the poem and constitutes its climax. It culminates with the depiction of the dissolution of the planet in which the sun is the operative force:

Je croy que le haut Element
 Ne fait desja de tout le Monde
 Qu'un Globe de feu seulement.

¹⁰³Oeuvres, I, 51-52.

¹⁰⁴Oeuvres, I, 63.

Les Estoilles tombent des Cieux,
 Les flammes devorent la terre,
 Le Mongibel est en tous lieux,
 Et par tout gronde le tonnerre:
 La Salemandre est sans vertu;
 L'Abeste passe pour festu,
 La Mer brusle comme eau-de-vie,
 L'Air n'est plus que souffre allumé,
 Et l'Astre dont l'Aube est suivie
 Est par soy-mesme consumé.

.....

L'unique Oyseau meurt pour tousjours,
 La Nature est exterminée,
 Et le Temps achevant son cours
 Met fin à toute destinée . . .¹⁰⁵

This passage is an excellent example of Saint-Amant's exceptional ability to develop a complex narrative of multiple interest around a single image.

The inspiration for Saint-Amant's longest poetic endeavor, the Moyse sauvé, is directly biblical. The natural details in this "idyle héroïque" appear in various descriptive passages and serve to underscore or enrich certain points in the narrative. The story of the infant Moses is set in ancient Egypt, and the natural aspects of this setting attract considerable attention from the poet. A section of the Nile River, for example, is given this treatment:

Une branche du Nil, avec art menagée,
 Et d'arbres immortels en tout temps ombragée,
 Isole une prairie où les plus rares fleurs,
 Faisant briller l'esmail des plus vives couleurs,
 Presentent aux regards sur la beauté de l'herbe,
 Tout ce qu'ont nos jardins d'exquis et de superbe.

¹⁰⁵Oeuvres, I, 67-68.

.
 Parmy tous les tresors qu'on voit s'espanouyr,
 Et dont le teint divers peut l'air mesme esblouyr,
 La tulipe sans prix, bizarre et merueilleuse,
 Y faisoit admirer sa richesse orgueilleuse.
 La gentille anemone au lustre diapré,
 Où d'un sang pur et doux le lait est empourpré,
 Et l'oeillet, et la rose, y montroyent leur peinture
 Par la profusion de la seule nature;
 Et de mille autres fleurs les charmes innocens
 Y donnoyent au soleil leur baume et leur encens.¹⁰⁶

The poet presents a scene profuse with a vegetation of which the multiple colors and fragrances are intensified by the sun's brilliance and warmth. This tableau forms a rich background of local color and creates an exotic atmosphere which heightens the interest of the narrative.

Occasionally, nature becomes more closely involved with the central activity of the poem. The famous scene depicting the parting of the Red Sea in which various marine animals peer in astonishment at the passing Hebrews has already been noted.¹⁰⁷ In another passage, Saint-Amant attributes human qualities to plant life as well:

Dans la verte espaisseur de ces fragiles plantes
 Qui pousoyent hors du Nil leurs testes chancelantes,
 S'entr'ouvroit par contours une espece de sein,
 Qu'un favorable sort offroit comme à dessein
 De recevoir l'enfant, et garder que sur l'onde
 Le courant ne rendist sa barque vagabonde;¹⁰⁸

In this passage, the poet imbues nature with a sympathetic, almost sentient ability in order to arouse similar feelings

¹⁰⁶ O.C., II, 313.

¹⁰⁷ See note 34 of this paper.

¹⁰⁸ O.C., II, 163.

within the reader. Consequently, the somewhat emotional impact of the narrative is substantially augmented. A similar effect upon the reader is generated when the human situation is compared to an analogous event in the natural world. The apprehension of Jacobel, Moses' mother, on the prospect of abandoning her child is described in this way:

Telle que dans l'horreur d'une forest espesse
 Une biche craintive, et que la soif oppresse,
 Quitte à regret son fan, depuis peu mis au jour,
 Quand pour chercher à boire aux fosses d'alentour,
 Ayant au moindre bruit les oreilles tendues,
 On la voit s'avancer à jambes suspendues,
 Faire un pas, et puis deux, et soudain revenir,
 Et de l'objet aymé montrant le souvenir,
 Montrer en mesme temps, par ses timides gestes,
 Le Soupçon et l'effroy des images funestes
 Qui semblent l'agiter pour autruy seulement:
 Telle fut Jacobel en son esloignement.¹⁰⁹

The hesitating step of the doe, its furtive glances and its seeming attempt to retain mentally the appearance of its fawn are touchingly familiar. They transmit perfectly through comparison Jacobel's intense concern for the child Moses in his vulnerable state. Malherbe may have been partially correct in his opinion that the details in Moyse sauvé interrupt the narrative and spoil the grandeur of the theme. The above examples indicate, however, that they are more often than not a vitalizing accessory to the narrative.

In most of the remainder of Saint-Amant's work, natural elements appear to a negligible extent. When they do appear,

¹⁰⁹O.C., II, 163.

they generally fail to substantiate meaningfully the overall effect of the poem. This absence is mainly due to the types of poetry represented. The "Poèmes de circonstances"¹¹⁰ are concerned with events which are associated with the poet's personal life, or have an historical interest. Similarly, the "Epîtres familières," which are addressed to his friends, detail personal experiences of the poet or express his ideas on contemporary affairs. The "Poèmes d'inspiration satiriques" and the "Poèmes burlesques" are mainly concerned with a humorous depiction of seventeenth-century society and manners. The "Poèmes mythologiques" are merely imitations in verse of classical myths.

The "Poèmes fantaisistes" are of diverse inspiration, their unifying trait being their composition according to Saint-Amant's unrestrained imagination. Occasionally, a natural occurrence activates the poet's tendency to fantasize. In "Le Mauvais Logement," the poet is afflicted with insomnia, and an ordinary nocturnal scene becomes a true nightmare for him:

Au clair de la Lune qui luit
D'une lueur morne, et blafarde,
Mon œil tout effrayé regarde
Voltiger mille oyseaux de Nuit
.....

Maints faux rayons éparpillez
En fanfreluches lumineuses,

¹¹⁰The classification is Gourier's, as are those following in the paragraph.

Offrent cent chimeres hideuses
 A mes regards en vain sillez:
 Ma trop credule fantaisie
 En est si vivement saisie
 Qu'elle mesme se fait horreur; ¹¹¹

In this poem, ordinarily benign natural phenomena are metamorphosed by the poet's vivid imagination into a macabre and horrifying vision. In another of these poems, simply entitled "Caprice," an unseasonable rain provides the point of departure for Saint-Amant's expressing his personal feelings of frustration:

Tous nos Melons sont fricassez;
 Adieu les plaisirs de la bouche:
 Les Cieux contre nous courroucez
 Les font pourrir dessus la Couche.
 Il a tant pleu tout aujourd'huy
 Que mon coeur en seche d'ennuy,
 Pensant à ce desastre insigne;
 Et si cette abondance d'eau
 N'estoit ailleurs propre à la Vigne
 Je ferois jouer le cordeau. ¹¹²

The dilemma of a rain which spoils the melons but strengthens the grapevines is intentionally applicable to Saint-Amant's career as a poet. The poet, as changeable and unpredictable as the weather itself, cannot always meet with universal approval.

¹¹¹ Oeuvres, II, 146-149.

¹¹² Oeuvres, II, 141.

CONCLUSION

Although seventeenth-century French literature has generally been characterized by a dearth of nature poetry, a few poets of the earlier part of the century demonstrate a considerable sensibility to the external world. This trait is seen mainly among the poets associated with the baroque current, one of whom is Saint-Amant. Nature is a characteristic element in much of his poetry. It appears in a variety of forms and it has diverse functions.

The depiction of nature in Saint-Amant's poetry assumes conventional as well as more original forms. Natural elements sometimes appear conventionally as personifications drawn from classical mythology or are characterized by traditional formulas of preciousness. In his more original treatments of natural elements, Saint-Amant exhibits baroque tendencies. His realistic descriptions display an attention to detail. He accentuates not only the visual aspects of his subject, but often notes sounds, smells and tastes as well. The result is often a highly sensual effect. Sometimes Saint-Amant is more concerned with suggesting an atmosphere inherent in a particular scene in order to produce a generally psychological effect.

The functions of nature in Saint-Amant's poetry are equally varied. A quantity of his poetry can justifiably be classed as nature poetry. Nature functions here not only

as the source of inspiration, but also as the subject of the poems themselves. Although his method of presentation is basically description, Saint-Amant often details his personal response to his subject, a tendency opposed to the classical doctrine.

Natural elements also are found in much of Saint-Amant's poetry which is not directly inspired by natural scenes or phenomena. In his contemplative poetry, nature provides the inspiration for the development of philosophical themes. The poet appears here in a state of direct communion with nature. This leads him to consider a philosophical explanation of the world or to reflect upon the vastness of the cosmos. Sometimes, as in his love poetry, he sees in nature the reflection of his own internal state. He may also approach nature as a witness to his emotional suffering.

In Saint-Amant's less serious poetry, an observable natural occurrence often provides a realistic point of departure for a purely fantastical recitation. Similarly, the poet's imagination may metamorphose an observable reality into a macabre vision.

Sometimes, the poet is seen responding to nature on a more physical level. He sees in nature a pleasant environment in which to enjoy himself as well as a source for his physical gratification. In its lesser functions, nature serves as the setting for the central interest of the poem or as *décor* to enhance the narrative.

The use of nature throughout his work also reflects Saint-Amant's basic ideas on poetic composition. The diversity of forms and functions of nature in his poetry reflects his belief in the importance of variety in inspiration and poetic expression. He also disfavored imitation, preferring to derive his inspiration from personal observation. In his poetry, as Gautier noted, "La nature y est étudié immédiatement et non à travers les oeuvres des maîtres antérieurs."¹¹³ Gautier's general evaluation of Saint-Amant led to a renewed interest in his work during the romantic movement. The Romantics also appreciated his personal closeness to nature reflected in his philosophical and emotional response to the natural world which was similar to their own. This renewed interest in Saint-Amant during the nineteenth century led in turn to a critical re-evaluation of his poetry and the ultimate recognition in the twentieth century of Saint-Amant's contribution to the literature of the French Baroque.

¹¹³Gautier, p. 168.

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