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PREFACE

Since the early nineteenth century, and more particularly with the renewal of interest in seventeenth-century French baroque poets which dates from before the last war, a considerable number of studies have been devoted to the poetry of Marc-Antoine Girard de Saint-Amant (1594–1661). Almost without exception these works point to Saint-Amant's outstanding talent for writing descriptive, visually evocative verse. However, there has yet to appear a full-length study dealing with this one aspect and its many ramifications which I consider, and have attempted to prove, to be crucial to an understanding of the poet and his achievement.

I must at this point record my debt to Dr R. A. Sayce whose article 'Saint-Amant and Poussin' first crystallized some half-formulated ideas I was entertaining about the poet. The article in question drew my attention to the possibilities of linking Saint-Amant's descriptive poetry to the theory of *Ut pictura poesis.* I, in fact, begin with a discussion of this theory and its influence in the sixteenth, seventeenth and, to a lesser degree, eighteenth centuries. My intention, in so doing, is to indicate some of the problems which arise from too close an assimilation of poetry and painting. For this reason I feel justified in introducing the views of writers who lived after Saint-Amant. Following chapters examine the poet's work itself in the light of the various problems and facets of *Ut pictura poesis.*

Certain of my tactics need to be explained. In Chapter 3, which deals with the poet's difficulty in creating coherent static pictures, I have concentrated my attention on descriptions of the countryside. This for two reasons: firstly because, of the static scenes evoked by Saint-Amant, they are easily the most numerous; secondly because, in spite of a number of excellent works on the subject, more has yet to be said about *le sentiment de la nature* in seventeenth-century France. And in Chapter 5, treating the expression of emotion in Saint-Amant's poetry, I have concentrated solely on his vast work *Moyse Sauvé.* This is not because his other poems do not attempt to convey emotion — they do — but because this particular work offers the greatest opportunity to discover the poet's attitude and approach to emotion in poetry.

This dissertation was first undertaken in candidature for the degree of M.A. and I would like to record my gratitude to Professor R. C. Knight who first interested me in seventeenth-century poetry and who was a constant source of help, encouragement and valuable scholarship during my years as a post-

graduate student. My thanks, too, to the staff of the Cabinet des Estampes of the Bibliothèque Nationale in Paris for their good-humoured guidance during my researches there. In preparing this work for publication I have benefited much from the advice and consideration of Professors Barber and Ross, co-editors of this series. I should also like to thank Dr M. Freeman for his helpful and often stimulating suggestions. I am most grateful to Penny for her quiet encouragement and understanding. Finally, I wish to acknowledge my debt to the citizens of Great Britain who, all unwittingly, have been responsible for this work which I dedicate to my parents in recognition of their faith in me.

NOTES

In order to avoid a surplus of notes, references to Saint-Amant's poetry (*Œuvres complètes*, edited by Ch-L. Livet, 2 vols (Paris, 1855)) are given in the text itself — roman numerals indicating the volume, arabic numerals the page.

Notes to all chapters are printed towards the end of the book, preceding the Bibliography.

CHAPTER 1

UT PICTURA POESIS

It is clear that the relationship between the various arts, that is to say between literature, music, painting and sculpture, is extremely intricate, confused even, and dependent on numerous factors. The aims of the poet or the novelist, the musician and the painter may coincide or they may be radically opposed. Although the means used in the creation of a poem or a painting are different, themes are clearly often the same. Moreover, one art may inspire another: paintings can and do suggest themes for poetry, plays are frequently transformed into operas and so forth. There is, however, an aspect to the relationship between the arts that is both more fascinating and more important in many respects: at various times in the history of European civilization one art has endeavoured to reproduce the effects obtained by another art. So, for example, poets have attempted to write 'musical' verse — Verlaine striving to put his concept of 'de la musique avant toute chose' into practice. Or, and this is of most interest to us, certain poets have tried to achieve the effects obtained by the painter.

The sixteenth, seventeenth and eighteenth centuries saw this deliberate confusion of these two arts at its height. To begin with, one is struck by the widespread habit amongst writers of referring to poets as painters and to poetry as painting. In 1587 Ronsard wrote of Homer:

> Car s'il fait bouillir de l'eau en un chaudron, tu le verras premier fendre son bois, puis l'allumer & le soufler, puis la flame environner la panse du chaudron tout à l'entour, & l'escume de l'eau se blanchir & s'enfler à gros bouillons avec un grand bruit, & ainsi de toutes les autres choses. Car en telle *peinture*, ou plustot imitation de la nature consiste toute l'ame de la Poesie Heroïque, laquelle n'est qu'un enthousiasme & fureur d'éun jeune cerveau.[1]

The poet Théophile de Viau, in 1624, was to write:

> Pour laisser, avant que mourir,
> Les traits vivans d'une *peinture*
> Qui ne puisse jamais perir
> Qu'en la perte de la Nature,
> Je passe des crayons dorez
> Sur les lieux les plus reverez.[2]

In 1666 Louis Le Laboureur, discussing the *bienséances*, remarked:

> Il y a deux temps à garder, celui du héros & celui du poète, & je crois qu'il n'est pas mauvais quelquefois de faire un mélange de l'un avec l'autre . . . avec un tempérament si sage que cela adoucisse les traits de la *peinture* et ne les change pas.[3]

A few years later Racine had this to say:

> A la vérité j'avois travaillé sur des modèles qui m'avoient extrêmement soutenu dans la *peinture* que je voulois faire de la cour d'Agrippine et de Néron. J'avois copié mes personnages d'après le plus grand *peintre* de l'antiquité, je veux dire d'après Tacite.[4]

La Fontaine joined in this vogue for confusing terms:

> Je vais t'entretenir de moindres aventures
> Te tracer en ces vers de légères *peintures*.[5]

And in 1714 Fénelon, like Ronsard, referred to Homer's *peintures*, echoing both Lucian and Petrarch who had called him the best of 'painters'.[6]

However, one might justifiably pass off such allusions as vague metaphors or artistic quirks if it were not for the fact that, during the centuries in question, so many treatises on art and literature were concerned with the very close relationship between poetry and painting, which came to be known as 'sister arts'. As scholars, from the beginning of the Italian Renaissance onward, set to work interpreting and commenting on the poetical theories of Horace and Aristotle, the relationship between painting and poetry became more and more complex, more and more exaggerated. The ideas developed from Horace's succinct simile 'ut pictura poesis' became progressively removed from the poet's original meaning,[7] whilst Aristotle's theory of imitation led straight to the formal identification of painting and poetry and was reiterated by many a scholar. Fénelon, for one, was to repeat again and again that 'la poésie est . . . une imitation et une peinture' and that 'un poète est un peintre'.[8] When one compares such statements with what a painter, Poussin, had to say it becomes clear how the close identification of poetry and painting could be justified by virtue of the theory of imitation: 'la peinture n'est rien autre que l'imitation des actions humaines, lesquelles sont proprement actions imitables'.[9]

Along with the theory of imitation was developed the idea of *bienséances* or 'decorum'. Horace, advising the dramatic poet, had said:

> Ne forte seniles
> Mandentur iuveni partes pueroque viriles;
> Semper in adiunctis aevoque morabimur aptis.[10]

Now Renaissance critics, from Alberti (1404–1472) onward, elaborated on this sound piece of advice and, more important still, applied it to both poetry and painting. To adhere to the *bienséances* meant 'the observance in any subject of seriousness or magnitude of a certain propriety, not only for the sake of

representative truth but also in one sense or another of decency or good form'.[11] The ramifications the theory engendered were numerous and confusing. So it was that Michelangelo offended what was right and proper, and hence the *bienséances*, by depicting sacred figures as naked in the Sistine Chapel. On the other hand, Poussin was accused of having violated them by omitting the ten camels mentioned in the Biblical account of Elizah and Rebecca from his painting treating the same theme. And Racine, it will be remembered, had to defend himself for not having adhered strictly to the truth in his play *Britannicus*.[12]

Not only did this theory apply to both poet and painter but also affected both in that during the centuries in question they were expected, to a greater or lesser degree, to be learned. They were expected to be knowledgeable about every science, literature in general and the scriptures in particular. Ignorance, it was believed, would lead to the sort of 'crime' of which Poussin was deemed guilty. Moreover, it was assumed that the great painter was the painter of history — that is to say, any story found in either sacred or profane history and poetry. Obviously, then, the painter had to know the Bible and the writers of ancient Greece and Rome. Similarly, just as the painter had to be learned in order to do justice to his sources, so the poet had to be well versed in the sciences and arts too. Ronsard wrote of the epic poet:

> tantost il est Philosophe, tantost Medecin, Arboriste, Anatomiste & Jurisconsulte . . . c'est un homme lequel comme une mousche à miel delibe & succe toutes fleurs, puis en fait du miel & son profit selon qu'il vient à propos.[13]

Often, however, the poet or painter was far from being really learned. Poussin's attempts to identify the scene of his paintings usually depend on rather general distinguishing touches: an obelisk to represent Egypt for example. In the same way both Racine and Corneille try, on occasions, to suggest the setting for the action of their plays. Yet, however evocative and *vraisemblable*, these settings are not elaborate or realistic in any real sense — one thinks particularly of that vivid scene described in Act I of *Bérénice*. Here Racine evokes all the glory of Rome with one or two well chosen details in company with more indeterminate aspects:

> Ces flambeaux, ce bûcher, cette nuit enflammée,
> Ces aigles, ces faisceaux, ce peuple, cette armée,
> Cette foule de rois, ces consuls, ce sénat.[14]

Scholars eager to accept the approval of antiquity for their deliberate confusion of poetry and painting did not overlook the following remarks which Quintilian had addressed to the orator:

> Nec mirum, si ista, quae tamen in aliquo posita sunt motu, tantum in animis valent, cum pictura, tacens opus et habitus semper eiusdem, sic in intimos penetret adfectus, ut ipsam vim dicendi nonnunquam superare videatur.[15]

From this it was maintained that it was in the expression of the emotions that painting most resembled poetry, and comparisons were drawn between the portrayal of various emotions in poetry and those depicted in paintings.

Poetry and painting were confused in other ways still, often with comical results. For example, scholars went so far as to apply Aristotle's theory of the unity of action to painting. Now, one can justifiably maintain that a unity of action exists in painting when all the various parts of the whole are related to the main theme — when, in other words, a spatial unity exists. Yet R. S. Lee relates how in 1667 a French critic applied Aristotle's unity of action, intended of course for dramatic poetry, to Poussin's painting depicting the Fall of the Manna, declaring that there was a beginning, a middle, and an end to the drama shown and thus implying that it developed in time — a manifest absurdity.[16]

In a more general way poetry and painting were drawn together by virtue of the belief in the usefulness of the arts. Leonardo, for example, brought the two together when he asserted that both could teach: 'per l'una e per l'altra si pò dimostrare molti morali costumi, come fece Apelle con la sua calunnia'.[17] In the eyes of some poets and painters, however, the arts were intended to delight and entertain rather than be didactic: Marino and Poussin both shared this point of view and so their respective arts could be compared because of their hedonistic aspects.

However, one must not assume that this tendency to equate poetry with painting met with no resistance. In spite of the fact that, generally speaking, they were held to be 'sister arts' not a few scholars were aware of the great differences between them. Even so, those who did appreciate these differences often accepted the general principle of *Ut pictura poesis*. Dolce, for instance, whilst distinguishing between the two arts nevertheless still saw them as being closely related:

> il Pittore è intento a imitar per via di linee, e di colori . . . tutto quello che si dimostra all'occhio, . . . il Poeta col mezzo delle parole va imitando non solo ciò che si dimostra all'occhio, ma che ancora si rappresenta all'intelletto. Laonde essi in questo sono differenti, ma simili in tante altre parti, che si possono dir quasi fratelli.[18]

Although Dolce rightly points out that the painter cannot portray the workings of the mind as can the poet, it is still apparent that he considers poet and painter to be alike when depicting the external world perceived by the eye. Other scholars agreed with this distinction: 'i Poeti imitano il di dentro principalmente . . . et i Pittori imitano principalmente il di fuori'.[19]

But, of course, the main distinction between poetry and painting is that the one is a temporal art and the other a spatial one. The poet's medium is words, and obviously words, at least when read or heard, follow one another in time. Should a poet attempt to paint in detail a scene he must, of necessity, list the various parts of the whole. The result, however effective *poetically*, can never

really be as coherent as the same scene rendered by the painter, in whose work all the details exist together at once in space. This may be stating the obvious but the obvious was often overlooked, although happily not always. Rousseau, for one, clearly scorned those who could not see this crucial difference. In his *Essai sur l'origine des langues* he wrote:

> c'étoit bien mal connoître les opérations de la nature, de ne pas voir que l'effet des couleurs est dans leur permanence, et celui des sons dans leur succession . . . Ainsi chaque sens a son champ qui lui est propre. Le champ de la musique [and Rousseau could well have added 'poetry' here] est le temps, celui de la peinture est l'espace.[20]

La Fontaine, although, as we have seen, joining in the vogue for confusing poetic and artistic terms, nevertheless pointed out:

> Les mots et les couleurs ne sont choses pareilles;
> Ni les yeux ne sont les oreilles.[21]

And Leonardo asserted that painting was superior to poetry since it can give us, for example, all the parts of a face at once whilst the poet would be forced to give us a list.[22] Whether or not this does prove painting's superiority over poetry is clearly another matter, but Leonardo's premise is valid even if his reasoning appears to neglect the real qualities of poetry.

Although it follows that Lessing (1729–1781) was not the first to show that the two arts should be distinguished on the grounds that one is a spatial art and the other temporal, his *Laokoon*, first published in 1776, the central theme of which is the very problem under discussion, has probably become the best known book treating the subject. In Lessing's opinion what the poet can really 'paint' is action. Indeed the poet, in his attempts to describe something, should do so in such a way as to bring in action. Lessing went to Homer for confirmation of this idea. Homer, instead of trying to describe a ship in all its detail, would content himself with the briefest of descriptions and then set the vessel in motion.[23] The painter, on the other hand, can give us all the details of a ship or all the features of a beautiful woman at once, but although he may be capable of suggesting it, he cannot actually paint action. To take a twelfth-century stylized description of female beauty in order to show how the enumeration of details can never fuse together to form a distinct whole as in painting is to take an extreme example, but it is also the most effective:

> De biauté n'ert o li igaus
> nule feme qui fust mortaus;
> lo front ot blanc et bien traitiz,
> la greve droite an la vertiz,
> les sorciz noirs et bien dolgiez,
> les ielz rianz et trestoz liez;
> biaus ert le nis, anprés la face,
> car plus blanche ert que nois ne glace;
> entremellee ert la color

avenalment o la blanchor;
molt ot bien faite la bochete,
n'ert gaires granz, mes petitete,
menu serrees ot les denz,
plus reluisent que nus argenz.[24]

The lack of unity in such a description, or at least unity in the pictorial sense, is only too evident.

That the theory of *Ut pictura poesis* was widespread and influential is demonstrated by the fact that Lessing saw the necessity for writing such a book as the *Laokoon.* It is important to remember, moreover, that he intended to write on the confusion between other arts: the *Laokoon* as we have it is but a part of the work as originally conceived. A recent tendency to fuse the arts, popular among their more 'revolutionary' practitioners, has far to go before it overcomes a still wider tendency to see each art as being quite distinct. Until then we should not be too hard on those who, in the past, have attempted to assimilate poetry to painting however, for as is pointed out by Wellek and Warren:

> one can hardly deny the success of the Horatian formula 'ut pictura poesis'. Though the amount of visualization in the reading of poetry is likely to be overrated there were ages and there were poets who did make the reader visualize.[25]

One such poet was Saint-Amant.

CHAPTER 2

SAINT-AMANT: POETRY AND PAINTING

Perhaps the one positive aspect of Saint-Amant's poetic ability about which scholars and critics have always been in agreement is his outstanding gift for writing descriptive verse. This talent brought him renown amongst his contemporaries. Faret, for example, wrote:

> Ceste chaleur, que les anciens ont appellée genie, ne se communique qu'à fort peu d'esprits, et ne se fait principalement remarquer qu'aux descriptions, qui sont comme de riches tableaux où la nature est représentée: d'où vient que l'on a nommé la poësie une peinture parlante. Et de faict, comme elle est le plus noble effort de l'imagination, on peut dire aussi que son plus noble chef-d'œuvre est celuy de bien descrire . . . Lors qu[e] [Saint-Amant] descrit, il imprime dans l'ame des images plus parfaites que ne font les objects mesmes. Il fait tousjours remarquer quelque nouveauté dans les choses qu'on a veues mille fois . . .[1]

A similar judgement is passed by several others, notably Michel de Marolles:

> Plus un esprit est beau et plus il trouve de diversitez agreables dans les objets: et nostre Sainct-Amant par exemple, a vû des choses dans sa Solitude, dans sa Nuit, dans sa Matinée, dans sa Pluye et dans son Contemplateur, que d'autres ny eussent peut-estre iamais apperceuës, ou qu'ils ny eussent pas si bien vuës.[2]

Chapelain echoes the significant phrase 'peinture parlante' used by Faret when he asks: 'qu'est-ce que *La Pucelle* peut opposer dans la peinture parlante au *Moïse* de M. de Saint-Amant?'[3] and elsewhere commends the descriptions in the vast Biblical epic.[4]

It is apparent that not only is Saint-Amant praised for his remarkable ability to write descriptive verse, but that this is also thought to have been the hallmark of any good poet. Clearly such remarks bear witness to the influence of the theory of *Ut pictura poesis*: Faret, for one, almost equates poetry and painting. In more recent times, scholars have perhaps been reluctant to link Saint-Amant's poetry itself to the theory because of the poet's apparently natural aptitude for descriptive verse, for, given an inherent talent for this sort of poetry, to what extent can we really maintain he was influenced by Horace's maxim and its reverberations? Even R. A. Sayce, who has perhaps appreciated more than any other critic the many affinities between Saint-Amant's poetry and painting, proceeds circumspectly and merely suggests that the theory 'may well

have added its influence to Saint-Amant's natural aptitudes'.[5] Moreover, the issue is not made any easier by the fact that the poet was far from being alone in writing visually evocative poetry. Butler, indeed, considers verse of this nature to be typically baroque: 'Tout un aspect de l'art baroque est en effet observation aiguë de la réalité . . . Jamais, sans doute, la poésie n'a été plus descriptive'.[6] Likewise, A. M. Boase maintains that 'il y eut en France une poésie descriptive, le baroque pictural',[7] whilst Odette de Mourgues points out that 'the similarity borne by baroque poetry to the visual arts is good evidence of its pictorial characteristic'.[8]

However, there is some evidence within the body of Saint-Amant's work to suggest that he was in fact influenced by *Ut pictura poesis*. There are, to begin with, the following interesting comments which he makes in his preface to *Moyse Sauvé*:

> il est presqu'impossible de faire d'excellens vers, à cause de l'harmonie et de la representation, sans avoir quelque particulière connoissance de la musique et de la peinture, tant il y a de rapport entre la poésie et ces deux autres sciences, qui sont comme ses cousines germaines . . . (II, 147)

The poet closely associates poetry and painting (and also music, although this particular relationship will not concern us for the time being) to the extent of calling them, if not 'sister arts', at least 'cousines germaines'. Nor does Saint-Amant merely pay lip-service to his belief that the poet should be knowledgeable about painting. His own familiarity with paintings, his grasp of the techniques involved in the art, and his interest in and enthusiasm for it permeate much of his writing.

He readily turns to painting in order to illustrate his ideas on poetry. Thus it is, for example, that when praising originality in a poet he asserts the opinion that 'entre les peintres le moindre original d'un Freminet est beaucoup plus prisé que n'est la meilleure coppie d'un Michel Ange' (I, 14). On another occasion, he compares himself to a painter who, 'voulant tirer une excellente beauté, n'eust pas si tost jetté l'œil sur elle pour en ebaucher les premiers traits, que, ravy en la contemplation de ses merveilles et confus de la temerité de son entreprise, le pinceau luy tomba d'une main et les couleurs de l'autre' (I, 248). A number of fairly insignificant little epigrams on paintings clearly show that Saint-Amant was interested in the painter's opportunity to create a realistic portrait and the extent to which he succeeds. There is, for example, the epigram 'Sur un portrait du Roy':

> Icy l'art passe la nature,
> Puisque par cette portraiture,
> Dont tous les yeux sont esblouys,
> Il a fait un autre Louys.
> Pour moy, je pense qu'il aspire
> A faire que, sans mescontens,

Frontispiece to the 1653 edition of *Moyse Sauvé*
Engraving by Abraham Bosse from a drawing by Claude Vignon

Nicolas Poussin *The Discovery of Moses* (1638)
The Louvre

On puisse voir dans cet empire
Vivre deux rois en mesme temps.
(I, 133)

Yet another shows Saint-Amant again giving a critical appreciation of a portrait, though this time in a very light-hearted vein:

Guy, ton peintre, à ce qu'il m'en semble,
Est bon et mauvais tout ensemble,
Je le remarque à ton portrait:
A merveilles il te ressemble,
Et cependant il est mal fait.
(II, 69)

In a poem written shortly before his death, 'La Suspension d'armes', Saint-Amant briefly refers to a painting of the Infanta Marie-Thérèse sent to Louis XIV prior to their marriage — it was, of course, the custom for portraits to be exchanged between those about to enter into a marriage of convenience, if distance or politics prevented them from actually meeting:

Si par le seul recit, si par les seules armes,
Qu'un illustre pinceau fait agir en ses charmes,
Ce heros nompareil, ce roy toûjours vainqueur,
A receu tant de coups dans l'œil et dans le cœur,
O Dieu! que j'en prevoy de sensibles attaintes
Lorsque les veritez succederont aux feintes,
Et que, par les travaux de son grand CARDINAL,
Il en verra briller l'illustre original.
(II, 477–8)

Again we sense this admiration, so typical of Saint-Amant's time, of painting as a palpable and exact imitation of reality.

Frequenting as he did the wealthy and influential, Saint-Amant had ample opportunity to familiarize himself with the paintings of both French and foreign artists. Durand-Lapie points out, for example, that the Duc de Liancourt, whose *hôtel* the poet regularly visited, had a considerable collection of paintings, even going as far as to state that 'ce goût pour les tableaux explique l'affection du duc pour Saint-Amant, aussi bon amateur en peinture qu'en musique'.[9] Certainly, it is worthwhile noting, the poet was acquainted with the familiar reality and *luminisme* to be found in Bassano's work:

Ces quatre saisons de l'année
Sont du Bassan, je le voy bien:
Jamais pinceau n'exprima rien
D'une façon mieux ordonnée . . .
(II, 51)

We have already observed how, on one occasion, Saint-Amant draws a comparison between a Freminet original and a copy of one of Michelangelo's

masterpieces. He also makes another allusion to the great painter and sculptor in 'Le Contemplateur'. In this particular poem he is reminded of the Day of Judgement by the sight of the sun rising and exclaims:

> L'immortelle et sçavante main
> De ce fameux peintre romain
> N'a rien tracé d'émerveillable
> Que ce penser de l'advenir,
> Plein d'une terreur agreable,
> Ne ramene en mon souvenir.
>
> (I, 39)

'Le Contemplateur' was written in 1627 — a comment on the siege of La Rochelle helps to date the poem — and Saint-Amant's known journeys to Italy and Rome were later than this. It would therefore appear that his praise of Michelangelo is either based on hearsay or on engravings of the Last Judgement. We may justifiably assume that the latter is the case. Michel de Marolles, whose impressive collection of engravings and prints founded the Cabinet des Estampes of the Bibliothèque Nationale in Paris, possessed a number of engravings made of the Sistine Chapel masterpiece. Although there is unfortunately no way of telling when exactly they came into his possession, it is not unlikely that Saint-Amant, whose long friendship with Marolles had begun some time before 1622,[10] had already seen them at his *hôtel* by the time he came to write 'Le Contemplateur'.

It is perhaps in *Moyse Sauvé* that Saint-Amant's interest in painting and his knowledge of the art are most clearly indicated. Although as long ago as 1888 P. Schönherr had, whilst discussing this work, called attention to certain paintings by Poussin which he believed to have influenced the poet,[11] it is R. A. Sayce's study of the pictorial qualities of a number of scenes in the Biblical epic — scenes which almost inevitably invite comparison with Poussin's paintings of the Moses cycle — that is particularly noteworthy.[12] The comparison is inevitable, if only because of the way the poet actually mentions the painter by name in the poem. Schönherr concludes because of this that Saint-Amant had Poussin's work in mind when composing *Moyse Sauvé*. In point of fact, however, the quite different treatment the two give the same theme undermines this conclusion, for a similarity of theme alone at a time when, as Schönherr himself remarks, the stories of the Old Testament were popular subject-matter for poets and painters alike should surely not be taken as conclusive evidence of a direct inspiration. Sayce, indeed, rightly makes the point that the contrast between the treatment given to the story of Moses by Saint-Amant and that chosen by Poussin is emphasized by the engraving which served as frontispiece to the first edition of *Moyse Sauvé*: it faithfully reflects the poet's flamboyant, baroque approach as opposed to the painter's classical simplicity and naturalness[13] (compare plates 1 and 2). It is necessary, moreover,

to take into account possible literary influences on Saint-Amant. Both Schönherr and Sayce draw a comparison between Saint-Amant's description of the Flood (II, 190) and Poussin's painting *L'Hiver*, also known as *Le Déluge*, now in the Louvre. However Sayce, in a later work, suggests a literary inspiration for the poet — the description by Du Bartas of the Flood — and maintains that a number of passages in *Moyse Sauvé* in fact have their source in Du Bartas.[14]

The actual reference to Poussin occurs at a point where Saint-Amant is attempting to convey an idea of the great joy experienced by the sister of Moses on seeing her baby brother safely delivered from yet another of the many dangers with which the poet besets him whilst he is hidden amongst the rushes. Saint-Amant exclaims:

> Quel esprit merveilleux auroit assez d'adresse
> Pour faire en un tableau flamboyer l'allegresse
> Qui parut en Marie et son teint raviva
> Quand la chere nacelle en ce bord arriva?
> Je doute si *Poussin, ce roy de la peinture,*
> Cet homme qui dans l'art fait vivre la nature,
> Oseroit se promettre, avec tous ses efforts,
> D'en exprimer à l'œil les aymables transports.
>
> (II, 241)

It is interesting to note that, as when he mentions Michelangelo, Saint-Amant inserts a brief judgement on the painter. Even more interesting is the fact that he quite clearly thinks of emotion in *visual* terms: here happiness is something to be *seen* rather than suggested in other ways. Noteworthy too is the fact that Saint-Amant 'calls to the rescue'[15] a painter who is known to have set great store by the portrayal of the emotions in his paintings, he himself remarking that in his *Fall of the Manna*, for example, one could easily distinguish those figures 'qui languissent, qui admirent, celles qui ont pitié, qui font acte de charité, de grande necessité, de désir de se repaître'.[16] In other words, by implying that an artist recognized for his ability to depict emotion might perhaps find it hard to do justice to the girl's joy and relief, Saint-Amant leaves us — or rather hopes to leave us — with an impression of indescribable, almost unbelievable gladness.

At this point it should perhaps be added that further light is shed on the close relationship between art and poetry by the discussion of the links between Saint-Amant and Poussin. Both of them knew Marino — Poussin was a close friend and, although it is not completely certain that Saint-Amant ever belonged to his circle, he did openly acknowledge his admiration of the Italian poet. It has been suggested that Poussin's painting entitled *The Inspiration of the Epic Poet* was designed as a memorial to Marino. This theory is far from proven but, even so, it is evident that the painter was depicting an epic poet since the books about the figure of Apollo are the *Iliad*, the *Odyssey* and the *Aeneid* —

the painting reflecting, then, the mutual interests between poet and painter, poetry and painting.

Another fascinating aspect of *Moyse Sauvé* and Saint-Amant's interest in painting is that he should have depicted, as he puts it in the preface to the work, 'des personnes habiles à la peinture et à la tapisserie en un temps où il semble que les arts n'estoyent pas encore inventez' (II, 144). To begin with, the mother of Moses is seen weaving a tapestry, then the Egyptian princess who rescues Moses is described as painting in order to take her mind off her childlessness, and finally Saint-Amant introduces some old, rolled-up paintings which illustrate the story of Joseph in Egypt. Why should he have brought in such anachronistic details? It is not as if he did not appreciate the criticisms to which he was leaving himself open for, in the preface, he attempts to justify himself. His arguments however, although they do have an aura of learning about them, are far from being at all convincing:

> il suffira que je die que cela n'estoit pas une merveille entre les Egiptiens, puis-que, leurs lettres hyerogliphiques estant presque toutes autant de figures et de representations d'animaux et d'autres choses, il faloit de necessité absolue que tous ceux qui sçavoient escrire sceussent portraire; outre qu'ils se vantent dans Polidore Virgile d'avoir eu la peinture beaucoup de siecles avant les Grecs. (II, 144)

There is obviously a great difference between the 'paintings' of ancient Egypt — however fine in themselves they may be — and the scene which Saint-Amant would have us believe is the work of a captive Israelite, the mother of Moses, and in which the poet displays a quite masterly appreciation of the technique involved in suggesting perspective:

> Là, de pieds et de mains, les hommes noirs de crimes
> Des arbres les plus hauts gagnoyent les vertes cimes;
> L'effroy desesperé redoubloit leurs efforts,
> Et l'on voyoit pâtir leurs membres et leurs corps.
> Ycy, l'un au milieu de sa vaine entreprise,
> Pour son peu de vigueur contraint à lascher prise,
> Blesme, regarde en bas, hurle, ou semble en effait,
> Hurler, tout prest à choir du chesne contrefait;
> Là, l'autre, plus robuste, empoignant une branche
> Qui sous le poids d'un autre en l'air imité panche,
> Fait que la branche feinte et s'eclate et gemit,
> Et trebuche avec eux dans l'onde qui fremit.
> Du sexe feminin les portraits lamentables,
> Donnant, quoy que menteurs, des touches veritables,
> A bras tendus et longs souslevoyent leurs enfans
> Sur le liquide chocq des perils etouffans.
> Dans ce malheur commun, les bestes esperdues
> Grimpoyent de tous costez ensemble confondues;
> Les abismes du ciel, versant toutes leurs eaux,
> Interdisoient le vol aux plus vistes oyseaux;

En la laine d'azur la mer sembloit s'accroistre;
Les monts l'un après l'autre y sembloyent disparoistre,
Et l'onde, encore un coup, triomphant des rochers,
Respectoit l'arche seule et ses justes nochers.
Ceux qui de ce travail avoyent veu les merveilles
Avoyent veu par leurs yeux suborner leurs oreilles,
Car on croyoit ouyr les cris et les sanglots
Des nageurs vains et nus qu'on voyoit sur les flots;
Et, sans le beau rempart d'une riche bordure
De fruits, de papillons, de fleurs et de verdure,
Qui sembloit s'opposer au deluge depeint,
Un plus ample ravage on en eust presque craint.
Les plus proches objets, selon la perspective,
Estoyent d'une maniere et plus forte et plus vive;
Mais de loin en plus loin la forme s'effaçoit,
Et dans le bleu perdu tout s'evanouissoit.

(II, 190–1)

Surely Saint-Amant introduced such an anomaly because it afforded him the opportunity to make use of his gift for evoking visual images. The scene certainly bears witness to his interest in painting: once again we come across his preoccupation with art as an exact imitation of reality — here, he rather naively claims, one can almost hear the cries of those drowning, so realistically are they portrayed.

That Saint-Amant considered himself to be a 'painter' becomes evident on reading his poetry. He will frequently refer, for example, to his own 'pinceau'. Now, whilst we do readily accept that a poet should speak of his 'lyre', or call on his muse to help him compose his 'song' — as Saint-Amant himself does again and again — allusions to his 'brush' or to his poetical 'colours' strike us as being much more unusual (although many a writer from Horace onward has made use of the latter expression, and meant a variety of things by it). References to the poet's 'lyre' or to his 'song' are conventional in the extreme and, moreover, acceptable on the grounds that originally poetry and music had common roots. And yet, before embarking on a description of the poet Maillet in 'Le Poëte crotté', Saint-Amant remarks:

Mais, avant qu'il ouvre la bouche,
Je veux luy donner une touche
De *mon pinceau* pour l'habiller,
Tant qu'on s'en puisse esmerveiller.

(I, 212)

It is noteworthy that the description of Maillet's strange garb which follows is full of visual detail and indicates an exceptionally large number of colours. In *Moyse Sauvé*, having resolved to describe no more of the plagues with which Jehovah inflicted the Egyptians, Saint-Amant again makes use of this idea of his 'brush' in an image which is vivid and effective. He protests:

Non, j'en laisse l'image à d'autres à despeindre;
Pour les miracles seuls *mon pinceau* se veut teindre . . .
(II, 209)

At times Saint-Amant would seem to be drawing attention to the differences in media between poetry and painting when he makes such allusions, and even regretting that he is not *really* painting. For example, in his poem 'La Vistule sollicitée', he has this to say:

Si je pouvois icy de ces trois avantures
Exposer à tes yeux les estranges peintures;
Si ma voix pathetique, *au deffaut de pinceau,*
Offroit à ton oreille un homme en un vaisseau . . .
(II, 21)

Nor does Saint-Amant reserve references of this nature for himself. If he thinks of himself as a 'painter' he also feels other poets have the same role. In a poem dedicated to the memory of Théophile he calls on those poets who charm us with their songs and melodies to sing the praises of their dead colleague. But he also addresses them in the following manner:

Peintres dont les *pinceaux parlens*
Avecque des traits excellens
Tirent les choses invisibles:
Le bruict, les pensers, les accords,
Les vents courroucez ou paisibles,
Et l'ame au travers de son corps;
(II, 487–8)

What is particularly fascinating in this passage is that Saint-Amant is implying that the poet can suggest those things which the painter finds beyond his reach, that the poet can imitate a wider range of subjects. He is not making a clear distinction between poet and painter as such, but in an oblique way we are reminded of the painter's limitations, limitations touched upon by Scève:

Le Painctre peult de la neige depaindre,
La blancheur telle à peu près qu'on peult voir
Mais il ne sait à la froideur attaindre,
Et moins la faire à l'œil apercevoir.[17]

(This is not to say, of course, that the poet is without his own limitations: his, as we have already seen, do exist but are of a different nature.) The phrase 'pinceaux parlens' — an interesting corollary to the phrase 'peinture parlante' employed by Faret and Chapelain — appears on several occasions in Saint-Amant's poetry. In 'La Vistule sollicitée', for example, he writes:

Tesmoin cette merveille à qui ma main destine
Du Parnasse françois les plus superbes fleurs,
Et des *pinceaux parlants* les plus riches couleurs.
(II, 23)

There is also, in 'La Genereuse', a rather pleasant image which, whilst not having anything to do with the poet's 'brush', is evocative and is further evidence of how readily Saint-Amant's mind turns to painting:

> Ces fresnes hauts et droits qui bordent ces ruisseaux,
> Aussi bien que les arbrisseaux,
> Me semblent renversez dans l'onde;
> Et, pour peindre à mes yeux les disgraces du monde,
> De leurs bras ils font des *pinceaux*.
>
> (II, 357–8)

The shape of the ash-trees, 'hauts et droits', and no doubt their swaying movement, have reminded Saint-Amant of brushes and, in a moment of despair, he has transformed the association of ideas into a telling poetical image.

It goes without saying that Saint-Amant regularly refers to his poems as 'peintures' or 'tableaux'. More often than not these terms are in fact quite apt since the poems or passages in question are visually descriptive. On the whole, however, they are employed so frequently and so vaguely that they lose their original meaning and we are no longer even surprised by such apparent paradoxes as when Joseph, in *Moyse Sauvé*, asks to hear about certain dreams and says: 'Donnez-m'en à l'oreille une exacte peinture' (II, 304). Naturally, one would not be justified in reading too much into Saint-Amant's use of such terms. On the other hand, his references to his 'pinceau' seem much less indiscriminate and, as a result, more worthy of our attention. One often has the impression, on reading his poetry, that he wanted to emphasize the descriptive qualities of his work — to underline, as it were, the fact that in his eyes poet and painter were much the same thing. Certain comments that Saint-Amant makes in two letters do much to strengthen this impression. Wishing to defend himself, in a letter addressed to Bochart, for having allowed his imagination to embroider on Biblical authority in his description in *Moyse Sauvé* of the gifts Jacob sent to his brother (II, 279), he writes: 'Le reste est *une fantaisie de poëte comme de peintre*, pour representer tousjours quelque chose de plus beau' (II, 333). (Saint-Amant glosses over the fact that a painter would in all likelihood have been censored too had he perverted the truth in the same way.) And in a letter addressed to the Princess Palatine, Anne de Gonzague de Mantoue, he says of his poem 'La Genereuse':

> C'est dans le tableau de cette GENEREUSE, ou plustot de la Generosité mesme, que j'aurois pû me promettre de faire voir tout ce qu'on se peut imaginer de plus rare et de plus grand, si, *quelques nobles traits et quelques vives couleurs que l'art du peintre puisse avoir employées en sa copie*, elle ne se trouvoit tousjours bien au dessous d'un si parfait et si divin original. (II, 348)

It is clear then that Saint-Amant, greatly interested in painting for its own sake, saw poet and painter as sharing much the same role. The tendency of the

period towards visually evocative poetry allowed his own inherent ability to flourish and he was able to create those pictures in verse for which he is best known. Just how successful he was will, it is hoped, be determined in the following chapters.

CHAPTER 3

SAINT-AMANT AND STATIC SCENES: THE COUNTRYSIDE

The old misrepresentation of the seventeenth century as a period devoid of any feeling for nature has, of course, long since been dispelled. We now appreciate that, in spite of a preference for certain aspects of nature or, at least, a marked dislike of other aspects, people were attracted to the countryside. Writers and painters gave ample expression to the feelings nature inspired in them and, indeed, it is largely due to their works that there has emerged a comprehensive idea of how their society in general felt about her. As B. Dorival puts it:

> De la confrontation, en effet, des peintures et des écrits . . . se dégage une telle ressemblance entre les expressions littéraires et les expressions plastiques du sentiment de la nature à cette époque, que ses aversions, ses indifférences et ses prédilections nous deviennent manifestes, et que notre connaissance en peut être augmentée, ainsi, de l'esprit et du cœur des Français du Grand Siècle.[1]

Generally speaking, poet and painter preferred serene landscapes with rivers, small woods and vales. The wilder aspects of nature — storms, hostile climates, awe-inspiring mountains and so forth — were usually shunned, as was agriculture. Sunshine — sunset and sunrise were favourite themes — and water held a particular fascination. Of course, the mere fact that poet and painter shared a common outlook on nature does not imply that Saint-Amant or Théophile, for example, rank with Poussin and Claude. Again it is B. Dorival who has rightly pointed out that:

> the seventeenth century required painting rather than poetry to declare its love of natural beauty — and in spite of the admirable verses of Ménard and Théophile, Saint-Amant and Tristan, Racan and La Fontaine, the great pastoral poets of the time are indeed its painters.[2]

However, of those poets who were inspired by nature, Saint-Amant is noteworthy as one possessing an acutely perceptive eye, a keen grasp of picturesque detail, a generally superior ability to paint in words, and also for having treated those aspects more usually forgotten or ignored. Let us, then, begin the discussion of his poetry proper by turning to his poem 'Le Soleil levant'. It has already been stated that sunrise and sunset were favourite

themes of poet and painter alike and, indeed, one has only to think of those wonderful, glowing sunsets painted by Claude, to appreciate the heights sometimes reached by those inspired by the sun's changing moods. If poetic treatment tended to be rather precious and overburdened with mythological allusions, there were, nevertheless, some quite remarkable interpretations. Saint-Amant's poem begins in an undistinguished fashion:

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

Certes, la nuict a trop duré;
  Desja les cocqs t'appellent:
Remonte sur ton char doré,
  Que les Heures attellent,
Et viens montrer à tous les yeux
De quel esmail tu peins les cieux.

Laisse ronfler ton vieux mary
  Dessus l'oisive plume,
Et pour plaire à ton favory
  Tes plus beaux feux r'allume;
Il t'en conjure à haute voix,
En menant son limier au bois.

Mouille promptement les guerets
  D'une fraische rosée,
Afin que la soif de Cerès
  En puisse estre appaisée,
Et fay qu'on voye en cent façons
Pendre tes perles aux buissons.

(I, 193–4)

In spite of the playful burlesque in the third stanza, there is very little to distinguish this particular greeting of the dawn from countless others. However, as the poem continues, Saint-Amant introduces a number of colourful *tableaux* depicting how various creatures react to the sight 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 œil puisse estre charmé.

Le chevreuil solitaire et doux,
  Voyant sa clarté pure
Briller sur les feuilles des houx

Et dorer leur verdure,
Sans nulle crainte de veneur,
Tasche à luy faire quelque honneur.

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

Le saulmon, dont au renouveau
Thetis est despourveue,
Nage doucement à fleur d'eau
Pour jouir de sa veue,
Et monstre au pescheur indigent
Ses riches escailles d'argent.

L'abeille, pour boire des pleurs,
Sort de sa ruche aymée,
Et va sucer l'ame des fleurs
Dont la plaine est semée;
Puis de cet aliment du ciel
Elle fait la cire et le miel.

Le gentil papillon la suit
D'une aisle tremoussante,
Et, voyant le soleil qui luit,
Vole de plante en plante,
Pour les advertir que le jour
En ce climat est de retour.

(I, 196–7)

Each *tableau* is a rather strange mixture of myth, quaint folk-lore, preciosity, and close observation. Particularly delightful is the description of the sunlight gilding the holly leaves — clearly Saint-Amant was very much alive to the effects of light. Delightful, too, the description of the salmon swimming lazily just beneath the surface of the water: doubtless born of personal observation, it recurs in *Moyse Sauvé*, although expressed in a slightly different way:

Les nageurs escaillez, ces sagettes vivantes
Que nature empenna d'ailes sous l'eau mouvantes,
Montrent avec plaisir en ce clair appareil
L'argent de leur eschine à l'or du beau soleil.

(II, 238)

Shortly after this particular passage there is a description of bees and butterflies which is also very reminiscent of 'Le Soleil levant'. Such visually evocative elements are, as we will see again and again, one of the characteristic features of Saint-Amant's poetry. It should be pointed out, however, that a poem by Théophile treating the same theme also has a good deal of visual appeal.

After beginning his poem, 'Le Matin', with the conventional description of Dawn, Théophile portrays for us the early morning routine — and obviously liked his shepherdess scene enough to use it again, word for word, in his ode 'A monsieur de L. sur la mort de son père'.[3]

Le pré paroist en ses couleurs,
La bergere aux champs revenue
Mouillant sa jambe toute nue
Foule les herbes et les fleurs.

La charrue escorche la plaine;
Le bouvier, qui suit les seillons,
Presse de voix et d'aiguillons
Le couple de bœufs qui l'entraine.

Alix appreste son fuseau;
Sa mere, qui luy faict la tasche,
Presse le chanvre qu'elle attache
A sa quenouille de roseau.[4]

Both poets introduce rather trite mythological allusions, both are guilty, by modern standards at least, of an excess of sweetness, yet both poems are attractive — thanks to some well observed little details. Saint-Amant makes use of the more unusual sequence of scenes, however, and demonstrates his relish for minute details, a characteristic we will frequently come across in his poetry.

Let us now turn our attention to what is probably Saint-Amant's best known poem, and one of which he himself was justifiably proud, 'La Solitude'. The poem is a reverie inspired by nature. As such it is quite different from Théophile's ode of the same title. The latter is a love-poem and 'ce val solitaire et sombre'[5] merely a suitable background to the poet's amorous avowals. Théophile gives us little description and we are left with a vague impression of some sylvan scene, rendered all the more unreal by a host of mythological allusions. Saint-Amant, on the other hand, presents us with a series of vivid, cameo-like descriptions. He too, in keeping with the tendency of the period, introduces some mythological elements, allusions to Pan, Jupiter, Neptune, tritons and so forth. However, in spite of these and some rather fanciful, although not altogether ineffective, embroidery — the ghost of a shepherdess haunts the spot where her lover killed himself because she would not requite his love — the poem is remarkable for its quite enchanting descriptions of a closely observed reality. A wealth of pleasing, evocative detail is here: frogs hopping about amongst reeds, a water-bird preening itself, ivy growing in the shade of a walnut tree. Even the following little picture:

. . . la cave
Que la limace et le crapaut
Souillent de venin et de bave . . .
(I, 24)

coloured as it is by traditional folk-lore, still appeals to us. Woods, streams, marshland, ruined castles, the sea, even mountain crags are all described. It would be false to claim that Saint-Amant gives us a coherent whole, a unified landscape. In fact he makes no attempt to do so, and in any case, given the temporal nature of poetry, it would have been impossible to unite so many varied scenes. It must be added, moreover, that the absence of what we might call 'unity of scale' does not help matters: Saint-Amant is one moment depicting the huge and grandiose, and the next moment the very minute. Even his conjunctions — for the most part 'là' and 'tantôt' — are so vague as to be of little use in uniting the successive *tableaux*.

Sainte-Beuve criticized 'La Solitude' since, in his opinion, it was neither 'la solitude du poète et du sage; ni celle de l'amant mélancolique et tendre; ni celle du peintre exact et rigoureux'.[6] In a sense Sainte-Beuve was right: the somewhat bewildering array of little scenes does prevent one from deciding just how to take the poem. And yet, judging by the number of *tableaux* which are supremely visual, Saint-Amant deserves to be called 'un peintre', even though he sometimes allows his imagination to run riot whilst depicting ostensibly realistic scenes:

Que c'est une chose agreable
D'estre sur le bord de la mer,
Quand elle vient à se calmer
Après quelque orage effroyable!
Et que les chevelus Tritons,
Hauts, sur les vagues secouées,
Frapent les airs d'estranges tons
Avec leurs trompes enrouées,
Dont l'eclat rend respectueux
Les vents les plus impetueux.

Tantost l'onde, broüillant l'arène
Murmure et fremit de courroux,
Se roullant dessus les cailloux
Qu'elle apporte et qu'elle r'entraine.
Tantost, elle estale en ses bords,
Que l'ire de Neptune outrage,
Des gens noyez, des monstres morts,
Des vaisseaux brisez du naufrage,
Des diamans, de l'ambre gris,
Et mille autres choses de pris.

Tantost, la plus claire du monde,
Elle semble un miroir flottant,
Et nous represente à l'instant
Encore d'autres cieux sous l'onde.
Le soleil s'y fait si bien voir,
Y contemplant son beau visage,
Qu'on est quelque temps à sçavoir

Si c'est luy-mesme, ou son image,
Et d'abord il semble à nos yeux
Qu'il s'est laissé tomber des cieux.
(I, 25–6)

Saint-Amant is appealing to our mind's eye: note, for example, the introduction of a phrase such as 'il semble à nos yeux', whereby the reader is patently induced to share the poet's experience. It is interesting to discover, moreover, how the poet emphasizes the pleasure the sense of sight gives him. He writes:

. . . que *mes yeux sont contens*
De voir ces bois . . .
(I, 21)

Que *je prens de plaisir à voir*
Ces monts pendans en precipices . . .
(I, 22)

Que *j'ayme à voir* la décadence
De ces vieux chasteaux ruinez . . .
(I, 23)

. . . une falaise escarpée,
D'où *je regarde avec plaisir*
L'onde qui l'a presque sappée . . .
(I, 25)

Such exclamations, no doubt heart-felt, have the capacity of inducing the reader to visualize. This marked emphasis on the sense of sight is again noticeable in another celebrated poem, 'Le Contemplateur':

Là, par fois consultant les eaux
Du sommet d'une roche nue,
Où pour *voir* voler les oyseaux
Il faut que je baisse la *veue*,
Je m'entretiens avec Thetis
Des poissons et grands et petits
Que de ses vagues elle enserre,
Et ne puis assez admirer,
Voyant les bornes de la terre,
Comme elle les peut endurer.
(I, 30–1)

Tantost, levé devant le jour,
Contre ma coustume ordinaire,
Pour *voir* recommencer le tour
Au celeste et grand luminaire,
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,
Dont il est comme le crayon.
(I, 38)

The pleasure Saint-Amant derived from observing the many aspects of the world about him is, perhaps, suggested most strongly in the following revealing comment, a comment which might almost serve as an apologia for the wide variety of scenes in 'Le Contemplateur' and 'La Solitude':

> La diversité plaist aux yeux,
> Et la veue en fin est lassée
> De ne regarder que les cieux.
>
> (I, 33)

'Le Contemplateur', like 'La Solitude', presents a series of pictures which are clearly the fruits of a close observation of nature. These are, it is true, unfortunately interspersed with some rather tiresome moralizing: Saint-Amant, one feels, was rather too obviously trying to impress the Bishop of Nantes, to whom the poem is addressed. What is of particular interest to us, however, is that the sight of something often inspires in the poet a mental picture of something else, which he then goes on to vividly portray. Thus it is that, looking out to sea one day, he is led by the sight of the waves to picture to himself 'Noé chery des cieux, Pleurant pour les pechez du monde' (I, 31), whilst the sunrise gives birth to a vision of the end of the world, a vision which, although it does not succeed in conveying a sense of doom and terror, is quite remarkable for its picturesque qualities.[7]

In 'La Pluye' Saint-Amant's emphasis on sight acquires a new dimension. It has already been suggested that the use of phrases such as 'je voy', and even 'j'aime à voir', can have the effect of inducing the reader to visualize. However, although the present tense in such cases does lend a certain amount of spontaneity to the description which follows, it cannot really be said that Saint-Amant is deliberately seeking to make us share an actual scene with him. This is the case with 'La Pluye'. The poet is describing a storm which brings to an end a long period of drought. He imagines himself to be in the company of a certain Pierre Deslandes-Payen, to whom the poem is addressed. In all probability the two once witnessed a storm together, and Saint-Amant is here reliving the event and giving us a sort of 'running commentary' on it:

> Enfin, la haute Providence
> Qui gouverne à son gré le temps,
> Travaillant à nostre abondance,
> 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.
>
> (I, 92)

In the last two stanzas of this vivacious, merry poem, Saint-Amant, from the shelter of Payen's house and with a glass of wine in his hand, calls his host's attention — and hence ours — to some delightfully picturesque little scenes which are 'taking place' outside, scenes which he describes with amusement and affection:

Regarde à l'abry des ces saules
Un pelerin qui se tapit:
Le degoust perce ses espaules,
Mais il n'en a point de dépit.
Contemple un peu dans cette allée
Thibaut, à la mine haslée,
Marcher froidement par compas:
Le bonhomme sent telle joye,
Qu'encore que cette eau le noye,
Si ne s'en ostera-t-il pas.

Voy de là dans cette campagne
Ces vignerons, tous transportez,
Sauter comme genets d'Espagne,
Se demenans de tous costez;
Entens d'icy tes domestiques
Entrecouper leurs chants rustiques
D'un frequent battement de mains;
Tous les cœurs s'en espanouissent,
Et les bestes s'en resjouyssent
Aussi bien comme les humains. (I, 94)

There are a number of observations to be made concerning these two stanzas, observations which may equally well be applied to a good deal of Saint-Amant's poetry. Firstly, it is clear that he is not merely creating a visually biased poem. He is also charmed by the sound of rain falling on leaves and, as can be seen in the last stanza, the clamour made by Payen's servants, overjoyed now that the drought has ended. Obviously, he is attempting to evoke as much of the *ambiance* of such a happy occasion as possible — we will, in a later chapter, discuss in more detail Saint-Amant's talent for conveying an impression of atmosphere. Having said this much, however, there can be no denial of the *visual* appeal of these little scenes — a great deal of which depends on the way Saint-Amant deliberately points them out to Payen and, in so doing, to us.[8] Françoise Gourier summed up the charm of these final stanzas thus:

> Nous pourrions reproduire, crayon en main, le tableau qu'a observé Saint-Amant; il ne peint pas seulement les attitudes physiques des personnages, il sait aussi rendre leur joie, et les mouvements et les sons qui l'expriment.[9]

It is evident, then, that Saint-Amant was more often than not directly inspired by nature, and that he was frequently concerned with a realistic portrayal of some of the many sights that caught his eye. Unlike most of his

fellow poets, whose bucolic descriptions rarely reflect nature 'as she really is', he regularly gives one the impression of having actually seen, and borne in mind, the many and varied scenes he records. He is, moreover, quite exceptional in that he depicted some of those aspects of nature which have been indicated as having little or no attraction for his contemporaries. Three of an admirable cycle of four sonnets treating the seasons were inspired by landscapes and climates which few other poets of his time were likely to have deemed suitable material. The very titles of the poems suggest the originality of Saint-Amant: 'L'Esté de Rome', 'L'Autonne des Canaries', 'L'Hyver des Alpes', the fourth being the more acceptable 'Printemps des environs de Paris'. Again it is Françoise Gourier who can best sum up the appeal of these sonnets:

> [Saint-Amant] a voyagé et a su rapporter avec un réel talent les lointains paysages qu'il a observés; il a su choisir, parmi tous les lieux visités, ceux qui représentaient pour ainsi dire l'essence même de la saison qu'il voulait symboliser. La douceur printanière de l'Ile-de-France, l'impitoyable canicule romaine, la richesse sensuelle de l'automne des Canaries, et la silencieuse et miroitante froideur des Alpes sont peintes avec le même amour de la couleur et de la lumière; le réalisme brillant avec lequel il recrée ces paysages si différents l'un de l'autre permet de considérer Saint-Amant comme l'un des poètes de la nature les plus originaux de son temps.[10]

The four sonnets, which all contain to some degree the usual mythological allusions (although these are particularly apt and effective) in fact have little visual description — the poet suggesting, rather, a multitude of sense impressions. There are, nevertheless, a number of picturesque touches which, although losing some of their charm once lifted from their context, still prove just how well Saint-Amant grasps the essential traits of what he sets out to describe. In the sonnet celebrating Spring, for example, he gives vivid expression to the contemporary enthusiasm for sun and water:

> J'apperçoy de ce bord fertile et tortueux
> Le doux feu du soleil flatter le sein de l'onde.
>
> (I, 391)

In 'L'Autonne des Canaries' he describes the exotic plants of those islands basking in an 'eternal' autumn:

> 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 eclatte 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.
>
> (I, 393)

Of the four sonnets, it is perhaps 'L'Hyver des Alpes', with its memorable impression of sparkling, glistening snow, that is the most outstanding:

> Ces atomes de feu qui sur la neige brillent,
> Ces estincelles d'or, d'azur et de cristal
> Dont l'hyver, 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 transparent 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 petillent.
>
> Cette saison me plaist, j'en ayme la froideur;
> Sa robbe d'innocence et de pure candeur
> Couvre en quelque façon les crimes de la terre.
>
> Aussi l'Olympien la void d'un front humain;
> Sa collere l'espargne, et jamais le tonnerre
> Pour desoler ses jours ne partit de sa main.
>
> (I, 393)

Clearly Saint-Amant had been spell-bound by the dazzling mountain scene. The poem is strikingly effective, and owes much of its impact to the way he has introduced the idea of gold and silver to suggest, not only these *colours*, but the cold, metallic sheen which the snow possesses. We have now, however, touched upon the problem — if one may call it a problem — of the suggestiveness of words, a quality skilfully made use of by La Fontaine in 'Le Tableau' (see chapter 1, note 21). All words are, of course, suggestive. That is to say, they function by 'stir[ring] into activity images that are already present consciously or subconsciously'.[11] Should somebody mention a 'king', there flashes on our mind's eye a 'representative' king — one inspired perhaps by Holbein's *Henry VIII*, or childhood fairy-stories, or the local inn-sign — but in any case one which differs, in all probability, from the speaker's, although sharing the same 'kingness'. However, once we begin to link words together, their suggestiveness can become limitless. 'The barrel-like king' implies a round, tubby king and, furthermore, a somewhat *comic* figure. Connotations of various kinds are prompted by such an association of ideas, as may be seen in the second quatrain of 'L'Hyver des Alpes'. The fourth line would seem to suggest that the scene is visual in nature — in a sense it is — yet it is quite evident that we have left the realm of what we actually see, when the poet starts to talk of mountains clothing themselves in snow. Doubtless the image must have been hackneyed even in Saint-Amant's time, and its original power to surprise long since blunted. Nevertheless, we realize that 's'habiller' is being used outside its original terms of reference in order to evoke the soft, muffling, all-enveloping nature of snow as it completely covers the mountain range. A similar association of ideas is found when 'cotton' is used to suggest the purity and lightness of snow.

Now, obviously, some words are less widely suggestive than others. Or, to put it another way, they stir into activity images which necessarily correspond more closely to those of the speaker or writer. 'Tree', for example, is open to a wider interpretation than 'cedar'. ('Cedar of Lebanon', of course, narrows one's field of reference down even more.) It does not follow that a descriptive poet is obliged to make use of a more concrete, explicit vocabulary, but it would, nevertheless, seem that if he really wishes to 'paint' he should choose those words which will evoke images as close as possible to his own. However, a number of factors have to be taken into account before a poet decides whether or not to employ a more precise vocabulary, and we will have occasion, in a later chapter, to return to this particular topic. It will suffice to say, for the time being, that Saint-Amant himself would appear to have thought in terms of a more explicit vocabulary when describing, judging by what he has to say in the preface to *Moyse Sauvé*. There he maintains that '[le] stile qui descrit . . . doit estre toujours soustenu de mots propres, justes et significatifs' (II, 147). In fact, his descriptive passages are often remarkably precise. Indeed, it is safe to say that his extremely wide and varied vocabulary enables Saint-Amant to bring to his poetry an exactness sometimes wanting in that of his contemporaries. J. Bailbé has rightly remarked:

> l'abondance des termes empruntés aux diverses sciences et aux divers métiers donne une idée de ce vocabulaire, qui permet [à Saint-Amant] d'ajouter au pittoresque de la description un élément de précision.[12]

His poetical landscapes show proof of a desire to be exact. The little picture of the pilgrim sheltering in 'La Pluye', for example, does not merely point to 'ces arbres' but to 'ces saules'. Immediately our mental image must coincide more closely with Saint-Amant's. Moreover, at the risk of reading too much into a word which, after all, makes a convenient rhyme for 'espaules', it could be added that of all trees willows, by their very shape, suggest a shelter. Elsewhere Saint-Amant frequently refers to a certain kind of tree, rather than simply leaving their exact species to our imagination. In 'La Solitude', for instance, he briefly enumerates those trees which surround 'ce marets paisible' — service-trees, alders, willows, and osiers (I, 22) — and it is worth remarking that nearly all these trees are usually to be found in damp places. In *Moyse Sauvé* he offers us the following somewhat anachronistic list of flowers:

> La *tulipe* sans prix, bizarre et merveilleuse,
> 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'*œillet*, et la *rose*, y montroyent leur peinture
> Par la profusion de la seule nature . . .
>
> (II, 313)

Amongst the many creatures mentioned in his poetry there are, apart from those

such as the swan and the deer which have mythological overtones, rabbits, cormorants, bream, rats, swallows, and dolphins — ample proof of both an interest in the animal kingdom and of a desire to be explicit.

This is not to say that Saint-Amant always uses the more concrete nouns, for this is not the case. Often, indeed, he employs what might be loosely termed 'poetic formulae' such as periphrasis, sometimes with the obvious intention — and this is typical of most baroque poets — of surprising or entertaining the reader. One or two examples will suffice: 'plaine liquide' or 'plaine azurée' are frequently used for the sea, 'celeste et grand luminaire' or 'le grand flambeau du ciel' indicate the sun, 'ver qui brille' a glow-worm. In a sense such phrases are very evocative, but their appeal is probably more to the intellect than to the mind's eye. Nor could it be argued with any validity that Saint-Amant possesses as wide a vocabulary of nature as the Romantics, to whom he has sometimes been compared. Hugo's 'Pasteurs et troupeaux', for example, mentions bull-finch, greenfinch, warbler, hawthorn, broom, blackberry-bush, goat, ewe, and ram. There is nothing quite like this in Saint-Amant's poetry. However, in spite of these limitations, it is apparent that a good number of the *tableaux* we have discussed owe much of their attraction to the sharpness given them by a relatively precise vocabulary. We will, moreover, discover this same quality in other aspects of the poet's descriptive verse which we have yet to consider.

An observant eye and a quick sense of the picturesque are in themselves of little use to a poet, unless he can express his ideas in a way which does them justice. We do not judge a painting of a sunset to be good unless it is capable of inspiring in us the same sort of emotion, the same awe, the same love, as were felt by the painter. If it is a bad or a mediocre painting, it is of no avail for one to protest 'well, it *must* have been a beautiful sunset . . .'. We feel nothing, and we certainly do not share the experience the painter would have us share. The same applies to visually biased poetry. The fact that Saint-Amant could easily grasp what would appeal to our mind's eye did not alone render his little, cameo-like descriptions of the countryside so enchanting. Fortunately, he understood how best he might paint in words, how he might catch our attention, how he might best awaken in us a sense of the enthusiasm he himself must have experienced. It is for this reason that the little landscapes and *tableaux* of nature which he created in poetry are amongst the most memorable produced by his century.

CHAPTER 4

SAINT-AMANT AND THE PORTRAYAL OF MOVEMENT: THE SEA, SHIPS, BATTLES, AND MONSTERS

It will be remembered that, amongst others, it was Lessing who pointed out that what the poet could really 'paint' was action, that poetry, being a temporal art, lent itself easily to the portrayal of movement. With this in mind let us now turn our attention, having discussed the way Saint-Amant treats the essentially static scenes which the countryside offers, to his descriptions involving movement. His poetry is, in fact, full of descriptions of action, often violent action, and of objects in motion. On reading his poetry, it becomes apparent that Saint-Amant enjoyed treating certain specific themes, themes which appear again and again and on which we will concentrate. They are water, the sea, ships, battles and combats, the latter now and then involving monsters or dangerous beasts.

One of the characteristics of the baroque mind is, of course, its delight in movement — in restless, fickle motion and fluid rhythms — a delight which is almost epitomized by a fascination for running water. In this respect, at least, Saint-Amant may justifiably be called a baroque poet for, in addition to some splendid descriptions of still water, he has also given us a number of vivacious pictures of water in movement. There are, to begin with, such lines as:

> Ruisseau qui cours après toy-mesme,
> Et qui te fuis toy-mesme aussi . . .
> (I, 103)

and again:

> . . . 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 . . .
> (I, 168)

But here, although the image of water fleeing and chasing itself is based on reality — as anyone who has enjoyed watching a babbling stream will agree — our attention is caught by its ingenuity rather than by its latent truth. Other

descriptions give further proof of the poet's love of water and of visual detail. In the following two passages, for example, he neatly depicts spreading ripples on disturbed water:

> Arion, tout ravy de gaigner le rivage,
> Vouant aux immortels un fidelle servage,
> Regarde autour de luy fourmiller les poissons,
> Qui, suivant jusqu'au bord ses divines chansons,
> S'elancent haut en l'air d'allegresse infinie,
> Et, pour prendre congé de sa douce harmonie,
> Au plus profond de l'eau tout à coup se noyans,
> Agitent sa surface en cercles ondoyans,
> Qui petit à petit de ses yeux disparoissent,
> Se perdans l'un dans l'autre à mesure qu'ils croissent.
> (I, 81)

> Le caillou delasché s'abisme dans les ondes,
> En esmeut la surface en mille vagues rondes
> Qui perdent leur figure en trouvant les deux bords,
> Et du Nil, pour un temps, esbranlent tout le corps . . .
> (II, 287–8)

Elsewhere, Saint-Amant describes the sea breaking on the shore, admirably evoking the incessant, repeated movement:

> . . . le double mouvement
> Que fait dessus le bord l'incertain element
> Lors que, tout blanc d'escume, il vient, onde après onde,
> Se rouler en bruyant sur l'arene infeconde,
> Et qu'avec le gravier, qui bouillonne et fremit,
> Il s'avalle soy-mesme et puis se revomit.
> (II, 223)

It is once again evident that we have here the fruits of personal observation: the clever image of the waves swallowing themselves only to spew themselves forth again is, like the image of the brook previously referred to, born of a real grasp of visual phenomena. This particular passage is, in fact, very reminiscent of a description in 'La Solitude' already quoted (see page 21), and we know from that poem that Saint-Amant took a great delight in walking along the sea-shore and watching the breakers wash up on to the beach.

It must not be thought, however, that all the poet's seascapes are as effective or as full of visual detail for, sadly, they are not. In his poem 'La Suspension d'armes', a description of the sea becoming calm after a storm lacks the picturesque touches of earlier poems — it was written shortly before Saint-Amant's death in 1661 — and in its attempts to achieve a certain grandeur it plunges into a general prosaism:

> Ainsi voit-on la mer sous une aspre tempeste,
> Au poinct que de ses dieux elle apprend quelque feste,
> Refrener tout à coup l'orgueil de ses bouillons,

Et de ses champs esmeus applanir les sillons;
Les vents les plus mutins dont elle est agitée
Suspendent aussi tost leur haleine irritée,
Et, de peur de troubler cet acte solennel,
Ils promettent à l'onde un zephire eternel.

(II, 476–7)

Possibly the most vivid of Saint-Amant's seascapes are those where he introduces ships. We know that he himself undertook several long journeys by sea, around Europe, along the coast of Africa, and conceivably even as far as America. An interesting aside in *Moyse Sauvé* tells how, for instance, he had seen flying-fish rain down on the deck of the ship he was aboard:

Merary, tout auprès, le pié droit sur la rive,
La main droite en avant et la veue attentive,
Prend tant d'autres poissons qu'on diroit à les voir
Qu'un miracle nouveau du ciel les fait pleuvoir.
Ainsy, non sans plaisir, sur le vaste Neptune,
Où j'ay tant esprouvé l'une et l'autre fortune,
Ay-je veu mille fois, sous les cercles brûlans,
Tomber comme des cieux de vrays poissons volans,
Qui, courus dans les flots par des monstres avides,
Et mettant leur refuge en leurs ailes timides,
Au sein du pin vogueur pleuvoyent de tous costez,
Et jonchoyent le tillac de leurs corps argentez.

(II, 252)

Doubtless these journeys explain the poet's evident familiarity with ships and their many aspects, doubtless they were in part responsible for such splendid maritime scenes as the following:

Tantost, des airs prevoyant la colere,
En ce rivage aborde une galere,
Ou pour mieux dire un enfer de vivants,
Une prison qui flotte au gré des vents,
Qui marche et vole, et rampe, et nage, et glisse,
Qui sous maint bois, des bras l'aspre supplice,
De-hache, rompt, fend le dos de la mer,
La pousse au loin, blanchit l'azur amer,
Le fait fremir à l'entour de la proue;
L'onde en murmure, et le timon qui joue
Voit cent bouillons tournoyer après soy,
Comme enragez qu'il donne aux flots la loy.
A l'arriver, les antennes ailées,
Par mille mains sont aussy-tost calées;
L'ancre s'abisme, et le salut naval
Tonne et s'enfuit au creux d'un sombre val.

(I, 420–1)

Tel qu'un riche navire, après mainte fortune
Esprouvée en maint lieu sur le vaste Neptune,

Revient avecques pompe au havre souhaité,
Sous la douce lenteur des souffles de l'esté,
Qui, faisant ondoyer dans les airs pacifiques
De tous ses hauts atours les graces magnifiques,
Enfle à demy la voile, et d'un tranquile effort
Presqu'insensiblement le redonne à son port . . .
(II, 240)

In spite of a certain preciosity and periphrasis both passages are visually evocative. Particularly memorable are one or two exquisite details — the restless water, the swell of the sail. Durand-Lapie, who considered the first description to have 'la valeur d'un tableau de marine', enthusiastically wrote of it:

> La scène est-elle assez vivante? Ce n'est pas ici l'imagination seule qui inspire le poète, on est sûr qu'il représente, qu'il peint d'après nature un spectacle qu'il a eu souvent sous les yeux.[1]

The second of the two passages surely brings to mind those paintings by Claude depicting magnificent ships at anchor in or entering and leaving harbours bathed in golden sunlight. However, although both are admirable, neither of these two descriptions can rival a much more colourful and distinctive *tableau* in 'L'Arion'. In this particular poem, Saint-Amant creates a sense of urgency as he depicts a ship setting off on a voyage, unfolding a vigorous little harbour-scene, the like of which he must have witnessed many times:

On leve aussitost l'ancre, on laisse choir les voilles,
Un vent frais et bruyant donne à plein dans ces toilles;
On invoque Thetis, Neptune et Palemon,
Les nochers font jouer les ressorts du timon,
La nef sillonne l'eau, qui, fuyant sa carriere,
Court devant et tournoye à gros bouillons derriere.
Le peuple de Tarente, epandu sur le port,
Souhaitte que le Ciel luy serve de support,
En fait cent mille vœux, et, la perdant de veue,
La contenance morne et l'ame toute emeue,
S'en retourne au logis, comblé d'un deuil amer,
Tournant à chaque pas la teste vers la mer.
(I, 74–5)

The description contains a wealth of captivating detail: note how well, for instance, Saint-Amant has caught the movement of the sea about the ship's hull as it sails away. Once again we see how the poet shared the baroque taste for the effervescence of agitated water. Nor can one help but notice the engaging way he has depicted the townspeople returning reluctantly home. The words Lessing used to describe how Homer would 'paint' a ship actually sailing might equally well be applied to Saint-Amant:

> Ein Schiff ist ihm bald das schwarze Schiff, bald das hohle Schiff, bald das schnelle Schiff, höchstens das wohlberuderte schwarze Schiff. Weiter läßt er sich in die Malerei des Schiffes nicht ein. Aber wohl das Schiffen das

> Abfahren, das Anlanden des Schiffes, macht er zu einem ausführlichen Gemälde, zu einem Gemälde, aus welchem der Maler fünf, sechs besondere Gemälde machen müßte, wenn er es ganz auf seine Leinwand bringen wollte.[2]

There can be little doubt that Saint-Amant took delight in such a scene. How different, in comparison, is Théophile's description of a ship setting sail in his poem 'Sur une tempeste'. The latter, although it does have qualities of its own, is much less vivid, much less alive:

> L'ancre est levée, et le zephire,
> Avec un mouvement leger,
> Enfle la voile et faict nager
> Le lourd fardeau de la navire.[3]

It is interesting to note that Saint-Amant's descriptive verve is not only to be found in his poetry. In his preface to 'Le Passage de Gibraltar' — a poem celebrating the French naval expedition of 1636 against the Spanish occupying the fortified Iles de Lérins — he evokes in *prose* a thrilling, forceful picture of the massed ships of the French fleet:

> Jamais il ne fut une telle joye que la nostre, dans le ferme espoir que nous avions de trouver et de vaincre l'ennemy; jamais on ne vit rien de si beau que ce que nous vismes quand la clarté de l'aurore, dissipant les tenebres, nous vint à descouvrir tout d'un coup le superbe et furieux appareil de nostre flotte; et il faut advouer que qui n'a veu la pompe d'une armée navale le jour qu'elle s'attend de donner bataille ne se la sçauroit imaginer parfaitement. Nous avions plus de taffetas au vent que de toile; nous estions nous-mesmes tous estonnez de voir nos vaisseaux si lestes. La splendeur des broderies d'or et d'argent eblouissoit la veue en l'agreable diversité des enseignes. Tout favorisoit nostre passage: un zephire doux et propice nous souffloit en poupe; l'air estoit serain, la mer calme, le ciel net, pur et lumineux, et l'on eust dit que la terre de l'Europe et de l'Affrique s'abaissoit en certains endroits autour de nous par respect, et se haussoit en d'autres par curiosité. Enfin, si je ne retenois la bride à la fougue poëtique qui, malgré moy, se voudroit bien couler dans ma prose, je dirois que, quelque frayeur qu'eust l'Espagne de nostre puissance et de nostre courage, elle ne se pouvoit tenir d'admirer nostre somptuosité et nostre bel ordre, et de temoigner de prendre plaisir à voir les verges mesmes qui la devoient chastier. (I, 287–8)

During an adventurous life Saint-Amant was not only to make several long sea-voyages, but was also to take part in a number of military campaigns — La Rochelle, the taking of the island of Sainte-Marguerite in 1637, the Piedmont expedition of 1629 (although Lagny, in fact, questions whether Saint-Amant, whom he does not see as a poet-soldier, was indeed present during the latter and wonders whether he was ever more than a mere spectator at the others).[4] Soldier or not, the poet has nevertheless given us numerous battle-scenes full of realistic detail, martial excitement, and vigorous movement. Before examining

some of these, we would perhaps do well to look at what Leonardo had to say about the poet's attempts to describe a battle:

> Se tu, poeta, figurerai la sanguinosa battaglia, si sta con la oscura e tenebrosa aria, mediante il fumo delle spaventevoli et mortali macchine, miste con la spessa polvere intorbidatrice dell'aria, e la paurosa fuga delli miseri spaventati dalla horribile morte. In questo caso il pittore ti supera, perche la tua penna fia consumata, inanzi che tu descriva a' pieno quel, che immediate il pittore ti rapresenta con la sua scientia . . . il che longa et tediosissima cosa sarebbe alla poesia a ridire tutti li movimenti delli operatori di tal guerra, e le parti delle membra, e lor' ornamenti, delle quali cose la pittura finita con gran' brevità e verità ti pone innanzi, et a questa tal dimostratione non mancha, se non il romore delle macchine, et le grida delli spaventanti vincitori et le grida e pianti delli spaventati, le quali cose anchora il poeta no' po rapresentare al senso del audito.[5]

It is obviously true that the poet, unlike the painter, could not hope to give us all the many and varied aspects of a battle at once. But what Leonardo seems to have overlooked is that the poet can describe the *movement* of a battle as a whole, or the movement of some of the hundreds of scenes which go to make up the whole. He can, for example, describe the death of a soldier, from the moment he is wounded to the moment he dies. He can describe the whole of a furious charge — the gathering speed of each army, the shock of the encounter, the bloody fighting, the retreat, and the aftermath. The painter can only seize upon isolated moments of the whole, and thereby attempt to suggest the rest. Moreover, Leonardo is clearly wrong to assert that the poet cannot convey the noise and clamour of the battle. Even if the poem is not read aloud, one is still responsive to the poet's efforts to evoke sounds, be they by means of verbal description alone or through alliteration and onomatopoeia.

The following stanzas from Saint-Amant's 'Ode Heroi-comique' combine pictures of scattered incidents in a battle with descriptions of the din. The various scenes are, in themselves, fairly static: that is to say, Saint-Amant does not develop any particular action. The result is a confusion of different images which, in a sense, is not a bad thing, suggesting as it does the frantic disarray and chaos of a battle:

> Pié contre pié, front contre front,
> Les brusques trouppes se heurterent,
> Et d'un acier cruel et pront
> Leur vive rage executerent.
>
> Plusieurs mousquets des deux partis,
> Après le grand feu de l'approche,
> En leviers furent convertis
> Pour escrazer mainte caboche.
>
> L'ardeur ostoit le temps au temps,
> Les poings mesmes devenoient armes,
> Et les battus et les battans
> Confondoient leurs cris et leurs larmes.

Un bruit formé de cent rumeurs,
Que renforçoit nostre tonnerre,
Etouffoit les aigres clameurs
Des mourans qui mordoient la terre.

L'un, d'une pique outrepercé,
Hurle, s'enfile encor, s'allonge,
Et, rougissant le bois poussé,
Son glaive au sein de l'autre plonge.

L'un, que foudroye à bout portant,
Par le chef, la mort allumée,
Rend par la bouche au mesme instant
D'espais tourbillons de fumée.

Il en rend par le nez aussy,
Il chancelle, il tombe, il se pame,
Il sanglotte en l'air obscurcy,
Et semble petuner son ame.

L'autre dessus le serpentin
En tremblant ajuste sa mèche,
Et tandis est fait le butin
D'une ardente et viste flamèche.

L'un, prenant martre pour renard,
Tue Antoine au lieu d'Alexandre,
Et l'autre esquive, en fin canard,
Le fer qu'il voit sur luy descendre.

L'autre, insultant sur le vaincu,
Luy met le pié dessus la gorge,
Le fouille, en tire maint escu,
Puis se monte comme un saint George.

L'autre, obstiné quoy que tout seul,
Tombant sur ses propres entrailles,
De son drappeau fait son linceul
Et s'honore en ses funerailles.

(I, 398–9)

Once more we find the host of vivid details we have come to expect from Saint-Amant. Some of them tend to be starkly gruesome, even, it should be added, grotesquely preposterous and faintly reminiscent of those more ludicrous battle-scenes in *La Chanson de Roland.* Above all, however, Saint-Amant spoils the overall effect of his poem through his inability to move in a convincing manner from one scene to the next: the repetition of 'l'autre' soon becomes as tedious as the repetition of 'là' and 'tantost' in 'La Solitude' and 'Le Contemplateur'.

If the lack of cohesion between the various incidents described in 'L'Ode heroi-comique' may be seen as suggestive of the confusion of the battle, in yet

another poem it is effective for quite a different reason — although in neither case may one really assert with any confidence that the poet was aware of how the temporal quality of verse was affecting his creation. In 'La Genereuse' he depicts for us the many types of soldiers going to fight for the Queen of Poland in 1656. Here, as one description follows another, the reader has the impression of being a spectator at a kind of military review, with groups of soldiers marching and riding past:

De là, sous des lances creusées
Les espouvantables houssars,
Nommez les fantosmes de Mars,
Elevent leurs testes rasées.
L'un s'arme de la peau d'un tigre moucheté,
L'autre en suite a le dos enté
Des plus grandes ailes des cygnes,
Et tous deux ils font voir, en ces marques insignes,
La fureur et l'agilité.

Là je voy, sous de riches housses,
D'autres illustres cavaliers
Conduire ceux qui par milliers
S'arment de haches ou de trousses.
Le fourreau precieux dont ils parent leur flanc
Couvre un glaive alteré du sang
Qu'à leur juste colere ils doivent,
Qui s'en croit enivrer, qui veut que tous en boivent,
Et qui s'en promet un estang.

Icy l'on voit fumer les meches
Entre les doigts des fantassins,
De qui les tuyaux assassins
Menacent l'homme de cent breches.
Les picquiers à leur queue, avec leur bois pointu
Sur les espaules rabatu,
Montrent leur gravité guerriere,
Attendant que le fer qu'ils portent en arriere
En avant pousse sa vertu.

Là, les tartares en grand nombre
Enfin venus, après cent maux,
Font voltiger des animaux
Qui s'effarouchent de leur ombre.
Ces animaux legers, au regard vehement,
Enharnachez bizarrement,
A tous coups maistrisent leur maistre,
Qui, de leur propre chair joyeux de se repaistre,
S'abbreuve de lait de jument.

Quelquesfois, dans ses vastes plaines,
Ce rude habitant du Précop,
Hume, après quelque long galop,

Le sang qu'il tire de leurs veines.
Pour leur chair, il la cuit d'une exquise façon:
Il la trenche et met sous l'arçon,
Sous soy l'estreint, galoppe encore,
Puis, toute degoutante, en haste il la devore,
Et bave comme un limaçon.

Tantost, pour monstrer sa justesse,
A toute bride il lance un dard,
Et se mesure avec tant d'art
Qu'il le r'attrappe de vistesse.
Tantost ses compagnons, au plaisir attachez,
Par jeu s'estant escarmouchez,
Font cent passades, vont et viennent,
Et, jettant un bonnet, en l'air ils le soustiennent
A force de traits decochez.

Icy, sur un barbe qui rue,
Sur un turc qui hanit souvent,
On voit floter au gré du vent
Le heron, l'autruche et la grue.
La blanche et haute aigrete y montre son orgueil,
Et represente presqu'à l'œil
Entre cent turquoises plantée,
Les vagues de la mer doucement agitée,
Qui se brisent contre un escueil.

Deçà, delà, mille cornettes,
Mille estendars, dont les plus beaux
Sont ceux qui pendent par lambeaux,
S'esmeuvent au son des trompettes.
Mille enseignes à pié, qu'animent les tambours,
Font mille plis et mille tours
Sur ceux dont elles sont les règles,
Et l'on y voit voler, aussi bien que des aigles,
Des chiens, des lyons et des ours.

(II, 368–70)

Saint-Amant had been to Poland and during his visit would, no doubt, have seen for himself many of the troops that the Queen could muster. In order to create this colourful review — at times almost worthy of Mantegna — he has most likely supplemented this knowledge with imaginary details. One should not, however, be too sceptical about the incredible equestrian exploits of the Tartars: similar feats have been attributed to those other legendary horsemen, the Plains Indians of North America. It will be noted how the poet again introduces 'je voy' and 'l'on voit' in order to lend a certain spontaneity to the scene he is describing. It will also be noted that, like those descriptions in 'L'Ode heroi-comique' already alluded to, the successive *tableaux* in 'La Genereuse' do not give a detailed analysis of any action and no particular movement is developed

at length. Unfortunately, moreover, the ensuing description of the Battle of Warsaw is rather ineffective. Neither of these two poems, then, would have been likely to convince Leonardo that poetry was not inferior to painting and that, on the contrary, it was capable of doing things painting could not.

However, although the depiction of what we might call 'large-scale' battle movements escapes Saint-Amant, when he develops at length the action of single combats he frequently excels himself. A quite remarkable similarity between some of them would seem to suggest that once again he was basing his pictures on events and scenes he had himself actually witnessed. Certainly we would be justified in assuming that he had seen a wrestling-match such as he describes with verve and vigour in 'La Rome ridicule' and which, although hardly a 'combat' in the sense we have been using, must be included here:

> Icy, dans la palestre unie,
> De bras, de jambes et de corps,
> Les lutteurs font tous les efforts
> Que peut suggerer la manie:
> Tantost on les entend souffler,
> Tantost d'ahan on voit s'enfler
> Leurs muscles, leurs nerfs et leurs vaines;
> Ils bavent, ils grincent les dents,
> Et plus leurs secousses sont vaines,
> Plus à la prise ils sont ardents.
>
> L'adresse à la vigueur meslée
> Les noue et pousse à se presser,
> Mais leurs mains ne font que glisser
> Sur leur peau qui luit d'estre huilée:
> Flanc contre flanc, sein contre sein,
> Ils tentent dessein sur dessein
> Pour culbuter la resistance;
> Leurs os sont contraints d'en fremir,
> Et, malgré leur roide prestance,
> L'oppression les fait gemir.
>
> (II, 399–400)

Many of the fine, realistic details present here are to be found in Saint-Amant's account of the combat between Jacob and the angel in *Moyse Sauvé* (II, 281–2), and also in his description of the fight between Moses and the Egyptian overseer in the same poem:

> Le payen, confondu de voir que son espée
> S'est en ce grand effort à son poing echapée,
> Tourne viste à Moyse, et, sur luy se jettant,
> De jambes et de bras le saisit à l'instant.
> Moyse le reçoit: à la lutte ils se nouent,
> Ramassent leur vigueur, des mains s'entre-secouent,
> Soufflent, grincent les dents, deschirent leurs habis,
> De leurs yeux enflamez font d'estranges rubis,

Tentent mille desseins, et, redoublant leurs forces,
Se donnent l'un à l'autre entorces sur entorces;
Ils changent de posture, ils brûlent d'action,
Et l'eau que rend leur corps en cette oppression
Montre qu'ils n'ont en eux muscle, artere, ny veine,
Ny nerf, qui ne fremisse et ne s'enfle de peine;
Et mon œil agité voit en leur mouvement
Leurs pas sur le sablon empraints confusément.
Courage! du payen la valeur diminue;
Sa force de son ire est en vain soustenue,
Il fleschit, et l'Hebreu, terminant le combat,
L'estreint, le fait gemir, le sousleve, l'abat,
Luy presse d'un genouil l'estomach qui panthelle,
Et, luy voyant tirer une dague mortelle
Qu'en l'ardeur de la lutte il a mise en oubly,
Luy surprend d'une main le poignet affoibly,
De l'autre ouvre ses doigts, les detord, l'en arrache,
En tourne en bas la pointe et par trois fois la cache
Jusqu'à l'argent du manche, exquisement gravé,
Dans le flanc de son maistre à sa fin arrivé.
Il se debat, il crie à chaque fois que r'entre
L'impitoyable fer en son malheureux ventre.
Le sang à gros bouillons luy sort de maint endroit;
Une horreur l'enveloppe, il devient blesme et froit . . .
(II, 196–7)

Although hardly dramatic or particularly frightening this description is exciting, in spite of its faults. Perhaps the one thing it may most be criticized for is the extremely clumsy introduction of the poet's presence — no doubt done to add a touch of actuality — even though the detail of the churned-up sand is as delightful as that of the grinding teeth or the straining muscles. However, it must be emphasized that this love of detail, this *eye* for detail, leads Saint-Amant into over-estimating just how much a passage such as this will take. He describes the movements of the two enemies well, but he unfortunately causes the pace of his account to flag by the insertion of rather unnecessary touches — the most obvious example being where he slips in a brief description of the dagger's haft, a description which detracts our attention from what should be the most important feature, the death of the overseer. It might even be said that 'exquisement gravé' verges on the comical; certainly one can think of comic authors who would insert such a phrase at a crucial moment in order to make us laugh. Indeed, in another battle-scene from *Moyse Sauvé*, this concentration on detail does create a really humorous picture:

Mais le grand Josué, qui, tout brillant de gloire,
Veut par un grand exploit couronner sa victoire,
L'entreprend seul, l'affronte, et d'un grand coup de dard
Luy perce fierement le bras de part en part;
Et, voyant qu'à l'aspect de sa face difforme,

Son cheval, effrayé comme d'un monstre enorme,
Souffle, tremble, se cabre, et n'ose s'approcher,
Il fait un saut à terre, et s'en va le chercher.
Il le trouve aussi-tost, il le presse, il le charge;
En vain devant son fer le payen met sa targe,
En vain la forma-t'on de sept peaux d'elephant,
Le glaive à chaque coup en revient triomphant.
Ce corps immense et lourd à peine se manie;
Sa vigueur ordinaire à son bras se desnie:
Le dard fiché dans l'os, encore à l'os pendu;
Le long travail souffert, le sang qu'il a perdu
Et l'horrible douleur que luy cause la playe,
Desrobent à sa main sa puissante zagaye;
Mais, comme en se courbant il la veut ramasser,
Josué, qui l'espie et le voit se baisser,
Prend son temps, se sousleve, et d'un effort extreme
Luy fait sur le sablon voler la teste mesme;
Par trois ou quatre fois sur l'herbe elle bondit,
Et le grand corps tronqué trebuche et se roidit.

(II, 223–4)

Evidently Saint-Amant's grasp of visual effects is not matched here by an awareness of what poetry can best do and of how to go about achieving this. It is clear that too much detailed description slows down the pace of a poem and that in a passage involving frantic, urgent movement this is to be regretted. All too often, in fact, Saint-Amant squanders his opportunity to endow battle-scenes and the like with a *feeling* of violent, rapid action. At times too, one must admit, the way he expresses his ideas is slip-shod, to say the least. The rather amusing line describing how the decapitated head bounces about — perhaps suggested by the legend concerning the beheading of St Paul — could perhaps have been put in a less unfortunate manner, whilst it is only too obvious that the poet overdoes the use of 'grand' in the first three lines.

On the other hand, Saint-Amant was not altogether unaware of how poetry might be used to suggest movement. Particularly striking is the way he frequently strings a series of verbs together in order to convey an impression of action — this device will be discussed more fully in Chapter 7 — as in this allegorical description of a combat between Peace and the Fury of War in 'La Suspension d'armes':

Le desespoir l'anime, elle empoigne le glaive,
Contre ce bel objet la pointe elle en esleve,
Luy porte coup sur coup pour la mettre à l'envers,
Tantost d'une estocade et tantost d'un revers,
S'allonge, se retient, change et change de garde,
Enfin avec despit le fer mesme elle darde . . .

(II, 480)

The same sort of procedure is employed, in *Moyse Sauvé*, in this description of the Nile:

Le Nil, en ce complot, d'aspre fureur s'allume:
Il fremit, il bouillonne, il murmure, il escume;
Il monte jusqu'au ciel en cotaux ondoyans;
Il s'engloutit soy-mesme en cercles tournoyants . . .
(II, 230–1)

It was stated at the beginning of this chapter that a number of Saint-Amant's descriptions of combats involve monsters — a term used here to cover both real and imaginary beasts. Although our discussion of such passages will still centre primarily on the poet's attempts to depict movement and action, we shall, in passing, pay some attention to the portrayal of the monsters themselves.

Early in his career Saint-Amant tried his hand at a poem relating the rescue of Andromeda by Perseus. Entitled 'L'Andromede', the work is a rather disconcerting mixture of preciosity, prosaism, and spirited visual detail. Here is the description of how Perseus wounds the sea-monster to whom the maiden has been sacrificed:

Il fend l'air la main armée
D'un coutelas flamboyant;
Sous luy, la beste animée
S'enfle et gronde en le voyant.
Elle court, la gueule ouverte,
D'où sort une escume verte,
Après l'ombre du guerrier,
A qui, de cette entreprise,
La Gloire, en son ame esprise,
Offre desja le laurier.

Tel que descend le tonnerre
Sur quelque arbre audacieux,
Qui, de la part de la Terre,
Semble defier les Cieux;
Tel, en fureur, il se jette,
Plus viste qu'une sagette,
Sur son ennemy cruel,
Et d'une profonde playe,
Courageusement essaye
A terminer ce duel.

Le monstre, tout en desordre
Du grand coup qu'il a receu,
Saute après luy pour le mordre,
Mais son espoir est deceu.
Alors la Nue, irritée
De se voir ainsi heurtée,
Se ramasse en tourbillons;
Puis, soudain, quand il retombe,
La mer, qui sous luy succombe,
Pirouette à gros bouillons.

Tantost jusqu'au fond d'un gouffre
La rage le fait plonger,
Tantost les peines qu'il souffre
Hors de l'eau le font nager.
Il s'arreste, il se tourmente;
La douleur qui s'en augmente
Luy fait pantheler le flanc,
Et par sa mortelle atteinte
L'onde d'alentour est teinte
De venin meslé de sang.

(I, 56–7)

Clearly Saint-Amant appreciated how he might render the picture more dynamic and more convincing. The detail of the sky and sea rent and heaving adds, in spite of the touch of preciosity, movement and even realism to a scene which is far from being static and dull. The baroque love of movement, of sweeping rhythms and energy is surely exemplified here. One must admire, too, the way Saint-Amant seizes upon such realistic details as the panting flanks of the furious monster, and the sea stained with blood.

The beast itself had previously been described at length. Indeed, in painting it the poet had left very little to our imagination. This is perhaps a pity for there is something to be said for leaving purely imaginary objects, such as mythical beasts, as vague as possible. Often, the more we know about such an object the less sinister and frightening it becomes — it is the *unknown* that sends shivers down one's spine. There is also the danger of multiplying details in descriptions of this sort to the point of verging on the amusing, if not the ridiculous, not to mention the fact already emphasized that a coherent picture is very unlikely to emerge from a list of different characteristics. Saint-Amant's monster, although hardly comical, is neither frightening nor awe-inspiring, even though we are left — indeed *because* we are left — with an extremely vivid picture of it:

Sa teste affreuse et superbe,
Aux marques qu'elle portoit,
Du sang tombé sur de l'herbe
Vivement representoit;
Ses prunelles embrasées
Ressembloient à ces fusées
Qui font leur effet dans l'eau,
Et jettoient tout droit en l'ame
A longues pointes de flame,
La froide horreur du tombeau.

Tout ainsi qu'une baleine,
Il avoit dessus les yeux
Deux tuyaux qui pour haleine
Souffloient de l'eau jusqu'aux cieux;
Sa gueulle de crocodile
Estoit un gouffre mobile;

La mer s'abismoit dedans,
Et souvent sa langue noire
Se dardoit entre l'ivoire
Du triple rang de ses dents.

De mainte coquille dure
Qui sur le dos luy croissoit,
Comme d'une espaisse armure
Sa peau s'enorgueillissoit;
Une espouventable queue
Moitié jaune et moitié bleue
Luy tournoyoit sur le corps,
Et par fois, en frappant l'onde,
Sembloit menacer le monde
De ses merveilleux efforts.
(I, 54–5)

A comparison between this beast and that more celebrated monster of the seventeenth century, described by Théramène towards the end of *Phèdre*, is not without interest even whilst making allowances for the differing abilities and intentions of the two authors. Although Racine's description is particularly defined for once, it is still much less so than Saint-Amant's and yet somehow seems the more impressive:

Cependant, sur le dos de la plaine liquide,
S'élève à gros bouillons une montagne humide;
L'onde approche, se brise, et vomit à nos yeux,
Parmi des flots d'écume, un monstre furieux.
Son front large est armé de cornes menaçantes;
Tout son corps est couvert d'écailles jaunissantes;
Indomptable taureau, dragon impétueux,
Sa croupe se recourbe en replis tortueux;
Ses longs mugissements font trembler le rivage.
Le ciel avec horreur voit ce monstre sauvage;
La terre s'en émeut, l'air en est infecté;
Le flot qui l'apporta recule épouvanté.[6]

For one thing, Saint-Amant's explicit use of colours[7] is noticeable when compared to the Racinian passage, although the latter's 'jaunissantes' strikes one as being more evocative. One cannot help thinking, moreover, that the way Racine skilfully suggests the horror of the monster which causes Hippolyte's death by implying that it was at once a bull and a dragon and yet neither — these would have a special significance for Thésée in any case — is much more effective than the way Saint-Amant, with his tendency to seize upon details, rather clumsily builds up a picture of his creature by taking attributes of the whale and the crocodile. That the baroque poet would have seen both these beasts on his travels is beyond doubt — in his preface to *Moyse Sauvé* he gives the impression of being more than just a little scornful of those people who had only ever seen crocodiles 'pendus dans les cabinets des curieux' (II, 146) — and one might,

therefore, have expected his description of the crocodile which attacks the baby Moses, concealed in the rushes, to have benefited from his experiences. Sad to say, however, it lacks both visual detail and the poetic suggestiveness with which Racine endows his monster, whilst an allusion to 'crocodile tears' hardly helps matters:

> . . . un monstre cruel, qui nage et qui se treuve
> Tantost dessus la rive et tantost dans le fleuve,
> Un amphibie enorme, un traistre qui se pleint,
> Qui pour l'homme attraper les pleurs de l'homme feint,
> Sort du Nil tout à coup, rampe sur l'herbe emeue . . .
> (II, 181)

The ensuing combat between Merary and Elisaph, who are fortunately watching over Moses, and the crocodile has little to recommend it either. We find the same sequences of verbs:

> [Elisaph]
> Se courbe, offre son fer, affronte le trespas,
> S'appreste au rude chocq sur ses jambes roidis . . .
> (II, 181)

but the poet extends the description over 150 lines, introducing not only many details, but also much extraneous material which completely slows down what impetus this device offers and tempers any vigour the piece might otherwise have possessed.

Always eager to introduce a degree of excitement into *Moyse Sauvé*, Saint-Amant also obliges Merary and Elisaph to fight off a giant vulture. The description of this particular combat, being rather briefer than the crocodile episode, is a little more successful:

> [L'aspre vautour]
> Se renfonce au combat, va trouver qui l'attend,
> Montre ses grands orteuils, les ouvre, les estend,
> De leur acier crochu l'aigre fureur allonge,
> Arme son bec de rage et sur l'autre plonge . . .
> (II, 288)

although Saint-Amant in fact chooses a vaguely pretentious and unconvincing way of expressing himself (the second couplet, for example). The vulture, having been beaten off, is later attacked and killed by an eagle belonging to the Egyptian princess who rescues Moses from the rushes. It is in the description of the fight between the two birds that there occurs the one line which, perhaps more than any other, demonstrates just how significant a role Saint-Amant's remarkable grasp of picturesque details plays in his poetry:

> Dejà, bec contre bec et serre contre serre,
> Ils taschent de finir cette mortelle guerre;
> Dejà l'aspre vautour, sous l'aigle qui l'estreint,
> De douleur et de rage à crier est contraint;

Dejà le sang en pleut: son vainqueur le secoue,
Et tandis que le vent de leurs plumes se joue,
Tandis qu'ils font en l'air un combat si cruel,
Leurs ombres sur le pré font un autre duel.

(II, 319)

It will be noticed, in passing, how Saint-Amant attempts, with some success, to convey a sense of confrontation by 'opposing' words in each hemistich: 'bec contre bec et serre contre serre'. This is, in fact, a device he often uses in his descriptions of combats: 'Pié contre pié, front contre front' (cit. supra, p. 34), 'Flanc contre flanc, sein contre sein' (cit. supra, p. 38).

The sea, ships, battles, and monsters — what conclusions may we draw concerning Saint-Amant's attempts to describe action and movement? Firstly, it would seem that not only was he capable of painting static scenes in words, but that he was also able, on occasion, to develop movement in a convincing manner. Secondly, it is very much to be regretted, especially when reading those passages of verse where a climax of action is reached or required, that he was seemingly unaware of the fact that too much detail can ruin a *sense* of movement, however fine in itself that detail might be. Nevertheless, one would be justified in maintaining that Saint-Amant vindicates Lessing's assertion that the poet is superior to the painter in one respect at least — even if only by virtue of that delightful maritime scene in 'L'Arion'.

CHAPTER 5

SAINT-AMANT AND THE COMMUNICATION OF EMOTION: *MOYSE SAUVÉ*

In Chapter 2 it was stated that Saint-Amant, wishing to give expression to the great joy experienced by the sister of Moses on seeing the baby safely delivered from a dangerous predicament, 'calls to the rescue' the famous French painter Poussin—a fact which, it was suggested, implies a tendency to think of emotion in visual terms. Several crucial questions arise from this statement. To begin with, one must ask whether Saint-Amant always attempts to express emotion *visually*. Or does he, on the other hand, ever turn to the other resources of poetry in order to communicate 'il di dentro'? To what degree, indeed, does he succeed in portraying emotion at all? In approaching these problems we must think not only of the emotions of the various characters described within the story of Moses but also, and this is perhaps of more importance, of the emotion to be engendered in the reader, and of the poet's skill in doing this. Does he ever manage to move *us*? Clearly the tone of the poem will be an important factor here — to what extent does Saint-Amant's descriptive, visually evocative verse lend itself to the tone one would expect of a work which the poet calls an 'idyle heroïque'?

In one sense Saint-Amant's attempts to portray the emotions of his characters are more often than not both visual and poetic. By this it is meant that he relies, to a very great extent, on comparisons in order to express fear, joy, anguish and so forth, these comparisons themselves usually being of a picturesque nature and frequently containing an indirect means of appealing to the mind's eye such as 'tel qu'on void'. For example, wishing to describe how very loath Jocabel is to leave her baby Moses amongst the rushes, Saint-Amant introduces the following comparison:

> 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 Jocabel en son esloignement.

(II, 163–4)

This is surely a poignant little picture, complete in itself but at the same time ably illustrating Jocabel's anxiety. It is, in fact, one of Saint-Amant's more successful attempts at conveying the emotions of his characters. However, the poet is not content to stop here and further pursues the description of Jocabel's state of mind:

Ses blessures, qu'Amram avoit consolidées,
Se r'ouvrent à l'aspect de ses tristes idées,
Et son debile espoir privé d'un tel appuy,
Trebuche sous la peur et succombe à l'ennuy.
Ainsi, quand d'une poutre on oste quelque estaye
Qui se vit autresfois l'honneur d'une futaye,
Et qui des vents esmûs soustint tous les debas,
On voit au mesme instant tout le plancher à bas.
Tantost elle regarde, et tantost elle escoute;
Tantost jusqu'à la rive elle reprend sa route;
Puis ayant veu la nef où flotte son tresor
Le sentier domestique elle refoule encor.
Mais à chaque moment elle tourne la teste;
Dessus la moindre butte elle monte et s'arreste,
Sur les pieds se sousleve, et par l'œil du desir
Figure à l'œil du corps une ombre de plaisir.

(II, 164–5)

A number of remarks need to be made concerning these two passages. The initial comparison is, as we have said, effective. It is quite obvious, however, that it loses much of its appeal by being submerged in the spate of explanatory details which follow. The little description of how Jocabel stops and starts, although fairly vivid and pleasing in itself — it is in many ways reminiscent of that exquisite picture of people returning home from the port in 'L'Arion' — does not add to the general effect but rather, being quite unnecessary, actually detracts from it. As for the second comparison, it is patently a *tour d'adresse* and introduced for its own sake. It does, however, shed light on Saint-Amant's methods: he chooses to illustrate Jocabel's troubled state of mind and the way her bolstered-up hopes disintegrate with an image that is concrete and visual and, as a result, somehow disconcerting. All too often, in fact, we sense that Saint-Amant has followed in Marino's steps too closely for, as with the Italian, his comparisons, frequently unbelievably far-fetched, are intended to *amaze* the reader — the logical conclusion of the Renaissance goal of *ammirazione* which Marino himself expressed in the verse 'E' del poeta il fin la meraviglia'.[1] An example of just such a comparison is to be found when a storm

springs up on the Nile. Here is how Saint-Amant suggests the distress felt by the sister of Moses:

> Et, telle que *l'on void* sur un bord aquatique
> Se tourmenter en vain la mere domestique
> Quand le fils adoptif sous sa chaleur esclos,
> Comme d'une autre espece, entrecouppe les flots,
> Passe de vague en vague, et sur la plaine esmeue
> S'esleve, disparoist, se redonne à sa veue,
> Tandis qu'elle s'agite, et que d'un son peureux,
> Elle se plaint aux vents du sort cru dangereux,
> Telle, pendant l'orage estrange en sa furie,
> Parut la triste sœur, au bord de la prairie,
> Pour le destin du frere, agité sur les eaux
> Plus que leurs propres joncs, et leurs propres roseaux.
>
> (II, 233–4)

There is admittedly something remarkable about the ingenuity of such a comparison, but in this context it is finally nothing but comical, especially as the phrasing is clumsy and the wording stilted. To compare a young woman who is appalled at what might happen to her baby brother — a baby who is destined to become the saviour of a whole nation — with a hen afraid for a duckling she has hatched and mothered, is indeed to go from the sublime to the ridiculous. Leaving aside the propriety of such comparisons, however, it is perfectly obvious that Saint-Amant is tending, in these passages, to describe the outward signs of the emotions. Both Jocabel and her daughter are seen reacting to a situation, and even when the poet does try to convey an idea of how Jocabel gives way to despair in her mind he does so by means of a visual image.

However, elsewhere in *Moyse Sauvé*, Saint-Amant makes use of comparisons which, because they introduce images dealing with human beings and their predicaments rather than animals and inanimate objects, seem much more appropriate and allow him to suggest emotion more convincingly. Apart from the main narrative dealing with the hiding and finding of Moses, the poet also develops other stories drawn from the Old Testament, stories which fill in more of the history of the Israelites. One of these concerns Jacob and his love for Rachel. Rachel's sister, Lya, falls in love with Jacob too, and after much mental turmoil tells her father who resolves to help his unhappy daughter. In order to express how overcome with relief Lya is Saint-Amant resorts to the following comparison:

> Quiconque, au sein d'un bois affreux et solitaire,
> Après s'estre engagé d'un pas involontaire
> A suivre triste et seul l'erreur qui le conduit,
> Sous le morne silence et sous l'aveugle nuit;
> Après cent tours, cent maux, cent peines incroyables
> Parmy les hurlements des bestes effroyables,

Qui l'auroyent fait trembler, qui l'auroyent fait gemir,
Après se voir enfin contraint de s'endormir,
Après l'horreur d'un songe où son ame en tenebres
Auroit feint à ses yeux mille images funebres,
Viendroit à s'eveiller, et d'un bien sans pareil
Entendroit tout à coup, au lever du soleil,
Mille divers oyseaux faire dessus sa teste
De mille aymables tons une douce tempeste,
Seroit moins consolé, moins gay, moins en repos
Que ne le fut Lya d'entendre ces propos.

(II, 267–8)

This particular comparison depends less on the reader witnessing the outward signs of Lya's new-found joy than being made to share it in some sort. The gloomy, oppressive forest becomes for each reader the labyrinth out of which Lya suddenly finds a means of escape. It must be admitted that the image is a little unwieldy but, on the other hand, it does contain one or two very fine lines — 'Sous le morne silence et sous l'aveugle nuit', for example. Yet another comparison, although lacking what we might call the immediate appeal of the last one, nevertheless gives us a good idea of the astonishment felt by Lya's father, Laban, on learning of her dilemma:

Tel qu'*on verroit* surpris des couleurs et des choses
L'homme qui seroit né les deux lumieres closes,
S'il venoit, par fortune ou par grace des cieux,
A jouir des objets dont jouissent les yeux,
Tel fut surpris Laban au discours de sa fille . . .

(II, 266)

Here, the introductory 'tel qu'on verroit' more or less precludes any sharing of the emotion felt by the blind man and hence Laban. Astonishment, here, is something to be seen. In point of fact, Saint-Amant has missed the opportunity to make us really feel Laban's amazement. He could just as easily, and much more effectively, have asked us to imagine we had been born blind, and then made to see, rather than proceeding by the rather round-about way of asking us to imagine it happening to somebody else. For all that, the actual comparison is interesting, especially so when we consider the poet's own delight in vision and the visual bias to his poetry.

It would seem, then, that those comparisons which involve human experiences and which require us to share emotion rather than merely witness it have most impact on our sensibility. However, there are exceptions and the following example must be deemed reasonably successful. Jocabel is relieved to find that her elder son has not been harmed by the Egyptian soldiery:

Non, la brebis du nord ne sent pas tant de joye
Lors que du loup-cervier bruyant après la proye,
Ou de quelque grand ours pour la queste sorty,
Elle voit à ses flancs son agneau garanty,

Qu'en ressent et qu'en montre au depart agreable
La mere qui du fils prend un soin incroyable,
Qui le tient, qui le baise, et qui doit benir Dieu
De voir, bien qu'à regret, l'orage en autre lieu.

(II, 166)

Homer, of course, made much use of this sort of comparison. However, although he frequently develops his for their own sake, and now and then produces one which startles rather than illustrates, his choice of imagery is more often than not particularly apt and effective. When expressing emotion he turns to human experiences for his images, as in the following passage from *The Odyssey*:

Ὣς φάτο, τῷ δ' ἔτι μᾶλλον ὑφ' ἵμερον ὦρσε γόοιο·
κλαῖε δ' ἔχων ἄλοχον θυμαρέα, κεδνὰ ἰδυῖαν.
ὡς δ' ὅτ' ἂν ἀσπάσιος γῆ νηχομένοισι φανήῃ,
ὧν τε Ποσειδάων εὐεργέα νῆ' ἐνὶ πόντῳ
ῥαίσῃ, ἐπειγομένην ἀνέμῳ καὶ κύματι πηγῷ·
παῦροι δ' ἐξέφυγον πολιῆς ἁλὸς ἤπειρόνδε
νηχόμενοι, πολλὴ δὲ περὶ χροΐ τέτροφεν ἅλμη,
ἀσπάσιοι δ' ἐπέβαν γαίης, κακότητα φυγόντες.[2]

Obviously, such a comparison, within the context of Odysseus's journeying, is appropriate and compelling even though embroidered on for its own sake. Whilst Saint-Amant clearly delights in his comparisons and enjoys developing little scenes, his choice of imagery seldom has quite the same thematic or tonal link with the main story as is evident, for example, in the Homeric comparison which follows:

Ταῦτ' ἄρ' ἀοιδὸς ἄειδε περικλυτός· αὐτὰρ 'Οδυσσεὺς
τήκετο, δάκρυ δ' ἔδευεν ὑπὸ βλεφάροισι παρειάς.
ὡς δὲ γυνὴ κλαίῃσι φίλον πόσιν ἀμφιπεσοῦσα,
ἅς τε ἐῆς πρόσθεν πόλιος λαῶν τε πέσῃσιν,
ἄστεϊ καὶ τεκέεσσιν ἀμύνων νηλεὲς ἦμαρ·
ἡ μὲν τὸν θνήσκοντα καὶ ἀσπαίροντα ἰδοῦσα
ἀμφ' αὐτῷ χυμένη λίγα κωκύει· οἱ δέ τ' ὄπισθε
κόπτοντες δούρεσσι μετάφρενον ἠδὲ καὶ ὤμους
εἴρερον εἰσανάγουσι, πόνον τ' ἐχέμεν καὶ ὀιζύν·
τῆς δ' ἐλεεινοτάτῳ ἄχεϊ φθινύθουσι παρειαί·
ὣς 'Οδυσεὺς ἐλεεινὸν ὑπ' ὀφρύσι δάκρυον εἶβεν.[3]

Certainly, on one occasion Saint-Amant compares Jacob's family scattering in fear of Laban to fish fleeing and hiding from 'monstres' (crocodiles?) in the river Nile (II, 276), the geographical link contributing towards the association of ideas, but this is hardly as significant as the above comparison from the *Odyssey*.

Saint-Amant does not, however, rely entirely upon comparisons in order to evoke the feelings and emotions of his characters. A sort of verbal sleight-of-

hand used on occasion by the poet is perhaps so obviously a device that it lacks any depth. Nevertheless it is a step in the right direction. Here, for example, is how he describes Rebecca's fears for the safety of her son Jacob:

> Si l'air se noircissoit dessous le moindre orage
> Lors que son cher Jacob estoit au pasturage,
> Il tonnoit dans son ame, et l'obscure vapeur
> Un spectre du deluge y formoit à sa peur;
> Si de la moindre épine il avoit quelque atteinte,
> Son cœur estoit percé du couteau de la crainte;
> Et, si la fievre au lit le tenoit un moment,
> Elle estoit dejà morte et dans le monument.
>
> (II, 171)

Unfortunately, the device appears too contrived to be really convincing and the effect is clearly overdone. The same criticism must be made of a similar passage in which Saint-Amant attempts to communicate Jocabel's terror when the storm on the Nile endangers her son:

> Ce bruit impetueux, cette noire tempeste,
> En excite soudain une autre dans sa teste
> Qui prouve son tonnerre, et ses vents et ses flots,
> Par les cris, les souspirs, les pleurs et les sanglots.
>
> (II, 231–2)

A good deal of *Moyse Sauvé* is given over to dialogue enabling the various characters to voice their feelings. Sad to say their speeches are, on the whole, too forced, stilted even, ever to grip the reader. Chapelain, who, in a letter to Balzac, faulted the work for not depicting 'les mœurs et les passions',[4] in yet another letter criticized Saint-Amant's inability to create convincing, *moving* dialogue. Having commended the descriptions in the 'idyle heroïque' he goes on to say that '[Saint-Amant] tombe lorsqu'il faut faire parler, si bien qu'*il entretient l'imagination et ne remue point les entrailles*'.[5] Chapelain's judgement is only too justified. Here, for example, is the Queen of Egypt, distraught at the death of her son, railing against her husband for not having allowed the Israelites to leave, an obstinacy which brings down the various plagues upon the Egyptians:

> Tien, luy dit-elle enfin, regarde, miserable!
> Regarde où nous reduit ton cœur inexorable!
> Et bien! es-tu content? Cette punition
> Pourra-t'elle fleschir ton obstination?
> En veux-tu de plus grande? et le sort homicide,
> Qui du ciel et de toy la querelle decide,
> Pour delivrer Jacob de tes injustes fers,
> Doit-il rendre l'Egipte un tableau des enfers?
> Las! tu commets le crime, et j'en porte la peine!
> Mon fils, mon seul espoir, n'est plus qu'une ombre vaine!

O tragique pitié! vien, vien me secourir,
Et fay que sur son corps je puisse au moins mourir.
(II, 210)

There is no real pathos, no real anguish in this rather pedestrian speech. A flurry of exclamations and rhetorical questions are not enough to convey an impression of deep grief and despair. How much more effective it might have been had the bereaved mother described the poor, lifeless body of her son, recalling how those sightless eyes once smiled and laughed at her, how those still, livid lips once asked for her, and so forth, instead of uttering taunts which, in any case, have no venom or bitterness to them. How banal 'mon fils, mon seul espoir' sounds — surely he was more than that, surely he was all her happiness, all her joy, a source of constant bliss and worry on whom she lavished all her love and affection? How trite the last line sounds. We do not really feel she means it: it is no more than a concession to convention. Nor is Rebecca's grief at being obliged to bid farewell to Jacob when he is sent away to avoid his brother's anger any more heart-rending:

Quoy! dit-elle en soy-mesme, il faut donc que je voye
S'eclipser à mes yeux mon bien, ma seule joye,
Ou que je sois reduite au miserable estat
De craindre à tous momens quelque horrible attentat!
Il faut donc que je vive, ou plustost que je meure,
Dans l'apprehension de le perdre à toute heure,
Ce fils, ce doux sujet de mon cruel ennuy,
Ou que je me resolve à languir loin de luy!
(II, 176)

The passage seems forced: one notices, for example, how Saint-Amant has tried, unsuccessfully, to heighten the pathos of Rebecca's dilemma by multiplying the number of adjectives — '*seule* joye', '*miserable* estat', '*horrible* attentat', '*doux* sujet', '*cruel* ennuy'. 'Que je vive, ou plustost que je meure, / Dans l'apprehension de le perdre' is striving for the right effect, but it somehow seems rather glib and is certainly devoid of the chilling poignancy one might have expected.

Whilst they do not exactly express emotion it is perhaps significant that the speeches made by Jehovah in *Moyse Sauvé* frequently fail to give an impression of his grandeur and majesty. At times he speaks in an almost familiar fashion, although once or twice Saint-Amant does succeed in raising what he is saying to a more elevated and hence more appropriate level. The poet manages to endow the following speech with a certain awesome solemnity, for instance:

Avant que ma parole, en merveilles feconde,
Eust posé sur un rien les fondements du monde,
Eust construit la rondeur des globes éclatans,
Eust creé la nature et fait naistre le temps,
Je te predestinay pour estre mon oracle,

Pour faire aux bords du Nil miracle sur miracle,
Et pour tirer enfin ce peuple malheureux
De la calamité d'un joug si rigoureux.

(II, 201)

It is evident that the tone of any work plays a dominant role in determining our emotional reactions to the sentiments it contains. Consequently, it will be necessary for us to study the degree to which Saint-Amant's liking for highly detailed, descriptive verse is suited to the tone of a poem which has for its subject an ostensibly serious theme. *Moyse Sauvé* is, as we have seen, called an 'idyle heroïque' by its author, a poem of which he wrote 'le luth y eclatte plus que la trompette' (II, 140), meaning that the lyrical, idyllic elements are more prominent than the heroic or epic elements. From this definition it would seem that the work will not possess a sustained tenor of feeling, but will fluctuate between the lyrical and the heroic. As a result it must be borne in mind that, although *Moyse Sauvé* is purporting to tell a serious story, there will be moments when an intensity of feeling will neither be required nor, indeed, sought after — although the question of whether this might be detrimental to the poem as a whole will have to be given consideration.

Let us, to begin with, examine those elements which make up the idyllic parts of the work. As R. A. Sayce has pointed out, the main story concerning the hiding and the saving of Moses is idyllic, as is the subsidiary story of Jacob and his love for Rachel, although the former is given an epic character by the allegorical battles which are waged over the baby.[6] Strangely, it is often the idyllic descriptions which are the most memorable, even if they do seem out of place within the work as a whole. One such description relates how Moses's guardians while away the time whilst watching over the cradle by catching fish. Extremely detailed and colourful, it is patently obvious that the poet has brought it in because it afforded him the opportunity to paint a scene he knew well:

Mais dans l'onde dejà cette guerre s'allume,
Dejà le crin retors que le plomb et la plume
Tire au fond et retient, à l'œil est desrobé,
Et dejà sous l'appast le piege recourbé
Offre au poisson beant, mu d'une brusque envie,
Sa veritable mort sous une ombre de vie;
Dejà la canne ploye, et, dejà haut en l'air,
Le nageur estant pris vole comme un eclair.
Il s'y secoue en vain, de sa cheute on s'approche,
On y court, on le prend, du fer on le descroche;
Il s'echappe des doigts, tombe, sautelle, fuit,
Fait voir mille soleils en l'escaille qui luit,
Bat l'herbe de sa queue, et, sur la plaine verte,
D'une bouche sans cry, de temps en temps ouverte,
Baille sans respirer, comme né sans poumon,
Et laisse à qui l'estraint un reste de limon.

(II, 251)

The rapid succession of verbs which has been remarked upon in Chapter 4 is once again in evidence and is partly responsible for the description's vivacity. Another passage tells how little birds are caught and then released in a cage made of reeds. Although pleasant enough it lacks the sharpness of the fishing-scene. Moreover, in spite of what he says in the preface to *Moyse Sauvé* about using 'mots propres, justes et significatifs' when describing, Saint-Amant cannot resist the temptation to introduce some incredibly verbose periphrasis at times and this passage is, unfortunately, a case in point:

> Cependant les mauvais, si-tost qu'on les veut prendre,
> Du bec sauvage et dur taschent à se deffendre;
> Leur plume se herisse, et, tout noirs de la pois,
> Leurs ongles depitez egratignent les doigts.
> Marie en choisit un aux ailes emaillées
> Qui n'estoyent en la glus ni prises ni souillées,
> Et, r'enfermant son vol dans le creux de sa main,
> Sur son dos passe l'autre et le rend plus humain.
> Sa douceur caressante est mesme si hardie
> Que de *l'endroit aigu d'où sort la melodie*
> Son coral cherche l'or, et, pour l'apprivoiser,
> Ose offrir à ses yeux la gloire d'un baiser.
> Enfin, dans la prison dès le matin construite,
> La liberté de tous est noblement reduite;
> Ils tentent le passage entre les beaux treillis,
> Et r'enceints des roseaux regrettent leurs taillis.
>
> (II, 287)

Happily, this particular example of periphrasis is rarely bettered, if at all, although 'l'animal barbu qui de cornes est brave' (II, 170) comes near it. One cannot help thinking that such pretentious frivolities, although no doubt intended to amaze the reader, were also meant to lend a certain nobility to the descriptions in which they occur. In many ways it is a pity that Saint-Amant was so unaware on such occasions of the advantages of simplicity. A more critical approach would have benefited his descriptions generally, and certainly prevented the idyllic atmosphere from being weakened by such pomposity.

The account of how Jacob would carve his loved one's name on marble or on trees belongs to the idyllic tradition too:

> Tantost d'un fer pudique il gravoit sur les marbres,
> Ou sur la tendre peau dont se vestent les arbres,
> Le nom de sa bergere enlacé dans le sien,
> Et l'honoroit tousjours d'un loyal entretien.
>
> (II, 262)

Unhappily, such behaviour has become so hackneyed that the modern reader finds it most disconcerting within the context of a Biblical epic. More acceptable, although still in the same vein, is the description of how Jacob would carve shepherds' crooks:

Tantost, ayant tiré des forests verdoyantes
Quelque bois jeune et rare aux veines ondoyantes,
Qui fust sans nœus et droit, et de juste hauteur,
Et dont au bel eclat respondist la senteur,
Il s'asseyoit soudain sur l'humble violette,
Changeoit ce beau baston en gentille houlette,
L'enrichissoit du chiffre et traçoit tout autour
Quelque chaste progrès de son ardente amour,
Puis sous le toit aymé, quand la nuit, revenue,
Renfermoit tous les airs dans une seule nue,
Et que de tout travail le monde estoit exent,
En faisoit à Rachel un gracieux present.

(II, 262–3)

Idyllic, too, are the frequent descriptions of family life, especially of mothers and their children, which occur in *Moyse Sauvé*. One of the most charming and best observed concerns the young Aaron:

Le simple et jeune Aaron, tournant à l'entour d'elles,
Semble prendre sa part de ces douces nouvelles;
Il regarde, il se hausse, et, beant et ravy,
Tant plus en est repu, moins en est assouvy.
Quelquesfois l'innocent, d'une petite bouche,
Selon que le propos sa connoissance touche,
Parle, s'exclame, rit, le propos interront,
Et met à Jocabel un chagrin sur le front;
Mais aussi-tost, d'un signe entre affable et severe,
Estant reprimandé par la main de la mere,
Aussi-tost il se taist, et d'un geste craintif
Se montre non moins qu'elle au discours attentif.

(II, 246–7)

The comparisons used by Saint-Amant to evoke the emotions of his characters are also employed, as in Homer, to illustrate or complement scenes and actions described. As far as those occurring in the idyllic sections are concerned they can at times, in spite of their element of surprise, add a certain charm, tenderness even, to the passage in question:

Comme *on voit* aux beaux jours la gentille hyrondelle
Vers son nid merveilleux voler à tire d'aile,
En atteindre les bords, sur les bords tremousser,
De gestes et d'accents ses petits caresser,
Puis de l'œil, puis du bec, tousjours pront à repaistre
Leur innocente faim, qui comme eux vient de naistre,
Flatter l'un, flatter l'autre, et leur faire sentir
De son tardif retour l'aymable repentir,
Telle *vit-on* alors la soigneuse bergere
Courre vers le berceau d'une plante legere,
Flatter le tendre objet de cent mots enfantins,
Sousrire à ses appas, benir ses beaux destins . . .

(II, 249)

Coming just after amorous avowals between the shepherd Elisaph and his shepherdess and just before the vivid fishing-scene, such a comparison surely fits in well with the idyllic, pastoral atmosphere. No intense emotions are being evoked here, as they are in the comparison involving the frantic hen, and we enjoy the picture of the swallows and the ingenuity of the simile without feeling too uneasy.

When we turn our attention to the heroic elements in *Moyse Sauvé* it is, however, immediately apparent that, whereas detailed observation is not out of place in the more lyrical passages, it does tend to be so when a more elevated tone is required. Boileau's dismissal of Saint-Amant's account of the Crossing of the Red Sea has assured that particular description of a derisive immortality at the expense of a number of really worthwhile scenes, but one would not be justified in rejecting his criticism.[7] As Françoise Gourier puts it:

> Saint-Amant semble éprouver une certaine difficulté pour s'élever à la grandeur épique quand elle serait requise pour présenter sur le ton convenable certains épisodes bibliques. Cette insuffisance apparaît surtout dans les épisodes qui évoquent l'action divine se manifestant sur un plan très vaste, dans le tableau du Déluge, par exemple, ou dans celui du passage de la Mer Rouge. Dans ces passages Saint-Amant ne semble pas pouvoir s'élever suffisamment au-dessus de la réalité familière des événements dépeints.[8]

Here is the now notorious description of the Crossing:

> Là des chameaux chargés la troupe lente et forte
> Foule plus de tresors encor qu'elle n'en porte:
> On y peut en passant de perles s'enrichir,
> Et de la pauvreté pour jamais s'affranchir;
> Là le noble cheval bondit et prend haleine
> Où venoit de souffler une lourde baleine;
> Là passent à pié sec les bœufs et les moutons,
> Où nagueres flottoyent les dauphins et les thons;
> 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 naïveté;
> Là, quelque juste effroy qui ses pas sollicite,
> S'oublie à chaque objet le fidelle exercite,
> Et là, près des rempars que l'œil peut transpercer,
> Les poissons esbahis le regardent passer.
>
> (II, 214)

Just as Saint-Amant chose to depict the sea-monster in 'L'Andromede' in detail rather than suggest all its horror through the use of a less explicit

vocabulary, so here his bias towards the concrete and visual induces him to do the same, preventing him from achieving a moving, compelling vision of a supernatural event. The little scenes he paints are charming in the same way that so many Sunday-school tracts and pictures are charming. They are 'nice' but they do not grip us, they do not seize our imagination, they do not move us.

It should perhaps be pointed out that the description of the Israelites crossing the Red Sea, like that of the Last Judgement, is not only visual in nature but also pictorial. R. A. Sayce, in fact, draws our attention to the way 'Saint-Amant's visual imagination analyses the conception of the Israelite army into a series of groups' — in much the same manner as Poussin in his painting depicting the Crossing.[9]

Saint-Amant's preoccupation with detail does not always concern itself with visual phenomena however. When portraying angels leaving Heaven in order to do Jehovah's bidding he introduces the following little touch:

> A ces commandemens, les ministres fidelles,
> Montrans leur vive ardeur en leur dos pourveu d'ailes,
> Ouvrent *du saint portail le bronze radieux,*
> *Qui fait sur de beaux gonds un bruit melodieux.*
>
> (II, 236)

Once again, the importance given to detail renders the scene trivial when it should have been majestic and grandiose. A kind of logic which leads Saint-Amant through a process of thought — Heaven has gates, gates have hinge-pins, hinge-pins tend to groan but this is Heaven so, instead of groaning, they will be musical — which cannot free itself from the familiar causes him to define something which would have been best left undefined.

Of those Homeric comparisons which appear in the epic passages a number are sufficiently stirring to prevent them being too incongruous, although it is questionable whether they are always well timed or even necessary. Amongst the more successful is the following description of a battle:

> Tels que, sur l'Ocean, *on voit* deux noirs orages,
> Deux puissans tourbillons, gros de mille naufrages
> Et fiers de mille pins sur la terre abbatus,
> L'un à l'autre opposer leurs tonnantes vertus,
> En vagabonds côtaux changer l'humide plaine,
> Et foudre contre foudre, haleine contre haleine,
> S'entre-heurter, se rompre, et de bruits et d'esclairs
> Estourdir et trancher les ondes et les airs,
> Tels *voit-on* ces deux camps, en suitte d'une gresle
> Et de traits et de dars eslancez pesle-mesle,
> En suitte des cailloux qui de bras denouez
> Sont avec force et bruit dans les frondes rouez,
> En suitte des longs cris, s'entre-choquer, se fendre,
> Se rejoindre aussi-tost, se charger, se deffendre,

Fleschir, faire eclater leurs glaives inhumains,
Et teste contre teste en revenir aux mains.

(II, 221)

The very same battle contains yet another comparison which immediately strikes one as being both dramatic and in keeping with the tone required:

Et comme un pilier seul, quand tout un pont se rend
A la rapidité d'un superbe torrent,
Soutient parfois le chocq des ondes courroucées,
Quoy qu'il voye à ses flancs les forests renversées
Passer de bord et d'autre, et que tous les sillons
Soyent vastement couverts d'impetueux bouillons;
Ainsy ce fier payen, cet homme espouventable,
Seul resiste à Jacob, et d'un cœur indontable
Voit cent morts l'assaillir et de loin et de près,
Voit son pesant bouclier tout herissé de trêts,
Voit son party deffait, ses estendars en fuite,
Et sa vaine esperance au dernier point reduite,
Sans qu'un glaçon de crainte ait pu par sa froideur
Amortir tant soit peu sa furieuse ardeur.

(II, 223)

It will be recalled that, whilst watching over the baby Moses concealed by the Nile's edge, Merary and Elisaph have to fight off a giant crocodile. During the struggle Elisaph lands a blow on the beast but fails to pierce its scales. Saint-Amant gives his description of this incident an extra vigour by the introduction of a forceful, succinct comparison:

Mais, comme en une forge où la terre s'allume
On voit le dur marteau rebondir sur l'enclume,
Dans le poin qui l'estraint en bruyant retourner
Et du cyclope noir le bras mesme estonner,
Ainsi revient l'espieu frustré de son attente,
Ainsi resonne-t-il en la main mécontente,

(II, 181–2)

In these two passages one feels that the poet has allied his keen observation — the almost Wagnerian smithy-scene is particularly striking — to a more critical sense of what is required by his subject. Whilst they still do not satisfy as completely as certain of those of Homer there is no doubt that they help lend the descriptions in question an epic tone. On the other hand, however, Saint-Amant was just as capable of extremely poor examples. Before managing at last to kill the crocodile Elisaph is wounded by the reptile and is close to death. Merary, his comrade in arms, hastens to gather certain herbs with which to heal him. Unfortunately, the poet kills all suspense and transforms what could have been a fairly dramatic scene into one which verges on the ludicrous by inserting a well observed but hopelessly out of place comparison:

Cependant Merary, songeant qu'en ces rivages
Il avoit remarqué certains simples sauvages
Dont la vertu secrette et le suc merveilleux
Serviroient au berger dans l'estat perilleux,
Y va tout aussi-tost, d'herbe en herbe chemine,
Se baisse, arreste l'œil, les fueilles examine,
Sent une fleur, sent l'autre, et passe, et tourne court,
De ses regars cherchans tout l'environ parcourt,
Et represente ainsy, sur la rive champestre,
Le fidelle animal qui, pour trouver son maistre,
Flaire à droit, flaire à gauche, et, confus en ses pas,
Va tousjours d'homme en homme, et le sien n'attaint pas.
(II, 186–7)

In addition to the quaintness of the comparison it is quite obvious that Saint-Amant is guilty here, as he was in the other descriptions of movement we examined in Chapter 4, of causing a loss of urgency and momentum by the introduction of gratuitous material.

It has become apparent that it is not merely Saint-Amant's preoccupation with detail that is his undoing, but his preoccupation with detail of a certain kind in the wrong place. Clearly some descriptions call for a broad and suggestive, rather than a detailed, treatment. And yet, on the other hand, one could conceivably think of details which might have actually enhanced the description of the Crossing of the Red Sea, for example. The poet could perhaps have seized upon a mother's fearful glance over her shoulder at the still sleeping Egyptians. He could have seized upon some detail of the Israelites' frantic scramble to safety — parents hurrying their children on, people stumbling, the young helping the old and infirm, and so on. In other words, Saint-Amant could have allied a few details more suited to the subject to a more general approach and, in so doing, rendered the whole far more satisfactory both artistically and logically.

As for the wider question of whether one can mingle heroic and idyllic elements without losing one's grip on the reader, it would seem that, as long as these elements do not contradict each other nor overlap too readily, they may, in fact, be complementary. That is to say the lack of tension in passages of an idyllic nature can act as a foil to the more emotionally charged heroic passages. This is not a question to be studied at length here as it is really outside the scope of this particular chapter. However, it must be said that the way Saint-Amant jumps erratically from one to the other, the way he frequently fails to distinguish between them when he should, negates any positive effect their combined presence might have had. Moreover the reader often feels cheated. For example, at the beginning of the work Saint-Amant sets the scene for the story to come with an admirable description of the city of Memphis, a fine, visually evocative

picture, followed by an account of the pitiful plight of the Israelites where the poet again uses the pictorial principle of analysis into groups:

> Mais, helas! un dur prince, un tygre espouventable,
> Diffamant par son regne un lieu si delectable,
> La rendoit aux Hebreux, lors esclaves sous luy,
> Un triste et sombre enfer plein d'horreur et d'ennuy.
> Et, bien que sur ces bords, depuis que dans les chaisnes
> Ils souffroyent la rigueur des plus sanglantes gesnes,
> Par plus de trois cens fois le ravage annuel
> Eust couvert tous les champs d'un bien-fait ponctuel,
> Toutesfois le long cours de cette servitude,
> Pour cette nation n'avoit eu rien de rude,
> Au prix de l'aspre joug dont cet homme inhumain
> Luy surchargeoit le col de sa terrible main.
> Tantost il la forçoit à creuser des abîmes;
> Tantost, pour eslever les fastueuses cimes
> Des prodiges de marbre erigez vainement,
> Il l'envoyoit gemir proche du firmament.
> Là l'un s'usoit les bras après une chaussée;
> L'autre mettoit au feu mainte brique entassée;
> L'autre tailloit un roc, l'autre fendoit un pin,
> Et jamais de leur tasche ils ne voyoient la fin;
> Car, une œuvre estant faite, un monstre sanguinaire
> Qui sur leurs actions controloit d'ordinaire,
> En commandoit une autre, et d'un bois en courrous,
> Pour tout loyer, après, les accabloit de coups.
>
> (II, 153–4)

This sad, distressing picture is hardly borne out by the idyllic life led by Elisaph, Merary and Moses's sister. They do not seem to be under any duress as they happily fish, catch birds, and tell stories, and it is only now and then that we are reminded of their situation and of the threat to Moses. In other words, the idyllic elements do not fit in with what we know of the captivity of the Israelites nor with what Saint-Amant leads us to expect. Whilst such elements are not out of place in the minor story of Jacob, and may be seen as having a justifiable role to play there, they do seem disconcertingly ill-suited to the main narrative.

Broadly speaking, Saint-Amant is not successful in his attempts to portray emotion nor does he manage to move the reader. His talent for detailed, visually biased descriptions becomes a barrier which, time and time again, prevents him from working up to a pitch of emotion or even achieving a sense of danger, anxiety, hope, pity or despair which could, in turn, be transmitted to his audience. *Moyse Sauvé*, in the final analysis, really deserves no better fate than that which it has suffered — that is to be forgotten except for a few colourful excerpts which have found their way into various anthologies.

CHAPTER 6

SAINT-AMANT: GENRE-PAINTER?

A good number of those critics who have written on Saint-Amant have drawn attention to a kind of kinship which exists between certain of his poems, notably his humorous poems, and Flemish and Dutch paintings of the period. Adam, for example, was to go so far as to claim that 'Saint-Amant, très au courant de ce qui se faisait dans le domaine de la peinture, a certainement voulu rivaliser avec les peintres flamands'.[1] He quotes as proof of this the sonnet 'Assis sur un fagot', already described by Sainte-Beuve as 'une bonne petite toile hollandaise'.[2] However, few scholars have been quite so dogmatic on this subject as Adam and most have been content to suggest that a certain kindred spirit exists between the poet and such painters as Brouwer, the Ostades, and Teniers. Françoise Gourier, for example, says of several stanzas of 'La Rome ridicule': 'nous trouvons en ces quelques strophes un vrai tableau hollandais, avec la même vie, la même couleur, la même précision de miniaturiste',[3] and also quotes Heiss as having called the scene a 'hübschen Genrebild'. Strzatkowa, for her part, maintains that the portrait of the Dutch sea-captain in 'La Rade' 'est exécuté d'après les principes du réalisme hollandais'.[4] In fact Strzatkowa feels that Saint-Amant was not alone in sharing the same spirit as the genre-painters and asserts, with some justification, that 'les peintres flamands réalistes sont pour beaucoup dans les œuvres littéraires de ce temps'.[5] A. Beaunier remarks that Saint-Amant 'est peintre dans ses poèmes et, dans le poème de "La Pluye" . . . il est peintre hollandais'.[6] Lanson, however, spoils an otherwise perfectly acceptable comment on this realism in the poet's work by linking his name to two painters he does not really remind us of: '[Saint-Amant] sait voir et rendre les réalités quotidiennes de la vie . . . Il met dans le pittoresque trivial une largeur de style, une richesse de couleur qui font penser à Rubens ou du moins à Jordaens.'[7]

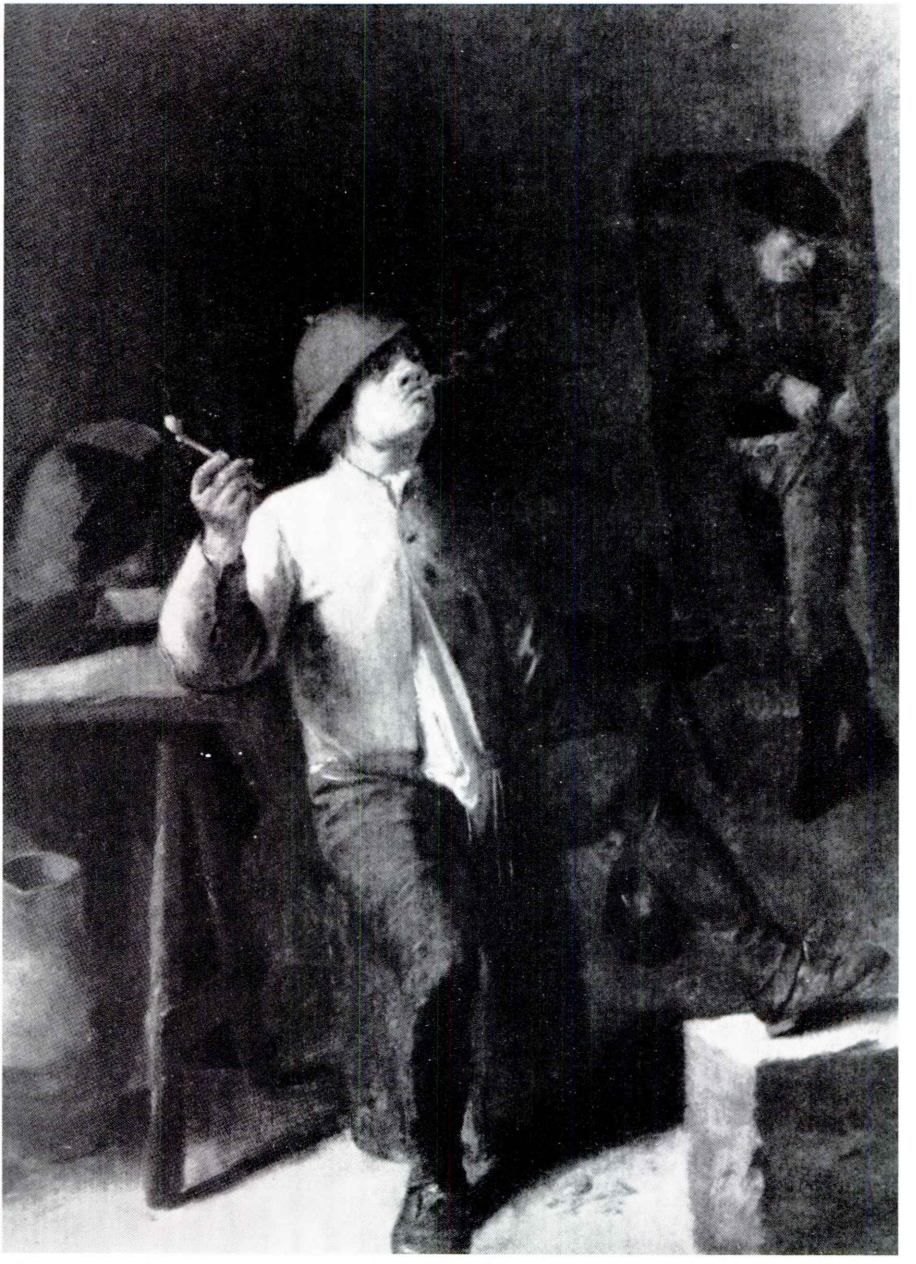
It is indeed true that there are numerous passages in Saint-Amant's humorous poetry which are vividly reminiscent of Flemish and Dutch paintings, passages where the poet exhibits the same interest in picturesque details, the same liking for the seamier aspects of life, the same flair for depicting the trivial, whilst yet endowing it with a kind of grandeur, as the genre-painters. It is safe to assume, moreover, that he would have been quite familiar with the works in question. We know, for instance, that Marolles possessed a fair number of engravings by or after the genre-masters and Saint-Amant would no doubt have seen many of the originals in the course of his travels about Europe — paintings of this

kind being much sought after at that time. It is tempting, then, to agree with Adam and we would perhaps do well to study more closely, as he suggests, the poem 'Assis sur un fagot':

> Assis sur un fagot, une pipe à la main,
> Tristement accoudé contre une cheminée,
> Les yeux fixés vers terre, et l'ame mutinée,
> Je songe aux cruautés de mon sort inhumain.
>
> L'espoir, qui me remet du jour au lendemain,
> Essaye à gaigner temps sur ma peine obstinée,
> Et, me venant promettre une autre destinée,
> Me fait monter plus haut qu'un empereur romain.
>
> Mais à peine cette herbe est-elle mise en cendre,
> Qu'en mon premier estat il me convient descendre,
> Et passer mes ennuis à redire souvent:
>
> Non, je ne trouve point beaucoup de difference
> De prendre du tabac à vivre d'esperance,
> Car l'un n'est que fumée, et l'autre n'est que vent.
> (I, 182)

To begin with, Saint-Amant gives us a rapid yet vivid sketch of himself. Even those who do not readily visualize on reading poetry must be aware of the immediate appeal to our mind's eye of this precise little description. One thinks at once of those paintings by Brouwer or Teniers depicting men smoking. It is interesting to note, however, that the poet's descriptive vein does not last. Indeed, the sonnet's effect depends on the feeling of sadness, tinged with a gentle cynicism, which Saint-Amant succeeds in conveying through the expression of his thoughts as his illusions vanish and he comes back down to earth. It needs to be pointed out, moreover, that this feeling of melancholy is in contrast to the atmosphere which pervades Brouwer's smoking-scenes, if not those of Teniers and the Ostades. Brouwer's smokers, uncouth-looking men, as often as not in a sullen stupor,[8] have little in common with the almost whimsical Saint-Amant.

However, what is important is that the poet, even if he were attempting to rival the Flemish and Dutch painters of his time, seems above all preoccupied with the expression of his own melancholy and is not merely content to describe in visual terms. He quickly creates a picture of himself sitting on a log against a chimney-piece, pipe in hand and staring at the floor, but he does not go on to describe the room or its furniture, his clothes or any possible companions. On the contrary, he uses poetry to do something beyond the possibilities of painting. And the fact is that quite a number of those poems by Saint-Amant the subject-matter and spirit of which one immediately associates with genre-painting rely, to a degree uncommon in the rest of his poetry, for their effect on the very qualities which belong alone to poetry or, at least, to language. There *are*



Adriaen Brouwer *The Smoker*

Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam

Adriaen Brouwer *The Smokers*

The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York; The Michael Friedsam Collection, 1931

descriptive passages in his humorous verse which are typical of Flemish and Dutch paintings but, above all, it is in these poems that we encounter Saint-Amant the poet rather than Saint-Amant the 'painter'.

At this stage it would seem necessary to give some indication as to which of Saint-Amant's poems are being referred to when we speak of his 'humorous' verse — in itself an extremely vague definition. To begin with there are all the poems in the first part of his work grouped under the heading *Raillerie à part*. These include such pieces as 'Le Fromage', 'La Vigne', and the excellent 'Chambre du débauché'. To these we must add various *caprices* such as 'Le Mauvais Logement', 'Le Cidre', 'Le Passage de Gibraltar', 'La Rome ridicule', and a small number of other poems including 'Le Poëte crotté', 'La Crevaille', and the celebrated 'Melon'. As their titles would suggest, some of these are gastronomical and bacchic poems in which Saint-Amant expresses his love of good food and wine and the delight he takes in drinking-bouts and the company of his fellow *goinfres*. Others are of a satirical or burlesque nature, satire and burlesque at times existing side by side in the same poem, as in 'La Rome ridicule' for example. It follows that, to a certain extent, these poems are in the Bernesque tradition; but to call Saint-Amant Bernesque[9] is to neglect the strong French tradition in this sort of poetry, the possible influence of Spanish *picaresque* novels on the poet, and finally, but not least of all, his own original handling of them.

On several occasions Saint-Amant uses a particularly effective, if not altogether original, procedure by which he imagines himself to be surrounded by his friends and making merry, eating and drinking — just as Brouwer depicted himself at a table drinking and smoking with his cronies (see plate 4). This gives the poet the opportunity to describe or suggest what is going on about him, to unfold, as it were, a little scene as it happens. It is true that we have already considered this device with relation to 'La Pluye', but in poems like 'La Debauche', 'Le Fromage', 'Le Melon', 'La Crevaille', 'Orgie', 'Le Cantal', and 'Le Passage de Gibraltar' it reaches a new dimension. Sometimes the poet relates very succinctly where he is — as in 'Assis sur un fagot' — or who is with him and what he is doing, as at the beginning of 'Le Fromage' for example:

> Assis sur le bord d'un chantier
> Avec des gens de mon mestier,
> C'est-à-dire avec une trouppe
> Qui ne jure que par la couppe,
> Je m'escrie, en laschant un rot:
> Beny soit l'excellent Bilot!
> Il nous a donné d'un fromage
> A qui l'on doit bien rendre hommage.
>
> (I, 153)

At other times he makes no such explicit references and leaves us to deduce from his remarks and exclamations whereabouts he is and with whom. Should he cry

'Lacquay, fringue bien ce verre' (I, 237) we can hazard the guess he is drinking with his noble protector. Or, again, an exclamation such as 'Morbieu! comme il pleut là dehors!' (I, 136) at least tells us he is inside somewhere! But we are not given a detailed description of the taverns he frequents or of his fellow boozers. Rather these poems, instead of appealing primarily to our mind's eye, suggest an atmosphere and also appeal to our other senses, smell, hearing, and touch. From the very beginning we are caught up by the force and the exhilarating urgency of the scene unfolded before us:

Sus, sus, enfans! qu'on empoigne la couppe!
Je suis crevé de manger de la soupe.
Du vin! du vin! cependant qu'il est frais,
  Verse, garçon, verse jusqu'aux bords,
  Car je veux chiffler à longs traits
A la santé des vivans et des morts.

Pour du vin blanc, je n'en tasteray guere;
Je crains toujours le syrop de l'esguiere,
Dont la couleur me pourroit attraper.
  Baille-moy donc de ce vin vermeil:
  C'est luy seul qui me fait tauper.
Bref, c'est mon feu, mon sang et mon soleil.

O qu'il est doux! j'en ay l'ame ravie,
Et ne croy pas qu'il se trouve en la vie
Un tel plaisir que de boire d'autant;
  Fay-moy raison, mon cher amy Faret,
  Ou tu seras tout à l'instant
Privé du nom qui rime à cabaret.

(I, 239–40)

How listless, in comparison, is Vion Dalibray's 'Lacquais que l'on me donne à boire', for example:

Lacquais que l'on me donne à boire,
Je veux m'enyvrer aujourd'huy,
Je veux que ce vin ait la gloire
D'avoir estouffé mon ennuy;
Verse m'en donc à tasse pleine,
Que je boive à perte d'haleine
Douze ou treize coups seulement . . .[10]

If he is going to get drunk it will be in a very genteel manner! Saint-Amant, on the other hand, is buoyed up with zest and *joie de vivre*, we sense the hearty, jovial companionship he enjoys so much. Each of his bacchic poems is punctuated by exclamations as he calls on the servant to pour out more wine, or gives vent to his admiration for Bacchus, or exhorts his greedy friends to leave him some cheese. Indeed, Audibert and Bouvier maintain that these poems possess the lusty rhythm of drinking-songs and, perhaps a little carried away by their enthusiasm for them, add that 'c'est parce que le poète portait en lui le

rythme des gobelets frappés sans fin sur les tables et la cadence enivrée des chansons à boire qu'il a pu instinctivement transposer de la vie à l'art l'élan des couplets bachiques'.[11] It could even be, of course, that Saint-Amant intended these songs to be set to existing tunes.

At least one of his poems, moreover, possesses not only the rhythm but also the form of a drinking-song. The long enumerative passage — Gourier justifiably calls it a 'litanie'[12] — which concludes 'La Debauche' strongly suggests the sort of song, always very popular amongst the drinking fraternity, where one attempts to get through a whole list of often quite unconnected phrases which are added the one to the other during the course of the singing: the best known example in French being, without a doubt, 'Gentille alouette':

Bacchus! qui vois nostre desbauche,
Par ton sainct portrait que j'esbauche
En m'enluminant le museau
De ce trait que je boy sans eau;
Par ta couronne de lierre,
Par la splendeur de ce grand verre,
Par ton thirse tant redouté,
Par ton eternelle santé,
Par l'honneur de tes belles festes,
Par tes innombrables conquestes,
Par les coups non donnez, mais bus,
Par tes glorieux attribus,
Par les hurlemens des Menades,
Par le haut goust des carbonnades,
Par tes couleurs blanc et clairet,
Par le plus fameux cabaret,
Par le doux chant de tes orgyes,
Par l'esclat des trognes rougies,
Par table ouverte à tout venant,
Par le bon caresme prenant,
Par les fins mots de ta cabale,
Par le tambour et la cymbale,
Par tes cloches qui sont des pots,
Par tes soupirs qui sont des rots,
Par tes hauts et sacrés mysteres,
Par tes furieuses pantheres,
Par ce lieu si frais et si doux,
Par ton boucq paillard comme nous,
Par ta grosse garce Ariane,
Par le vieillard monté sur l'asne,
Par les Satyres tes cousins,
Par la fleur des plus beaux raisins,
Par ces bisques si renommées,
Par ces langues de bœuf fumées,
Par ce tabac, ton seul encens,
Par tous les plaisirs innocens,
Par ce jambon couvert d'espice,

Par ce long pendant de saucisse,
Par la majesté de ce broc,
Par masse, toppe, cric et croc,
Par cette olive que je mange,
Par ce gay passeport d'orange,
Par ce vieux fromage pourry,
Bref, par Gillot, ton favory,
Reçoy-nous dans l'heureuse trouppe,
Des francs chevaliers de la couppe,
Et, pour te montrer tout divin,
Ne la laisse jamais sans vin.

(I, 136–8)

In as much that each line has something to do, however vaguely, with eating, drinking, and making merry this 'litanie' can be said to have a theme. However, above all, it shows us an exuberant Saint-Amant playing with words for their own sake in a manner reminiscent of Rabelais, delighting in their sounds, enjoying using them and manipulating them as a painter does his colours.

We have said that Saint-Amant often 'unfolds' a scene for us. In 'Le Fromage', for instance, he suddenly halts in his enthusiastic praise of the cheese to exclaim:

Mais cependant que je discours,
Ces goinfres-ci briffent tousjours,
Et voudroient qu'il me prist envie
De babiller toute ma vie.
Holà! gourmands, attendez-moy!
Pensez-vous qu'un manger de roy
Se doive traitter de la sorte?
Que vostre appetit vous emporte!
Chaque morceau vaut un ducat,
Voire six verres de muscat,
Et vos dents n'auront point de honte
D'en avoir fait si peu de conte.

(I, 155–6)

and we suddenly have the amusing vision of his comrades smugly finishing off the cheese, quite happy for the poet to forget his share. Here, then, Saint-Amant takes advantage of the temporal quality of language to convey a sense of immediacy and spontaneity. Another fine example of his use of this technique is to be found in 'La Berne' where he pretends to be participating in the tossing in a blanket of an old shrew. The little scene is given 'as it happens' with the aid of such witty exclamations and amusing reflections as one might well have made on such an occasion. Again, too, we sense the poet's relish for the lively manipulation of language:

Voilà qui va le mieux du monde;
Bons dieux! oyez comme elle gronde!
Quelle grimace! quel portrait!
Un constipé sur un retrait,

Un vieux charlatan qui boufonne,
Un mulet rongneux qu'on bouchonne,
Un singe qui croque des pous,
Un mastin assailly des loups,
Dom-Quichote dans les escornes,
L'Erty quand on luy fait les cornes,
Et Perrette en maschant des nois,
Font moins de mine trente fois.
Voyez, voyez comme elle escume!
Voyez comme sa teste fume!
Je croy qu'elle a le diable au corps:
Que jamais n'en soit-il dehors!
Messer Sathan, je vous encharge,
Et bien au long et bien au large,
Qu'elle en puisse crever d'ahan,
Et vomir l'ame avec le bran.
Ha! la voylà bien attiffée!
Nous allons voir un beau trofée
Fait d'une coëffe de satin,
D'une perruque, d'un patin,
D'un busc, d'un collet, d'une houpe,
D'un manchon tout gasté de soupe,
D'un masque et d'un salle mouchoir
Qu'en sautant elle a laissé choir.
O la plaisante melodie
Dont mon oreille est etourdie!
Chaisne, estuy, clef et peloton
Carillonnans à divers ton,
Et se meslans à la rencontre
Avec bourse, couteaux et montre,
Et mille autres jolivetez,
Luy brimballent aux deux costez.
Mais qu'est-ce cy, mes camarades?
Voicy d'estranges algarades!
On nous en baille, on nous en vent:
Nous ne bernons plus que du vent . . .
(I, 158–60)

Immediacy and spontaneity are also very evident in 'Le Mauvais Logement', a poem treating the fairly popular theme of a restless night spent in highly uncomfortable, sordid surroundings. Saint-Amant describes the room he finds himself in, his bed, and the filthy bed-clothes in a most forceful fashion, introducing familiar, colloquial vocabulary, colourful imagery, and earthy humour. Mock-solemnity rubs shoulders with slap-stick, spirited witticisms with grotesque exaggeration:

Gisté dans un chien de grabat,
Sur un infame lict de plume,
Entre deux draps teints d'apostume,
Où la vermine me combat,

Je passe les plus tristes heures
Qui, dans les mortelles demeures,
Puissent affliger les esprits;
Et la nuit si longue m'y semble,
Que je croy qu'elle ait entrepris
D'en joindre une douzaine ensemble.

Parmi tant d'incommoditez,
Je conte tous les coups de cloche,
Et, comme un oyson à la broche,
Je ne tourne de tous costez.
Une vilaine couverture,
Relique de la pourriture,
Malgré moy s'offre à me baiser
Mais, si je luy deffens ma bouche,
Je ne sçaurois luy refuser
Qu'à mes jambes elle ne touche.

Elle surplante les linceuls,
Qui se sauvent dans la ruelle;
Mais, pour fuir cette cruelle,
Les pauvrets n'y vont pas tous seuls:
Un manteau de laine d'Espagne
En ce chemin les accompagne;
Du travail à demy suant,
Et sans pretendre à la victoire,
Dans un pot de chambre puant
Il glisse, et va chercher à boire.

(I, 276–7)

Particularly worthy of our attention is the way the wretched blanket is subtly likened to a lewd, old hag making unwanted advances to the unfortunate poet. Indeed, the whole image, right up to its disgusting but amusing climax, is quite masterly in conception and execution. As the poem progresses we have an impression of the interminable night slowly passing until, at last, day breaks and Saint-Amant's sufferings are ended:

Maints faux rayons eparpillez
En fanfreluches lumineuses,
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;
Et sentant comme elle se pame,
Je me figure en cette erreur
Qu'on donne le moine à mon ame.

Que, si je pense m'endormir
Dans les momens de quelque treve,
Un incube aussi-tost me creve,

Et revant je m'entr'oy gemir;
Enfin mes propres cris m'eveillent.
Enfin ces demons s'emerveillent
D'estre quasi surpris du jour:
Ils font gille à son arrivée,
Et la diane du tambour
M'avertit que l'aube est levée.
(I, 279–80)

However, for all that the poems in question seem to be poetic rather than pictorial, there are descriptive passages within them, as has been said, and one should not entirely ignore them. Certain have already been dealt with in a previous chapter since they are not exclusively characteristic of Flemish and Dutch paintings — this is the case, for example, with those picturesque stanzas in 'La Pluye'. Two problems will arise from a discussion of those descriptions which are reminiscent of genre-painting. Firstly, it will be necessary to distinguish between 'realistic', meaning in this instance that which is faithfully portrayed, and burlesque and satirical descriptions. Secondly, it will become evident that a number of descriptions are not purely visual but also attempt to convey an impression of sounds and smells, and this to a degree unknown in the rest of Saint-Amant's poetry.

Firstly, then, the question of realism, burlesque and satire. Let us examine certain stanzas from the poem 'La Rome ridicule'. The poet breaks off a burlesque treatment of Rome's history in order to describe the Games which attracted the Sabines to the city. He then goes on to depict the dancing and the fair which accompany the Games:

XXXII

Icy, pour instrument de dance,
L'on oit la cimbale tinter;
Les ossets drus à cliqueter
En accompagnent la cadence;
Un aveugle, expert vielleur,
Joint sa symphonie à la leur
Sous l'orme droit comme une gaule;
Il grimasse en mille façons,
Il tord son minois sur l'espaule
Et fait peur aux petits garçons.

XXXIII

A ce beau son, vingt dodelues
Serrent la patte à vingt lourdauts
Qui meslent cent gestes badauts
A cent postures dissolues:
L'un va sottement de travers;
L'autre, étourdy, tombe à l'envers,
Quilles à mont sur la pelouze;

Celle qu'il traisne en fait autant:
On luy voit jusqu'à la belouze,
Et l'on en rit en s'éclattant.

XXXIV

Proche de là, bien que l'histoire
N'en fasse point de mention,
Par songe ou par tradition
Je sçay qu'il se tint une foire.
Oh! que de nippes à porchers!
Que de fratras aux filles chers!
Que d'enfantines bagatelles!
Je n'auroy pas finy demain;
Il ne s'en vit jamais de telles
A la foire de Saint-Germain.

XXXV

Là s'apperçoit une nourrice
Donner pour mets et pour jouet
A son magot tendre et flouet
Un joly dieu de pain d'épice;
Là, maints sifflets aux tons aigus,
Bastards de celuy qui d'Argus
Ferma les paupieres trompées,
Penetrans oreille et cerveau,
Animent les grosses poupées
Qui là s'étalent au niveau.

XXXVI

Là d'un costé les asnes brayent,
De l'autre grondent les cochons;
Icy l'on oit sous les bouchons
Les cris des beuveurs qui s'égayent,
Mainte mazette en hannissant
Répond au bouveau mugissant,
Auprès de l'ouaille qui besle;
Et de ces bruits il s'en fait un
Dans qui se confond pesle-mesle
L'echo plaisamment importun.

XXXVII

Là mille robustes Carites
Folâtrent sur l'émail d'un pré
Agreablement diapré
De jaunets et de marguerites;
L'une en amasse un gros paquet,
Puis, assise, en forme un boucquet,
Degoisant un vieil air champestre;

Et l'autre en son cœur prie aux cieus
Que, quand ses vaches iront paitre,
Tel herbage s'offre à leurs yeus.

XXXVIII

Là-dessus arrive Romule,
Qui, se quarrant en Jaquemart,
Le front borné d'un haut plumart,
Affourche une quinteuse mule.
Lors, à certain signal donné,
Des plus ribaus environné,
Chacun empoigne sa chacune;
Ils font un diable de sabat:
L'un pousse en courant sa fortune,
Et l'autre l'etreint et l'abat.
(II, 401–3)

It is this description of a fair that Françoise Gourier calls 'un vrai tableau hollandais'. There is, however, a difference between the scene conjured up, however much it may remind us of a genre-painting by Jan Steen or Adriaen van Ostade, and a realistic picture. Saint-Amant, it will be noticed, introduces a more familiar vocabulary — 'magot' and 'mazette' for example. Now, whilst in a sense this may be considered more realistic within the context of a coarse, noisy scene since it is the vocabulary of the common people, it is clearly not a *visual* realism — the poet is appealing to our intellect and not to our mind's eye. There is a difference, too, between a truly realistic scene and the description of the dancers (stanza XXXIII) which, although visually evocative, is already verging on caricature. Clearly, in a straightforward descriptive passage the writer's choice of vocabulary should be as free as possible from unwanted connotations. The following lines go beyond the realm of description:

A ce beau son, vingt dodelues
Serrent la patte à vingt lourdauts . . .
(II, 402)

A certain exaggeration of language, a deliberate misuse of certain words and the poet is suggesting other ideas, is seeking other effects, expecting other reactions. He invites us to laugh with him at these bumpkins cavorting clumsily about on the grass. He stresses their gross, uncouth ways with the use of the animalistic 'patte' and the extremely vulgar 'belouze'. He is no longer merely recording (in so far as he was ever merely recording). This is not to say, of course, that the genre-painters merely record. On the contrary, their very concentration on certain themes and subjects is in itself a comment on their own outlook, environment, and time.

The way Saint-Amant describes, in pure burlesque, the arrival of Romulus shows us another facet of his obvious talent for handling language. Here, in

stanza XXXVIII, he deliberately renders the whole affair grotesque and highly amusing, happily making fun of one of the legendary founders of Rome and of the subsequent rape of the Sabine women, through a masterly use of anachronism and parody.

Strzatkowa distinguishes between Saint-Amant's realistic approach to the description of the Dutch sea-captain in 'La Rade' and that of the English barber in 'Le Barberot' which, she maintains, 'rentre dans la manière burlesque'.[13] Without going into the question of whether or not it is truly burlesque, which usually implies a travesty of serious subjects, one can safely say that there is a strong element of caricature to it. The poet is getting his revenge for the ignominy he suffered at the barber's hands and he exaggerates his portrait:

Ses doigts, qui m'ont fagotté,
Surpassoyent en aspreté
Ceux d'un meneur de charrue,
Et mainte noire verrue
En relevoit la beauté.

(I, 467)

The deliberate irony of 'beauté' adds extra venom to the little sketch. If we compare this portrait with that of the sea-captain we discover that Saint-Amant has not been nearly so hard on him:

En grande nef je suis logé
Avec un petit enragé
Qui l'encheriroit sur le diable:
Il court, il peste, il fait du bruit,
Il est à boire insatiable,
Et me tourmente jour et nuit.

C'est un rustre de Holandois,
Qui plonge et sauce un de ses doigts
Dans le sel et dans la moustarde,
Et qui sans cesse a dans le bec,
Soit bon matin, soit heure tarde,
Le stokfisch ou le haranpec.

(II, 78)

Saint-Amant seems rather amused by this bizarre character and would, of this we may be sure, have found his drinking habits entirely to his liking! What is of most interest, however, is the fact that, once again, the poet gives us proof of his ability to sketch in the essential (or, if he chooses, the grotesque) traits of those around him — even if, as in the captain's case, he tells us not so much what he looks like as what he is doing. In neither of these two passages is Saint-Amant merely using words to describe, however, and the portrait of the captain is not merely realistic. For instance, the juxtaposition of 'grande' and 'petit' is there on purpose to strike a comical note. A good example of Saint-Amant's talent for satire coupled with detailed description is to be found in 'Le Poëte crotté':

Un feustre *noir*, blanc de vieillesse,
Garny d'un beau cordon de gresse,
Qu'il ne sçauroit avoir perdu,
Non plus qu'engagé ny vendu
Sans se voir aussi-tost nu-teste,
Couvroit la hure de la beste,
Troussé par devant en sainct Roc,
Avec une plume de coc.
Son pourpoint, sous qui maint pou gronde,
Montroit les dents à tout le monde,
Non de fierté, mais de douleur
De perdre et matiere et couleur.
Il fut jadis d'un drap minime;
Mais qu'est-ce que le temps ne lime?
Le pauvre diable a fait son cours:
Autant puissent durer mes jours.
La moitié d'une peccadille,
Sur qui sa criniere pandille,
Affreuse et sentant le sabat,
Luy servoit au lieu de rabat.
Des gregues d'un faux satin *jaune*,
D'un costé trop longues d'une aulne,
Et de l'autre à bouillon troussé,
Reliques d'un ballet dansé,
Qu'un galand coiffé d'une dame
Luy donna pour son anagrame
Avec un demy-quart d'escu,
Enharnachoient son chien de cu.
Un rocquet de bourraccan *rouge*,
Qui jamais de son dos ne bouge,
L'affubloit, quoy qu'il fust hyver,
Et qu'il fust rongé de maint ver.
Une estroitte jartiere *grise*,
Faite d'un vieux lambeau de frise,
En zodiaquant le gipon,
Servoit d'escharpe à mon fripon,
Et trainoit, comme à la charrue,
Pour soc un fleuret par la rue,
Dont il labouroit le pavé,
Lequel en estoit tout cavé.
Ses jambes, pour paistrir les crottes,
S'armoient à cru de vieilles bottes,
L'une en pescheur, d'un gros cuir *noir*,
La plus grande qui se pust voir,
L'autre d'un cuir *blanc* de Russie,
A genouilliere racourcie;
L'une à pié-plat, à bout pointu,
Et l'autre à pont-levis tortu.
Un petit esperon d'Engliche,
A la garniture assez chiche,

Ergottoit son gauche talon;
Quant au droit, le bon violon
N'y portoit rien qu'une ficelle
Pour en soustenir la semelle,
Qui, comme un fruict meur ou pourry,
Laissant l'arbre qui l'a nourry,
Par quelque soudaine tempeste,
A tous coups estoit toute preste
De quitter, en se remuant,
La plante de son pied puant.

(I, 212–14)

There is a strong visual bias to this description — one cannot, for example, help but notice the quite exceptional use of colours — but the added comments, the wit, and the suggestive manipulation of language create a satirical portrait rather than a realistic one. Some of Saint-Amant's remarks are indeed cutting — ranging, as they do, from the more overt ('la hure de la beste') to the more subtly sly ('un petit esperon . . . *ergottoit* son gauche talon'). Also worthy of our praise is his scathing attack on the dandies of his time in his 'Epistre diversifiée' where, once again, spirited satire and detailed observation go hand in hand:

L'œil peut-il voir rien de plus ridicule
Qu'un de nos preux à la taille d'Hercule,
Avec sa teste, autresfois non à luy,
Teste qu'on oste et serre en un estuy,
Teste de poil qui, de poudre couverte,
Assez souvent couvre une teste verte,
Et couvre encore et laine, et soye, et lin,
De plus de fleur qu'il n'en sort d'un moulin,
Et que tant d'art, tant de soin accompagne,
Que si l'honneur d'estre fait grand d'Espagne
A l'ajusté se daignoit mesme offrir,
Je ne croy pas qu'il voulust le souffrir?
Est-il enfin quelque objet plus estrange
Que de le voir mandier la louange
De la beauté, des graces, des appas?
Que de le voir, mesme dans le repas,
Pour contempler et ses lys et ses roses,
Faire partout miroir de toutes choses,
Et, sans respect ny des roys ny des dieux,
Insolemment se peigner en tous lieux?
Que de le voir, dis-je, mettre en usage
La mousche feinte en son fade visage?
Que de le voir traisner ses beaux canons,
Ses pointcouppez à cent sortes de noms,
Qui, sous l'amas de six rangs d'esguillettes
Dont les fers d'or brillent comme paillettes,
A cent replis bouffent en s'eslevant
Sur le beau cuir apporté du levant;

Et pour marcher font qu'à jambe qui fauche
Il meut en cercle et la droite et la gauche,
Non sans hazard de maint casse-museau,
Peine bien due au miste damoiseau!
(I, 426–7)

Let us now turn our attention to the second problem which arises, namely that, far from concentrating on scenes which appeal primarily to our mind's eye, Saint-Amant enjoys evoking sounds and smells in his bacchic poetry. Stanza XXXII of 'La Rome ridicule' describes for us the sound of the music at the country dance, although it does end on a more visual level. Stanza XXXVI, however, appeals solely to our mind's 'ear' — if one might call it that. (It is true that a person who readily visualizes will no doubt *picture* to himself the various animals, but it is nevertheless obvious that the poet is mostly interested in conveying an impression of their din.) This particular description would certainly seem to suggest, moreover, that Saint-Amant's ability to distinguish sounds was no less remarkable than his keen grasp of visual detail. This, indeed, is borne out by other poems — in 'Le Mauvais logement', for example, he gives vivid expression to the sinister cries of screech owls and the excited squabbling of rats.

It was perhaps only natural that a poet who adored good food and wine as much as Saint-Amant did should be able to describe so colourfully the effect they had on *all* his senses. The excellent still-lifes in which he has immortalized melons, hams, cheeses, and wines tell us not only what they looked like but also how they tasted and smelt. He begins his poem 'Le Melon' by trying to evoke the smell of the fruit:

Quelle odeur sens-je en cette chambre?
Quel doux parfum de musc et d'ambre
Me vient le cerveau resjouir
Et tout le cœur espanouir?
Ha! bon Dieu! j'en tombe en extase:
Ces belles fleurs qui dans ce vase
Parent le haut de ce buffet
Feroient-elles bien cet effet?
A-t-on bruslé de la pastille?
N'est-ce point ce vin qui petille
Dans le cristal, que l'art humain
A fait pour couronner la main,
Et d'où sort, quand on en veut boire,
Un air de framboise à la gloire
Du bon terroir qui l'a porté
Pour nostre eternelle santé?
(I, 198–9)

Suddenly he realizes that it is the melon that is filling the room with its odour and he goes on to describe it:

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;
Mais, bien que je ne le sois pas,
J'en feray pourtant un repas.
Ha! soustenez-moy, je me pâme
Ce morceau me chatouille l'ame;
Il rend une douce liqueur
Qui me va confire le cœur;
Mon appetit se rassasie
De pure et nouvelle ambroisie,
Et mes sens, par le goust seduits,
Au nombre d'un sont tous reduits.
(I, 200)

Saint-Amant depicts the melon in all its glory, its colouring and texture are lovingly portrayed, and once more we appreciate his gift for visual evocation. He then relates the effect the taste of the melon has on him — something that is certainly called for! Although there is a certain vagueness about his attempts to evoke taste and smell (one wonders if language is in fact capable of describing these senses with any accuracy) they are nevertheless quite delightful. Here is his description of a Cantal:

Ce repaire moisi de mittes et de vers,
Où dans cent trous gluans, bleus, rougeastres et vers
La pointe du couteau mille veines evente
Qu'au poids de celles d'or on devroit mettre en vente!
Ha! qu'il me fait bon voir lors qu'en le furetant
J'en decouvre quelqu'une et le crie à l'instant!
Quelle faveur me cuit quand ma langue appastée
En enduit mon palais et s'en trouve infectée!
(I, 282)

Both the rather repelling appearance and the pungent taste of the cheese are vigorously evoked. In a sense, then, such a passage is even more memorable than the Flemish and Dutch still-lifes, with their *trompe-l'œil* effect, of which it reminds us, since it manages to convey other sensations and other aspects. Indeed, in his 'Epistre à Monsieur le baron de Melay', the poet even describes how a succulent ham — 'ce mont de chair, ce prodige de lard' — is prepared and cooked:

Sur ce dessein je commanday qu'en haste
On fist bastir un grand palais de paste,
Pour avec l'ail, l'anchoye au teint vermeil,
Le poivre blanc et le clou nompareil,

Loger en roy ce jambon que je prosne,
Ce digne mets qui des mets tient le trosne,
Et par qui seul, les juifs estant morguez,
Les bons chrestiens des Turcs sont distinguez . . .
(I, 345)

Whether he is depicting cider 'qu'en cette glace arondie / Brille . . . / De la couleur de nos escus' (I, 334), or a golden cheese '[qui] si tost que le doigt le presse, / . . . rit et se creve de gresse' (I, 155), or 'une bouteille, / Qui d'une liqueur vermeille / [Est] teinte jusqu'à l'orlet' (I, 237), Saint-Amant conveys a sparkling impression of the many delights fine fare offers him.

We have not, of course, covered all the facets of the poet's humorous verse — they lie outside the scope of the present study. What has become evident, however, is that when he links his ability to evoke visual images to a greater awareness of all the many possibilities of poetry and language, possibilities to which burlesque, satirical, and humorous verse in general readily lend themselves, his poetry (and we may use the word in its fullest sense) is seen to reach new heights. Saint-Amant's humorous verse does not appeal solely to our mind's eye but also awakens our other senses and, by means of a masterly use of vocabulary, our intellect. We may add, too, that his humorous poetry not only reminds us of Flemish and Dutch genre-painting because he treated the same themes, because he evokes realistic scenes, because of his verve and zest, but also because we glimpse a Saint-Amant who seems to be the embodiment of those cavaliers who swagger their way through the taverns, halls, streets, and squares of Flemish and Dutch paintings.

CHAPTER 7

SAINT-AMANT: MUSICIAN

When Saint-Amant maintained, in the preface to *Moyse Sauvé*, that the poet should be knowledgeable about painting, he also asserted, it will be recalled, that in the interests of poetic harmony he should have a knowledge of music. Now, clearly, to neglect such a crucial remark would falsify our understanding of the poet, or, to put it another way, to merely concentrate our attention on the pictorial qualities in his poetry would certainly prevent a truly comprehensive idea of his intentions and achievements from emerging. In order, therefore, to redress the balance let us now examine the *musical* elements in Saint-Amant's verse.

We know, in fact, that Saint-Amant himself was an accomplished musician and quite renowned amongst his contemporaries for his skill on the lute. Even whilst making allowances for an exaggerated enthusiasm born of their friendship, it is safe to assume that there must have been some truth at least in Faret's comment on his colleague's poetic and musical abilities:

> jusques au son et à la cadence de ses vers, il se trouve une harmonie qui peut passer pour sœur legitime de celle de son luth.[1]

Théophile makes much the same sort of allusion in his poem 'Prière aux poètes de ce temps':

> Saint-Amant sçait polir la rime
> Avec une si douce lime
> Que son luth n'est pas plus mignard . . .[2]

Saint-Amant himself makes a number of references to his lute and the pleasure it affords him, references which are not to be confused with the conventional poetical allusions. In 'La Solitude' he describes himself playing the instrument in a hidden grotto:

> Au creux de cette grotte fresche,
> Où l'Amour se pourroit geler,
> Echo ne cesse de brusler
> Pour son amant froid et revesche.
> Je m'y coule sans faire bruit,
> Et par la celeste harmonie
> D'un doux lut, aux charmes instruit,
> Je flatte sa triste manie,
> Faisant repeter mes accords
> A la voix qui luy sert de corps.
>
> (I, 25)

This is a very précieux, yet nonetheless vivid, description. In 'Le Contemplateur' the poet forgoes classical mythology and turns to the Old Testament for the source of his imagery:

> Tantost, d'un son qui me ravit
> Et qui chasse toute manie,
> La saincte harpe de David
> Preste à mon lut son harmonie.
>
> (I, 38)

In 'L'Amarante' Saint-Amant gallantly confesses that his lady-love plays the lute better than he:

> Un sort delicieux m'a souvent fait jouir
> Du plaisir de la voir, du bonheur de l'ouir,
> D'admirer de sa main l'agile et mol albastre,
> Quand avec des accens que l'oreille idolastre,
> Sur les nerfs d'un bois creux qui chante et qui se plaint,
> Qui m'esveille et m'endort, me flatte et me contraint,
> Ses doigts harmonieux font aux miens telle honte
> Que de leur melodie on ne fait plus de conte.
>
> (I, 252)

A satirical passage in 'La Rome ridicule' indicates that a more than casual knowledge of music was possessed by the poet:

> Quels jolis racleurs de guiterre
> Enten-je passer là dehors?
> Sans mentir, voilà des accords
> A mener la musique en terre;
> Aux lamentables hurlemens,
> Aux syncopes, aux roulemens,
> Dont leur gorge est si bien munie,
> Sauf l'honneur de G - re - sol - ut,
> Je me figure l'harmonie
> D'un concert de matous en rut.
>
> (II, 415)

In yet another satirical poem, 'L'Albion', Saint-Amant regrets the eclipse of church music, the mighty organ and the sung responses, in Puritan England and then harshly rounds on English tavern minstrels who dare to afflict his ears with their 'music' (II, 454).

Now, when Saint-Amant states that the poet should have a knowledge of music such as the above quotations suggest he himself possessed, he is clearly thinking in terms of its influence on the rhythm and the harmony of verse in general. Before discussing this most important aspect of his work, however, it will be worthwhile examining his descriptions of various sounds themselves. Does he, for example, make use of sound patterns and particularly appropriate rhythms in order to evoke the breaking waves, the music, or the falling rain he is describing? To begin with — and this is perhaps contrary to what we might have

expected — he does not try his hand at the kind of virtuoso onomatopoeic poetry that is to be found in Du Bartas's 'Création des oiseaux':

> La gentille alouette avec son tire-lire
> Tire l'ire à l'iré, et tire-lirant tire
> Vers la voute du ciel; puis son vol vers ce lieu
> Vire, et desire dire: adieu Dieu, adieu Dieu.[3]

(We should perhaps be grateful for Saint-Amant's abstinence!) Of course, sound-suggestion is at the best of times an extremely tenuous concept, dependent on the reader's ability and willingness to make the necessary association between sound and meaning. Naturally, there are those words which are seemingly onomatopoeic in origin (grunt, groan, *gémir*, *geindre*) but they present themselves automatically to the mind in certain circumstances because they are the *mot propre* and more or less unavoidable. Unless they are used alliteratively it cannot really be claimed that the poet is attempting to suggest sounds. Saint-Amant, for instance, often uses the verb 'murmurer' when describing water:

> Un ruisseau plein d'inquietude,
> *Murmurant* sur le dos d'un aspre et vieux rocher . . .
> (I, 268)

However, since the poet makes no attempt to prolong or build on the sounds contained in 'murmurant' there is no proof that the verb was especially chosen for its sound value. In fact, Saint-Amant's poetry does not contain a great deal of sound-suggestion. In 'La Pluye', for example, he exclaims:

> Mon Dieu! quel plaisir incroyable!
> Que l'eau fait un bruit agreable,
> Tombant sur ces fueillages verds!
> Et que je charmerois l'oreille,
> Si cette douceur nompareille
> Se pouvoit trouver en mes vers!
> (I, 93–4)

This passage is extremely evocative, probably because it stirs our memory into action, reminding us of a sound we have all no doubt heard and enjoyed at some time or another. Yet, although here was a golden opportunity to make use of onomatopoeia, Saint-Amant in fact ignores the device. (It is interesting to note how he is again concerned with the musicality of his verse however.)

What should be made quite clear at this stage is that Saint-Amant loses none of his command of language when it comes to describing sounds. His vocabulary is still varied and expressive, as the following examples will show:

(i) Un long cry de hybou, douloureux et tremblant . . .
(I, 268)

(ii) Les chats, presque enragez d'amour,
Grondent dans les goutieres;
Les lou-garous, fuyans le jour,

Hurlent aux cimetieres;
Et les enfans, transis d'estre tous seuls,
Couvrent leurs testes de linceuls.

Le clochetteur des trespassez,
Sonnant de rue en rue,
De frayeur rend leurs cœurs glacez,
Bien que leur corps en sue;
Et mille chiens, oyans sa triste vois,
Luy repondent à longs abois.

(I, 97)

(iii) . . . et le salut naval
Tonne et s'enfuit au creux d'un sombre val.
D'un mesme ton nostre bronze le paye;
L'echo repart, et mugit et s'effraye,
Et tous ces bruits ensemble confondus
Rendent bien loin les Tritons esperdus.

(I, 421)

(iv) La tymbale, aux chefs glorieuse,
Tonnant dans son ventre d'airain,
Fait bruire en l'air doux et serain
Une musique furieuse.
La trompette éclatante et le tambour divers
Au fifre embouché de travers
Joignent leur brusque melodie,
Et tous ces instrumens, en l'oreille estourdie,
Semblent confondre l'univers.

(II, 367)

What is so remarkable about a good many of Saint-Amant's descriptions of sounds is the way he introduces visual elements. In the fourth of the above passages the fife, for example, is succinctly described as 'embouché de travers'. His descriptions of lute music are interesting for the way he depicts the actual strumming of the strings. In that extract from 'L'Amarante' already quoted he describes, admittedly in a précieux idiom, the soft, white hand of his lady-musician. In *Moyse Sauvé* Pharaoh's daughter is depicted as not only whiling away the empty hours painting but also playing the lute, and it is noteworthy how the poet contrasts the whiteness of her hand against the dark wood of the instrument:

Tantost, pour reveiller une ame par l'ouye,
Pour de douceur en rendre une autre esvanouye,
Elle faisoit gemir, mais d'un air plus qu'humain,
Sur l'ebene d'un luth l'yvoire de sa main . . .

(II, 292–3)

In 'L'Arion' there occurs the following couplet where visual elements are combined with a description of sound:

[Les] tremblemens subtils de sa main delicate,
Sous qui la chanterelle en mille tons s'eclate . . .
(I, 80)

And in 'Les Visions' Saint-Amant tells how his fingers idly follow the whims of his changing moods:

Si, pour me retirer de ces creuses pensées,
Autour de mon cerveau pesamment amassées,
Je m'exerce parfois à trouver sur mon lut
Quelque chant qui m'apporte un espoir de salut,
Mes doigts, suivans l'humeur de mon triste genie,
Font languir les accens et plaindre l'harmonie;
Mille tons delicats, lamentables et clairs,
S'en vont à longs souspirs se perdre dans les airs,
Et, tremblans au sortir de la corde animée,
Qui s'est dessous ma main au dueil accoustumée,
Il semble qu'à leur mort, d'une voix de douleur,
Ils chantent en pleurant ma vie et mon malheur.
(I, 89)

It must be added that this particular passage effectively suggests, through the use of sound patterns, the sad, melancholy strains of the poet's music.

The poem 'L'Arion' mentioned above is, in fact, based on the story related by Herodotus concerning the semi-legendary poet Arion who is said to have invented the dithyramb. Arion, homeward bound across the sea, threw himself off the ship rather than be murdered by the sailors who were plotting to steal his riches, and was miraculously rescued by a dolphin attracted by his music. Such a story was perhaps guaranteed to appeal to the imagination of Saint-Amant, himself a poet-musician. However, rather than attempting to describe the song which Arion sings just before throwing himself into the ocean, Saint-Amant gives us the 'actual' lyrics:

[Arion]
Accorde bien son lut, en ajuste les touches,
L'essaye avec sa voix, dont il emeut les souches,
Puis, montant sur la poupe en superbe appareil,
Donne air à ces propos, tourné vers le soleil.

O! le plus beau des dieux, et le plus adorable,
Toy qui, par ta valeur, aux mortels favorable,
Fis que l'affreux serpent expira sous tes coups,
Hélas! pren soin de nous.

Phebus, que les neuf Sœurs reconnoissent pour maistre,
Prince de la lumiere, à qui tout doit son estre,
Grand et nompareil astre aux flamboyans cheveux,
Sois propice à nos vœux.

Supreme deïté dont les sacrez oracles
Dans le temple de Delphe annoncent les miracles,

Seul arbitre du temps, qui sans toy ne peut rien,
Travaille à nostre bien.

Dissipe la fureur de ces noires tempestes,
Que le malheur prepare à foudroyer nos testes;
Et, pour nous retirer de la nuict du tombeau,
Preste-nous ton flambeau.

Nous sommes bien certains qu'Eole te revere;
Si ta faveur l'ordonne, au lieu d'estre severe,
Il montrera pour nous autant d'affections
Que pour ses Alcions.

Il calmera les flots que son sceptre gouverne,
Enchaisnera Borée au fond de sa caverne,
Et laissera courir Zephire seulement
Sur ce vaste element.

(I, 76–7)

The song is rendered quite distinct from the narrative, which is in *vers suivis*, by the introduction of *strophes*. It has, unfortunately, little to recommend it and certainly does not possess any of the anguish and passion one would expect from a poet who knows he is about to die. (It would perhaps be rather unfair to criticize Saint-Amant for not having made Arion's farewell song a dithyramb — that is to say a wild, irregular poem, not divided into stanzas, and addressed to Pan rather than Apollo — especially, of course, since the latter was also a marine deity and known, appropriately enough for this song, as the 'dolphin-god'.[4])

But if Saint-Amant rarely suggests actual sounds and is often content, when describing them, to tell what effect they have on those who hear them or how they are made, there are, on the other hand, a number of passages where he successfully evokes a certain mood through the repetition of specific sounds. There are, to begin with, the following much-quoted lines from 'Le Contemplateur' which surely rank amongst the most exquisite, the most memorable ever written in the French language:

Tantost, delivré du tourment
De ces illusions nocturnes,
Je considère au firmament
L'aspect des flambeaux taciturnes;
Et, voyant qu'en ces dous desers
Les orgueilleux tyrans des airs
Ont appaisé leur insolence,
J'escoute, à demy transporté,
Le bruit des ailes du Silence,
Qui vole dans l'obscurité.

(I, 36–7)

Lines such as these surely defy analysis and Borton, for one, has fallen into the trap of delving too deeply in order to explain their attraction:

> the poet can by discreet suggestions render visible the 'sound' of silence . . . The first three verses [beginning 'Et, voyant . . .'] set in tonal relief the second three, establishing a sense of true hush. The effect of the following verses is to deepen even further the sense of silence: first, by the implication of the verb-form 'J'escoute', suggesting the wrapt attention necessary to perceive what is now more difficult to detect than before; second, the phrase 'à demy transporté', indicating the tension of the poet half bent on listening and half enchanted by a barely discernible or now imperceptible sound; and third, the conception of silence as something as mobile and as quiet as the wings of a bird, so that silence progressively deepens as it flies away through the darkness. Accompanying the conception of silence as flight there is a haunting quality of liquids and sibilants which lend the short passage a touch of awesomeness . . .[5]

One need really say no more than that it is the subtle association of soft, lingering sounds and symbolistic imagery to which the reader responds.

Another poem which is significant for its sound-mood is 'La Nuict'. We have already had occasion to look at some of the highly colourful descriptions of sounds contained within this poem (excerpt ii on pages 80–1), yet its first stanza is even more remarkable for the way it suggests to the ear the languid peace of night:

> Paisible et solitaire nuit,
> Sans lune et sans estoilles,
> Renferme le jour qui me nuit
> Dans tes plus sombres voilles;
> Haste tes pas, deesse, exauce-moy:
> J'ayme une brune comme toy.
>
> (I, 95)

It is perhaps a pity that Saint-Amant was unable, or unwilling, to maintain this mood of lazy indolence and intimacy evoked by the masterly interlinking of ideas and soothing sounds, for all too soon we are plunged into a grotesque world of werwolves and howling dogs (although, in a sense, this very variety may be seen as giving the poem as a whole a force and vitality of its own). Saint-Amant seems particularly talented at suggesting calm and stillness. Again in 'La Nuict' there occurs another passage where soft sounds underline a description of sweet music and fountains playing in the still of night:

> Tous ces vents, qui souffloient si fort,
> Retiennent leurs haleines;
> Il ne pleut plus, la foudre dort,
> On n'oit que les fontaines
> Et le doux son de quelques luts charmans
> Qui parlent au lieu des amans.
>
> (I, 98)

Clearly there is in this stanza a deliberate attempt on Saint-Amant's part to suggest peace and the musicality of the cascading water and the lutes. In the first line '*souff*loient *si f*ort' is obviously intended to suggest by means of onomatopoeia the sound of the blowing winds. The internal rhyme in line two (retiennent / haleine) reinforces the music of the piece, as does the approximation of sound between 'son' and 'charmans' (and of course 'vents' and 'amans'), and the over-all lulling quality of the sounds present. At the end of *Moyse Sauvé* are to be found the following hauntingly beautiful lines:

> Dejà les rossignols chantoyent sur les buissons;
> On oyoit dans le Nil retomber les poissons;
> Le silence paisible et l'horreur solitaire
> Contraignoyent doucement les hommes à se taire.
> (I, 328)

It is so still and quiet fish can be heard jumping. It is so peaceful mankind dares not break the silence. The way Saint-Amant is at once exact in his description (nightingales singing, fish leaping) and vague (abstract terms such as 'l'horreur solitaire') is particularly effective when combined with the fluidity of the verses and the hushed sounds.[6] A parallel must be drawn here too between the way the poet introduces a degree of actuality by making use of verb-forms ('On n'oit', 'On oyoit') and the way he does the same thing when appealing to our mind's eye ('je voy' and so forth).

Let us now move on to a discussion of the more important question of the relationship between poetry and music generally as applied to Saint-Amant's work. It perhaps goes without saying that we are immediately on much safer ground than when we were considering the affinities between his poetry and painting. Originally, of course, music and poetry had common roots and if their early close ties were greatly loosened through the centuries it is nevertheless true that a good deal of popular verse was never divorced from music. There is really nothing novel about present-day poet-musicians and Brassens, Brel, Ferré, and even the Beatles are merely continuing a long tradition, a tradition to which Saint-Amant contributed.

Saint-Amant was in fact writing at a time when poetry and music were still seen has having a lot in common (although, of course, the fourteenth century and the advent of a complex polyphony had seen the last of the *trouvères*, poet-musicians such as Guillaume de Machault who set their verse to their own music). In the sixteenth century the Pléiade had sought to give the bonds between the two arts an extra significance by demonstrating how they had existed side by side in ancient Greece. Ronsard, for one, thought poetry and music to be complementary and it was said of him:

> La musique lui estoit à singulier plaisir, et principalement amoit à chanter et a ouyr chanter ses vers, appelant la Musique sœur puisnée de la Poesie,

> et les Poetes et Musiciens enfans sacrez des Muses . . . sans la Musique la Poesie estoit presque sans grace, comme la Musique sans la Melodie des Vers, inanimée et sans vie.[7]

Later, Malherbe was to share the same sentiments. As R. Winegarten points out: 'at least twenty-one of Malherbe's lyrics were composed to fit a set air, or were given a musical setting afterwards' and his odes were written 'as if they were to be sung, on a uniform strophic structure with alternating masculine and feminine rhymes [this last concept having been advocated by Ronsard[8]], a form which was chosen because it was eminently suited to the requirements of the musician'.[9]

As far as Saint-Amant is concerned we can only, for the most part, guess at the extent to which his ear for music may have influenced his choice of metre and his handling of it. A number of his poems would no doubt have been given a musical accompaniment, especially those such as 'Bacchus conquerant', 'Junon à Paris', and 'Le Sorcier' which were all intended to be performed as part of a *ballet du roy*. It seems likely that Saint-Amant would, on occasion, have accompanied his own songs on the lute but we only know he was celebrated for the way he *recited* them. The Livet edition of his works does include the anonymous tunes to two songs, his 'Chanson sur la naissance de Louis XIV' and his 'Chanson sur le grand Prince de Condé' — one should add, however, that neither the words nor the tunes are worth remembering, What does seem fairly certain is that Saint-Amant was never so consciously aware of the affinity between poetry and music as Malherbe. Strangely enough, on the one occasion he does give us an indication of the way in which his knowledge of music influenced his poetry — or at least when he draws a brief parallel between the two arts — he would appear to be going against a concept itself born of the close relationship between them. Just prior to the passage in the preface to *Moyse Sauvé* where he links poetry and painting and poetry and music together he writes:

> Je voudrois bien, pour conclusion, dire quelque petit mot en passant de mon stile, et de la manière que j'ay observée à faire mes vers. Si j'en avois le loisir je dirois que je ne suis pas de l'advis de ceux qui veulent qu'il y ait toujours un sens absolument achevé au deuxiesme ou au quatriesme. Il faut quelquesfois rompre la mesure afin de la diversifier; autrement cela cause un certain ennuy à l'oreille, qui ne peut provenir que de la continuelle uniformité; je dirois qu'en user de la sorte, c'est ce qu'en termes de musique on appelle rompre la cadence, ou sortir du mode pour y r'entrer plus agreablement . . . (II, 147)

'Mes vers' here refers to the twelve-syllabled *vers suivis* of *Moyse Sauvé*. Now Malherbe frowned on this particular form of poetry since he believed *vers suivis* to be unsuitable for musical accompaniment. He even attempted to make Racan divide his into divisions of four lines — in other words to give them a

strophic structure. But it is quite evident that Saint-Amant is less concerned with the possibility of putting his huge 'idyle heroïque' to music than with the effect of his verse by itself. A shift of emphasis from the close association of poetry and music to the 'musicality' of verse itself takes place. In point of fact the parallel Saint-Amant draws between poetry and music is apt and, indeed, extremely interesting. Musically speaking, 'une cadence rompue' is the movement from a dominant chord to a chord other than a tonic one, a cadence being a harmonic movement which gives the impression of a definite or a momentary pause to a musical phrase. In the case of the interrupted cadence the pause is only momentary and the development of the piece continues. If the poet then, instead of giving us a pause at the end of the second or fourth line where we have become conditioned to expect it, creates an enjambement and continues his discourse, he can easily be likened to the musician who introduces 'une cadence rompue'. Clearly Saint-Amant has seen that too much and too regular end-stopping can become monotonous, but that it can also be used to good effect when its pattern is occasionally broken:

Alors du Roy des roys les fidelles ministres,
Qui de tant d'accidents estranges et sinistres
Avoyent sauvé Moyse, et de leurs dignes mains
Destruit en sa faveur tant d'objets inhumains,
Voyant par cette reine, aussi-tost reconnue,
De son illustre sort la grande heure venue,
Et sachant ce qu'au ciel l'auguste eternité
Dans son livre de gloire en avoit arresté,
Pour l'exposer aux yeux la nacelle degagent
Des joncs et des roseaux qui l'ornent et l'ombragent,
En rompent les liens, et, d'un elancement
Où l'effort de leur bras s'imprime doucement,
La poussent dans le cours, la font glisser sur l'onde,
En surprennent la nimphe en charmes sans seconde,
Et, la comblant soudain d'amour et de plaisir,
D'en posseder l'honneur luy donnent le desir.
(II, 320)

Jacob, appaise-toy: la haute Providence
Du Dieu qui fait au ciel sa noble residence,
Et sans qui rien n'arrive en ce bas univers,
Non pas mesme aux destours des nus et moindres vers,
A determiné seule en son grand consistoire
Que pour ton propre bien, et pour sa propre gloire,
Lya, cette Lya dont doit sortir un jour
Le plus rare tesmoin de son divin amour,
Fust jointe à tes costez par des ruses discretes
Que feront resonner ses futurs interpretes.
(II, 272)

L'on ne voyoit qu'enfans ou noyés ou meurtris,
L'on n'oyoit que sanglots, que pitoyables cris,

Que soupirs, que regrets, que vehementes plaintes
Des femmes d'Israel, qui de tendres estreintes
Embrassoient en pleurant ces froids et pasles corps
Tristement estendus sur ces funestes bords . . .
(II, 156)

A little surprisingly — for her study of Saint-Amant is in most respects extremely sound and penetrating — Françoise Gourier appears to be somewhat confused over this particular aspect of the poet's work. In her chapter dealing with his versification she suggests that Saint-Amant was referring in the preface to *Moyse* to the way, as she puts it, 'il se sert souvent d'une succession de verbes courts pour rendre le dynamisme de l'action'.[10] It is true that this frequent use of a string of verbs does somehow convey an impression of the often violent action being described and in the chapter on movement we had occasion to study several examples (see page 40). Gourier calls it 'une sorte d'assouplissement de l'alexandrin pour évoquer des scènes actives' and a 'dislocation du vers' which helps to create 'un rythme brisé'. In point of fact, however, this device does not so much *break up* the rhythm of the alexandrine as accentuate the stresses within each hemistich — as the examples she herself chooses show:

Il le prend, il le mord; Elisaph le tient ferme,
Tasche de l'enfoncer dans l'ire qui l'enferme,
Pousse, tire, repousse, enfin l'arrache aux dents . . .
(II, 182)

It is this underlining of the stresses which lends a force and vigour to the action described. It seems most unlikely then that Saint-Amant was actually referring to this device in his preface. Moreover, it should be added that, for all its effectiveness in reinforcing the idea of movement and action, it does tend to become irritating. The poet uses it just a little too often and we come to expect it whenever there is some action to be described.

So, apart from this one indication, Saint-Amant offers us no information on how music might have influenced his poetry. We can, nevertheless, justifiably pursue the question by examining the way he makes use of metre. One of the most striking features of his poetry is, in fact, its frequent rhythmical effortlessness. Even when he is experimenting with new and different metres his poems possess a grace and harmony which are admirable. For instance, the nine-line *strophe*, an uncommon occurrence in the seventeenth century, is used on a number of occasions by Saint-Amant, whilst in his poem 'Regrets' we have an example of the even rarer heterometric nine-line *strophe* — yet he succeeds in moulding the lines of five and seven syllables into a work of exquisite gracefulness and rhythmical beauty:

J'ay veu repandre des larmes
A ces beaux vainqueurs
Où brille avec tant de charmes

Le doux roi des cœurs;
J'ay veu les yeux que j'adore
Imiter pour moy l'aurore
Au lever du jour,
Et je n'ay pas fait encore
Un excès d'amour!

J'ay veu ma chere Cephise,
D'un soupir ardant,
Montrer comme elle est esprise,
En me regardant;
J'ay veu son beau sein d'yvoire,
Prez de qui la neige est noire,
Esmeu de mon sort,
Et je n'ay pas pour sa gloire
Enduré la mort!

(I, 266)

Amongst his poems possessing the more usual stanzas of four, six or ten lines is to be found further proof of his ability. The splendid poem 'La Nuict', which we have already discussed, is written in *sizains* (although it does have the rather unusual combination of three different metres — lines of six, eight and ten syllables) and owes much of its charm to Saint-Amant's sure handling of versification. However, another piece, 'Bacchus conquerant', has the same combination but is, one feels, less successful:

Enfin mon bras victorieux
A couronné ma teste;
Ceux qui m'estoient injurieux
Solemnisent ma feste;
Tout m'obeït, mesmes les immortels
Reverent mes sacrez autels.

(I, 127)

Occasionally, it is true, Saint-Amant does not even do as well as this and Gourier is quite right, for example, to criticize his 'Chanson à boire' as being rhythmically clumsy:[11]

Payen, Maigrin, Butte, Gilot,
Desgranges, Chasteaupers, et Dufour le bon falot,
Qu'un chacun eslise son parrain
Pour trinquer à ce prince lorrain!
Il nous permet qu'en liberté
Sans aucun compliment on luy porte une santé.
Beuvons donc, il nous fera raison,
Car il est l'honneur de sa maison.

(I, 181)

Here, it will be noticed, the poet has combined lines of eight, nine and thirteen syllables—an extremely rare formula. A previous chapter has already

illustrated how rhythmically exhilarating others of Saint-Amant's 'pièces bachiques' are however.

Although, generally speaking, the poet's choice of metre is fairly conventional, he is prepared, as we have seen, to experiment. He also tries his hand at various medieval poetic forms which enjoyed a brief spell of popularity in the seventeenth century, as he himself tells us in his 'Epistre à M. l'Abbé de Villeloin':

> . . . puisque la belle eglogue,
> Puisque l'epistre est bien rentrée en vogue
> Que *le rondeau*, que *le fin triolet*
> A bien repris son aymable rolet . . .
> (II, 49)

and again in his amusing 'Petarrade aux rondeaux':

> *Un seul rondeau* vaut un poëme epique; . . .
> *Le chant royal* et *le gay triolet*,
> R'entrent en vogue et prosnent leur rolet.
> (I, 318–19)

In point of fact Saint-Amant was to compose two triolets and two rondeaux. The more successful of the two triolets, something of a *tour de force*, is not without its own captivating rhythm — although admittedly this has become a little tiresome by the end of the poem (there are sixty-four stanzas).

> Pour construire un bon triolet,
> Il faut observer ces trois choses,
> Sçavoir: que l'air en soit folet,
> Pour construire un bon triolet;
> Qu'il r'entre bien dans le rolet,
> Et qu'il tombe au vray lieu des pauses;
> Pour construire un bon triolet
> Il faut observer ces trois choses.
> (I, 444)

Clearly Saint-Amant was aware of the trends in poetry during his lifetime. On one occasion he even asked with tongue in cheek why, since the rondeau and triolet were back in favour,

> . . . le grand, le superbe lyrique,
> Faisant revoir sa morgue pindarique,
> Sur le papier ne reviendroit-il pas
> Danser un jour la volte ou les cinq pas?
> (II, 49)

(He would no doubt have been astonished to learn that some ten years after his death there was to be a revival of interest in Pindar, headed by Despréaux, although this did not bring about a return to the Pindaric structure of strophe-antistrophe-epode.)

On the whole, however, Saint-Amant employed the more traditional seventeenth-century forms of poetry. For example, the greater number of his

sonnets are composed of alexandrines and, for the most part, their rhyme scheme is the usual a b b a, a b b a, c c d, e d e. But he endows them nonetheless with a fluidity and a grace which many of his contemporaries and, indeed, poets since then must have envied. How well, for instance, the following sonnet evokes with its easy nonchalance the laziness and forlorn whimsicality of the poet:

Accablé de paresse et de melancholie,
Je resve dans un lict où je suis fagoté
Comme un lievre sans os qui dort dans un pasté,
Ou comme un Dom-Quichot en sa morne folie.

Là, sans me soucier des guerres d'Italie,
Du comte Palatin, ny de sa royauté,
Je consacre un bel hymne à cette oisiveté
Où mon ame en langueur est comme ensevelie.

Je trouve ce plaisir si doux et si charmant,
Que je croy que les biens me viendront en dormant,
Puis que je voy des-jà s'en enfler ma bedaine,

Et hay tant le travail, que, les yeux entr'ouvers,
Une main hors des draps, cher BADOIN, à peine
Ay-je pû me resoudre à t'escrire ces vers.
(I, 243)

That the rhythm of the piece is suggestive of idleness and day-dreaming is perhaps best brought out by comparing it with another sonnet where the verses are more disjointed and fitful, emphasizing the poet's bizarre, nonsensical dress and behaviour:

Fagotté plaisamment comme un vray Simonnet,
Pied chaussé, l'autre nud, main au nez, l'autre en poche,
J'arpente un vieux grenier, portant sur ma caboche
Un coffin de Hollande en guise de bonnet.

Là, faisant quelquefois le saut de sansonnet,
Et dandinant du cu comme un sonneur de cloche,
Je m'esgueule de rire, escrivant d'une broche
En mots de Pathelin ce grotesque sonnet.

Mes esprits, à cheval sur des cocquesigrues,
Ainsi que papillons s'envollent dans les nues,
Y cherchant quelque fin qu'on ne puisse trouver.

Nargue: c'est trop resver, c'est trop ronger ses ongles;
Si quelqu'un sçait la ryme, il peut bien l'achever.
(I, 188–9)

In the second sonnet the absence of a fourteenth verse adds a final crazy touch.

May we conclude that Saint-Amant's ear for music gave him this feeling for rhythm which is so manifest in his work? Probably: it would be difficult to decide, however, whether or to what degree he would have been as successful

if he had not himself been a musician. And certainly it would be difficult — and profitless — to determine how this flair affected another aspect of versification, rhyme. As it happens Saint-Amant's rhymes are, on the whole, rich and definitely play their part in adding to the general harmony of his poetry, as in the following stanza from 'La Nuict':

Quel jugement y doy-je assoir?
  Veut-elle me complaire?
Mon cœur s'en promet à ce soir
  Une preuve plus claire.
Vien donc, ô nuit! que ton obscurité
  M'en decouvre la verité.
(I, 96)

However, just as other poets have composed rhythmical, musical verse without being musicians themselves or even, for that matter, interested in music,[12] so a knowledge of the art is not a prerequisite for creating rich rhymes.

What has become apparent is that Saint-Amant was very much concerned with the effect of his poetry itself — that is to say with the effect of its sound, its rhythm, and its harmony — on the reader or listener. In other words his love of music influenced his poetry in as much as he attempted, with undoubted success, to endow it with the qualities of music.

Poetry and painting, and now poetry and music: Durand-Lapie has succinctly summarized the interrelation in Saint-Amant's work of all three arts:

> Avec le talent d'un peintre, Saint-Amant retrace ce qui a frappé ses yeux. L'art du peintre est un des éléments de son inspiration . . . s'il fait de cette manière et en peintre de la poésie pour les yeux, en musicien il charme l'oreille, surtout par la richesse des rimes et la coupe harmonieuse du vers . . .[13]

CONCLUSION

When, after over a century of unjust neglect, Saint-Amant was rediscovered in the early nineteenth century, it was largely due to the efforts of Théophile Gautier who devoted a chapter of his *Grotesques* to a spirited appraisal of his predecessor's achievement. Now, whilst we are not entitled to read too much into this — for he was to attempt to rehabilitate a number of other forgotten poets — it is nevertheless intriguing that it should have been Gautier who — having long hesitated between becoming a painter and becoming a poet and having finally compromised by making words 'paint' — was to be responsible for the revival of interest in an earlier 'poet-painter'. As might have been expected he was particularly alive to the pictorial qualities of Saint-Amant's poetry. Of *Moyse Sauvé*, for example, he wrote:

> la partie descriptive y est extrêmement brillante et fait passer sur beaucoup de défectuosités. Le descriptif est l'endroit où Saint-Amant excelle entre tous autres; ses voyages nombreux . . . le mettent à même de varier sa palette à l'infini et de la charger de couleurs originales et franches.[1]

Again as might have been expected, Gautier draws several parallels between Saint-Amant's work and that of various artists: the seventeenth-century poet is likened, in one way or another, to Callot,[2] Ostade (without it being specified which one in particular), Teniers and 'Bamboccio' (Pieter van Laer).

We may deduce from something he once said to Sainte-Beuve that Gautier probably sensed in Saint-Amant's work much the same urge to depict the visual world as drove him to make poetry a 'transposition d'art'. According to Sainte-Beuve he one day declared:

> toute ma vie je n'ai fait que m'appliquer à bien voir, à bien regarder la nature, à la dessiner, à la rendre, à la peindre, si je pouvais, telle que je l'ai vue.[3]

This conception of his task as a poet — this ideal — was no doubt at the back of his mind when he came to give his judgement on Saint-Amant's 'Solitude', and it is plain that, as far as this particular poem at least was concerned, the earlier poet's approach would definitely have appealed to him:

> *La nature y est étudiée immédiatement* et non à travers les œuvres des maîtres antérieurs . . . *il décrit ce qu'il voit*, non à la façon sèche et géométrique de l'abbé Delille, mais avec une liberté et une finesse de touche, avec un sentiment qui sentent leur grand maître; il n'est guère possible de faire mieux dans le genre pittoresque.[4]

We do indeed get the impression that the sharpness and vivacity of so much of Saint-Amant's descriptive verse is born of a close observation of reality. We feel that the poet has stored away in his memory picturesque scenes which he then utilizes in his poetry at a later date (and not always, it must be admitted, in the most apt places). Saint-Amant himself acknowledged the part memory played in the composition of poetry in company with 'l'imagination [et] l'entendement' (I, 13). Clearly his flights of imagination are also fundamental to his poetry, but reality and his memories of reality are often the stepping-stones to his most colourful descriptions. It is fascinating to discover, for instance, how Saint-Amant has made use of his memories of firework displays. In *Moyse Sauvé* the poet describes how a kind of falling star shows the parents of Moses where they are to conceal the baby:

> Un clair et beau prodige apparut à leurs yeux.
> Ce fut un trait de feu qui, comme une fusée,
> Commençant sur leur toit une ligne embrasée,
> Avec sa pointe d'or les tenebres perça,
> D'un cours bruyant et pront vers le Nil se glissa;
> Fit loin estinceller sa flame petillante,
> Et, laissant en la nue une trace brillante,
> S'en alla dans cette onde esteindre son ardeur,
> Et remplir l'air autour d'une agreable odeur.
>
> (II, 159)

Without a doubt this description was inspired by the memory of a firework display to mark a victory or a royal birth such as he describes in his 'Epistre Heroi-comique':

> Au bord de l'eau tout le peuple s'assemble,
> Pareil en nombre à ses grains areneux,
> Poir voir monter cent dragons lumineux,
> Qui, se crevans en paisibles estoiles,
> De l'air serain dorent les sombres voiles,
> Et tost après tombent tranquillement
> Sur le liquide ou le sec element,
> Ou quelquesfois font leur chute embrasée
> Au beau milieu de la tourbe amusée,
> Dont maint badin, qui craint pourtant sa peau,
> Rit d'en voir une empaumer un chapeau.
>
> (I, 369)

Even more remarkable is the way he has made use of such a memory in order to depict the eyes of the monster in 'L'Andromede':

> Ses prunelles embrasées
> Ressembloient à ces fusées
> Qui font leur effet dans l'eau . . .
>
> (I, 54–5)

However, in spite of certain affinities, it is evident that a gulf exists between Saint-Amant's and Gautier's respective attitudes towards poetry and painting and between their respective views on the poet's role. For all his great and informed interest in the art of painting, for all the strong visual bias to his poetry and its frequent pictorial qualities, it could never be said that Saint-Amant makes a doctrine of the theory of *Ut pictura poesis*, as does Gautier. The latter's poetry comes as close as is possible to being purely visual — indeed, it is perhaps significant that whereas Saint-Amant certainly delights in the sense of sight, Gautier actually confesses to the sin of 'concupiscentia oculorum'.[5] In love with painting and sculpture from an early age the Parnassian poet was to transpose pictures and statues into poetry, recreating in words, for example, two paintings by the Spanish artist Valdés Leal — the second of which he describes thus:

> Dans la seconde toile, où d'une lampe avare
> Tombe sinistrement une lumière rare,
> Des cercueils tout ouverts sont par file rangés,
> Avec leurs habitants gravement allongés.
> D'abord, c'est un évêque ayant encore sa mitre,
> Qui semble présider le lugubre chapitre;
> D'un geste machinal il bénit vaguement
> Tout le peuple livide autour de lui dormant.
> Son front luit comme un os, et, dans ses dures pinces,
> L'agonie a serré son nez aux ailes minces;
> Aux angles de sa bouche, aux plis de son menton,
> Déjà la moisissure a jeté son coton;
> Le ver ourdit sa toile au fond de ses yeux caves, . . .
> Plus loin, c'est un bravache à la moustache épaisse,
> Armé de pied en cap en son étroite caisse.
> La putréfaction qui lui gonfle les chairs
> Au bistre de son teint a mêlé des tons verts . . .[6]

Not once does Saint-Amant attempt to describe an actual painting in such detail. Yet Gautier went even further in his assimilation of poetry and the plastic arts. Since Art was seen as a struggle with a resistant material — and the more difficult the obstacles to be overcome the greater the achievement — the composition of a poem could be equated with the creation of a statue. Poetic form almost becomes plastic form:

> Sculpte, lime, cisèle,
> Que ton rêve flottant
> Se scelle
> Dans le bloc résistant![7]

Moreover, it is important to remember that, however valid and fascinating the comparison of Saint-Amant with Gautier may be, to insist on any affinities between the two poets will tend to obscure the fact that Saint-Amant was very much a child of his time — as, indeed, was Gautier. That very keenness of vision which the later poet recognizes and praises in Saint-Amant was itself

not only characteristic of those poets we call baroque, but of baroque artists in general. In fact, much of baroque painting depends on the close observation of reality, and techniques were perfected to enable the painter to reproduce the universe about him even more faithfully. As far as poets were concerned, the close observation of reality frequently found expression in verse which Odette de Mourgues has described, appropriately enough, as 'myopic and disconnected'.[8] We saw in Chapter 3, for example, how Saint-Amant delighted in seizing upon minute details of a landscape and how this was one of the factors preventing him from creating a more coherent, unified whole. We saw too, in Chapters 4 and 5, how his preoccupation with descriptive detail often spoils a sense of movement or a desired mood. Saint-Amant himself was aware, to a degree at least, of the extremes to which his love of highly detailed descriptions so frequently led him. In the preface to *Moyse Sauvé* he admits that 'la description des moindres choses est de [son] appanage particulier; c'est où [il] employe le plus souvent toute [sa] petite industrie' (II, 143–4), whilst in his 'Epistre à Monsieur le baron de Melay' he laughingly points out that his muse has all but written an epic poem about a ham and wittily adds:

> . . . en sa fougue, et qui la pousseroit,
> Sur un ciron un livre elle feroit.
>
> (I, 352)

Saint-Amant's art is typical of its period in other ways still. We have noted how the poet shared his contemporaries' enthusiasm for the effects of light and how he enjoyed describing sunbeams playing on water, on leaves and on snow, light filtering through a glass of cider, fireworks bursting in the night sky. His was the age of Claude, entranced by the diffusion of light in space; the age, too, of Georges de la Tour who, inspired by Caravaggio's chiaroscuro effects, painted pictures full of impressive contrasts of lights and shadows. Even the paintings of Poussin, that most un-baroque of painters, are bathed in light and air. Although the poets of the time rarely, if ever, rivalled the achievements of such artists with their descriptions of the effects of light, there can nonetheless be little doubt as to their predilection for bright hues — we have noted more than once Saint-Amant's explicit use of colours — metallic sheens, shimmering reflections, and chiaroscuro.

However, the baroque artist is not only characterized by the role light plays in his paintings: his use of movement is also a distinguishing factor. Baroque paintings are noted for their sense of movement, their rhythmical compositions, their forceful, often violent, vitality. Any painting by Rubens, to take the supreme example, is a series of interrelated movements spiralling or passing obliquely through space, movements whose impetus is hardly confined by the limits of the frame. Vigorous action of some kind or another is frequently taken as a theme — powerful gestures, dramatic stances force the eye across bold compositions. The baroque poet, too, shared in this love of movement and Saint-Amant,

as we saw in Chapter 4, was no exception. Certainly, some of his most successful and compelling poetry describes movement of some kind: running water, a ship setting sail, physical combat, writhing reptiles and so forth. It is almost as if the age he lived in — an age of quite profound political and social change — somehow gave birth to restless, dynamic minds delighting in movement and shifts of direction. The rejection, on religious grounds, of the pleasures of the world as merely transitory and, therefore, worthless considerations may also have influenced artists and poets, reinforcing, as it were, their obsession with the unstable and fickle. There can, of course, be little doubt that a religious fervour, born of the Counter-Reformation, was behind the baroque obsession with death, decay, and a life beyond the grave which is so evident in that macabre painting by Valdés Leal transposed into poetry by Gautier, evident also in the paintings of Zurbaran or the poems of Jean de Sponde and Chassignet. In this respect, too, Saint-Amant reflects to some degree the moods of his time: it will be remembered how his poem 'Le Contemplateur' ends with a vision of the Day of Judgement, even if the vision can hardly be considered all that catastrophic or threatening.

Although by no means necessarily baroque, the robust exuberance and zest so evident in Saint-Amant's humorous verse may be seen as also typical of the baroque mind — a reaction, it has been suggested, against the obsession with death just alluded to. Often, of course, this verve and vitality found expression in the grotesque, the erotic, and the obscene: the poems of Théophile, Scarron, and Malherbe, the engravings of Callot are there to remind us that Saint-Amant was not alone in his attempts to shock and arouse. Although baroque poetry generally appeals directly to our senses, in Saint-Amant's case particularly we feel that it is very much his *joie de vivre* which is the impetus behind verse of a supremely sensual nature. So much of his poetry, as we saw in Chapter 7, is quite effortlessly harmonious and musical, and most attractive to the ear. So many of his descriptions of sounds are extremely colourful and evocative. So often does he almost make our mouths water with his admirable still-lifes. So often, above all else, does he make us *visualize*.

We do still readily respond to so many of Saint-Amant's *tableaux*, sensing that he has not merely depicted something he has seen but also something that has made its mark on him. If, unlike Gautier whose name, for better or for worse, has now become inextricably linked with the concept of 'transposition d'art' and the closely related theory of 'art for art's sake', Saint-Amant may be seen more as a poet of many different intentions and moods, a poet content to follow where the whims of his muse led him, it is nonetheless true to say that the greatest single influence on his poetry was his enthusiasm for, and love of, painting. Other baroque poets may have shared this enthusiasm but none ever found quite such inspiration in it as did Saint-Amant who, in a very real sense, was indeed a *painter*.

NOTES

Notes to Chapter 1

1. Pierre de Ronsard, preface to *La Franciade*, *Œuvres complètes*, edited by P. Laumonier, S.T.F.M., 18 vols (Paris, 1921–67), XVI, 345.
2. Théophile de Viau, 'La Maison de Silvie', *Œuvres poétiques*, edited by L-R. Lefèvre (Paris, 1926), p. 164.
3. Louis Le Laboureur, preface to *Charlemagne*, cit. R. Bray, *La Formation de la doctrine classique* (Paris, 1927), p. 226.
4. Jean Racine, second preface to *Britannicus*, *Œuvres*, edited by P. Mesnard, Grands Ecrivains de la France, 8 vols + album (Paris, 1865–1929), II, 250.
5. Jean de la Fontaine, 'A Monseigneur le Dauphin', *Œuvres*, edited by H. Régnier, Grands Ecrivains de la France, 11 vols (Paris, 1884–1921), I, 56.
6. Fénelon, letter of 4 May 1714 to La Motte, *Œuvres*, edited by M. Aimé-Martin, 3 vols (Paris, 1835), III, 254.
7. Horace, *Ars poetica*, 361. Horace does not compare poetry and painting generally but in the single factor that in neither art is it justifiable to ask of the artist more than it is his intention to give.
8. Fénelon, 'Lettre sur les occupations de l'Académie Françoise', *Œuvres*, III, 232, and a letter of 22 November 1714 to La Motte, III, 256.
9. Nicolas Poussin, *Lettres et propos sur l'art*, edited by Sir Anthony Blunt (Paris, 1964), p. 169.
10. Horace, *Ars poetica*, 176–8.
11. Rensselaer W. Lee, 'Ut Pictura Poesis: The Humanistic Theory of Painting', *Art Bulletin*, 22 (1940), 197–269 (p. 236).
12. Racine, first preface to *Britannicus*, *Œuvres*, II, 243–5.
13. Ronsard, preface to *La Franciade*, *Œuvres complètes*, XVI, 336.
14. Racine, *Bérénice*, I. 5. 303.
15. Quintilian, *Institutio oratoria*, XI, 3, 67.
16. Lee, 'The Humanist Theory of Painting', pp. 256–8.
17. Leonardo da Vinci, *Trattato della pittura*, to be found in *The Literary Works*, edited and translated by J. P. Richter, 2 vols (London, 1939), I, 59.
18. Ludovico Dolce, *Dialogo della pittura intitolato l'Aretino*, cit. Lee, 'The Humanist Theory of Painting', p. 197.
19. Benedetto Varchi, *Due lezzione*, cit. Lee, 'The Humanist Theory of Painting', p. 254.
20. Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *Œuvres complètes*, 8 vols (Paris, Hachette, 1856–64), I, 402.
21. La Fontaine, *Œuvres*, V, 597. The poem from which these lines are taken, 'Le Tableau', describes a picture depicting an extremely licentious incident. La Fontaine shows up 'essential differences between the plastic and the literary. With the actual painting, the only recourse may well be to shroud it in curtains, yet the poet need not quail, for words can describe the undescribable. To underline this esthetic phenomenon, La Fontaine uses the metaphor of the veil; the poet's art replaces the censor's heavy curtain with the diaphanous veil of language.' J. C. Lapp, 'The Esthetics of Negligence: La Fontaine's *Contes*', *L'Esprit créateur*, 3 (1963), 108–15 (p. 110).
22. Leonardo, *Trattato della pittura*, *Literary Works*, I, 60.
23. Gotthold E. Lessing, *Laokoon*, edited by D. Reich (Oxford, 1965), p. 159.
24. Portrait of Camille, *Eneas: roman du XIIe siècle*, edited by J-J. Salverda de Grave, 2 vols (Paris, 1925–9), l. 3987.
25. René Wellek and Austin Warren, *The Theory of Literature* (London, 1953), p. 125.

Notes to Chapter 2

1. Nicolas Faret, preface to Saint-Amant's collected works (1629), *Œuvres de Saint-Amant*, edited by Ch-L. Livet, 2 vols (Paris, 1855), I, 8–9.
2. Michel de Marolles, *Traité du Poëme Epique*, cit. R. A. Sayce, 'Saint-Amant and Poussin: Ut pictura poesis', *French Studies*, 1 (1947), 241–51 (p. 241).

Notes to Chapter 2, continued

3. Jean Chapelain, preface to *La Pucelle*, cit. Sayce, 'Saint-Amant and Poussin', p. 241.
4. Chapelain, letter of 18 May 1638 to Balzac, *Lettres*, edited by Ph. Tamizey de Larroque, 2 vols (Paris, 1880–3), I, 238.
5. Sayce, 'Saint-Amant and Poussin', p. 242.
6. Philip Butler, *Classicisme et baroque dans l'œuvre de Racine* (Paris, 1959), p. 24.
7. Alan M. Boase, 'Poètes anglais et français de l'époque baroque', *Revue des sciences humaines*, July–December (1949), 155–84 (p. 184).
8. Odette de Mourgues, *Metaphysical, Baroque and Précieux Poetry* (Oxford, 1953), p. 78.
9. Paul Durand-Lapie, *Un Académicien du XVIIe siècle: Saint-Amant, son temps, sa vie, ses poésies* (Paris, 1898), pp. 121–2.
10. Jean Lagny, *Le Poète Saint-Amant (1594–1661). Essai sur sa vie et ses œuvres* (Paris, 1964), p. 56.
11. Paul Schönherr, 'Saint-Amant. Sein Leben und seine Werke', *Zeitschrift für neufranzösische Sprache und Litteratur*, 10 (1888), 113–86 (pp. 177–8).
12. Sayce, 'Saint-Amant and Poussin'.
13. Sayce, 'Saint-Amant and Poussin', p. 245.
14. Sayce, *The French Biblical Epic in the Seventeenth Century* (Oxford, 1955), pp. 95–6.
15. Discussing the indebtedness of literature to the plastic arts in the nineteenth century in his *Literature and the Visual Arts in Nineteenth-Century France* (Hull, 1963), Jean Seznec quotes H. Monnier as having said: 'how many times do writers *call to the rescue* those painters whose style and manner correspond to the scene which they want to describe?' (pp. 3–4).
16. Nicolas Poussin, letter of 28 April 1639 to Chantelou, *Correspondance*, edited by P. du Colombier (Paris, 1929), p. 12.
17. Maurice Scève, *Delie*, CCXCI.

Notes to Chapter 3

1. Bernard Dorival, 'Expression littéraire et expression picturale du sentiment de la nature au XVIIe siècle français', *La Revue des arts*, 3 (1953), 45–55 (p. 45).
2. Dorival, introduction to the Catalogue of an Exhibition of Landscape in French Art 1550–1900, at the Royal Academy of Arts, 1949–50, p. x.
3. Théophile de Viau, *Œuvres poétiques*, edited by L-R. Lefèvre (Paris, 1926), p. 207.
4. Théophile, *Œuvres poétiques*, pp. 30–1.
5. Théophile, *Œuvres poétiques*, p. 32.
6. Sainte-Beuve, 'Œuvres complètes de Saint-Amant', *Causeries du Lundi*, third edition, 15 vols (Paris, 1857–72), XII, 145–60 (p. 151).
7. Saint-Amant's vision of the Last Judgement — a vision which, as we saw in Chapter 2, was, on the poet's own admission, influenced by Michelangelo's masterpiece in the Sistine Chapel — is particularly noteworthy in that it is not only extremely visual in nature, but also *pictorial*. That is to say it relies, to a great extent, on a deliberate pictorial grouping and balancing. The poet links the resurrected together in pairs, or small groups, contrasting different gestures and stances, balancing the one with the other. He cannot avoid enumeration, yet this pictorial approach nevertheless lends the description an admirable coherence:

> L'un m'apparoist un bras devant;
> L'autre ne montre que la teste,
> Et, n'estant qu'à moitié vivant,
> Force l'obstacle qui l'arreste.
> Cestuy-cy s'esveille en sursaut;
> Cestuy-là joint les mains en haut,
> Implorant la faveur divine;
> Et l'autre est à peine levé
> Que d'un cœur devot il s'incline
> Devers l'agneau qui l'a sauvé.
>
> Près de là, le frère et la sœur,
> Touchez de ce bruit dont tout tremble,
> D'estre accusez d'inceste ont peur,
> Pour se trouver couchez ensemble.

Notes to Chapter 3, continued

Icy, la femme et le mary,
Objet l'un de l'autre chery,
Voyans la clarté souhaittée,
Semblent s'estonner et gemir
D'avoir passé cette nuictée
Sans avoir rien fait que dormir.

Tel, qui n'eust sceu quasi marcher
Autrefois, travaillé des goutes,
Court maintenant et va chercher
Du ciel les glorieuses routes.
Tel, de qui le seul ornement
Fut d'estre vestu richement
Et d'avoir des valets sans nombre,
Esbahy de sa nudité,
N'est plus suivy que de son ombre,
Encore va-t-elle à costé.

L'un de parler est tout ravy,
Veu qu'il manquoit jadis de langue,
Et fait à Dieu, qu'il a servy,
Son humble et premiere harangue;
L'autre, qui jamais du soleil
N'avoit veu l'éclat nompareil,
Pour estre aveugle de naissance,
Admire à present sa couleur,
Dont il ignoroit la puissance,
Bien qu'il en connust la chaleur.
(I, 40–1)

8. This sort of procedure has, of course, been used by many other poets. A fascinating example, especially when one considers our theme and that of this chapter in particular, is to be found in M. Lescarbot's *Tableau de la Suisse et autres alliez de la France ès hautes Allemagnes* (Paris, 1618), p. 1. Here the poet calls on a painter to paint the view before them which he then proceeds to describe in verse. The poem sheds a good deal of light on the seventeenth-century concept of nature. It also illustrates the fact that, although both poet and painter 'imitate' nature, there are fundamental differences between their arts. Lescarbot is obliged to enumerate, and although in so doing he suggests the actual creation of the painting — since the *process* of painting takes time — his final picture does not possess the coherence of the finished painting.

Peintre, ores que je suis sur la haute montagne
Qui conduit d'un long trait la Gaule en Allemagne,
Pein moi sur ce Tableau tout ce que des yeux
Je contemple d'ici, et d'un art studieux
Tire moi le pourtrait de ce grand païsage
Que le Ciel a donné aux Suisses en partage . . .
Ayant donc ton sujet borné de cette sorte
Apprête ton pinceau, et d'une main accorte
Pein moi premièrement toutes ces vives eaux,
Ces rivières, ces lacs, et murmurans ruisseaux
Qui coulent de ces rocs qu'une glace éternelle
Couvre de son manteau, et d'une course inelle
Viennent rapidement dans ce fleuve profond
Qui cotoie là-bas les rives de ce mont . . .
Cela fait, tu peindras de diverses couleurs
Tant de prés émaillés de cent sortes de fleurs
Que tu vois çà et la, soit parmi la campagne,
Soit au val arrosé des eaux d'une montagne,
N'omettant en ceci d'enrichir ton tableau
De bois frequens, qui font ce païsage beau . . .

Notes to Chapter 3, continued

9. Françoise Gourier, *Etude des œuvres poétiques de Saint-Amant* (Geneva, 1961), p. 172.
10. Gourier, *Œuvres poétiques de Saint-Amant*, p. 176.
11. Irving Babbitt, *The New Laokoon: An Essay on the Confusion of the Arts* (Boston, 1910), p. 151.
12. Jacques Bailbé, 'La Couleur baroque de la langue et du style dans les premières œuvres de Saint-Amant', *Le Français moderne*, 28 (1960), 171–80 and 287–96; 29 (1961), 43–61 (vol. 28, 177).

Notes to Chapter 4

1. Paul Durand-Lapie, *Un Académicien du XVIIe siècle: Saint-Amant, son temps, sa vie, ses poésies* (Paris, 1898), p. 357.
2. Gotthold E. Lessing, *Laokoon*, edited by D. Reich (Oxford, 1965), p. 159.
   > A ship is to him now a black ship, now a hollow ship, now a swift ship, at the most a well-rowed black ship. He goes no further in the painting of a ship. But the navigation, the departure, the arrival of the ship: out of these he makes a detailed picture, a picture out of which the painter must make five or six separate pictures if he wishes to place it entirely upon his canvas.
3. Théophile de Viau, *Œuvres poétiques*, edited by L-R. Lefèvre (Paris, 1926), p. 42.
4. Jean Lagny, *Le Poète Saint-Amant (1594–1661). Essai sur sa vie et ses œuvres* (Paris, 1964), p. 142.
5. Leonardo da Vinci, *Trattato della pittura*, *The Literary Works*, edited and translated by J. P. Richter, 2 vols (London, 1939), I, 53.
   > If you, poet, had to represent a murderous battle you would have to describe the air obscured and darkened by fumes from frightful and deadly engines mixed with thick clouds of dust polluting the atmosphere, and the panicky flight of wretches terrified by death in all its horror. In that case the painter will be your superior, because your pen will be worn out before you can fully describe what the painter can demonstrate forthwith by the aid of his science . . . What long and tedious work it would be for poetry to describe all the movements of the fighters in such a battle and the actions of their limbs and their ornaments. This is accomplished with great directness and truth in painting and placed before you, and in such a picture only the sound of the engines, the shouts of the terrible victors, and the cries and wailing of the terrified victims are wanting, and neither can the poet convey these to the sense of hearing.
6. Jean Racine, *Phèdre*, v. 6. 1513.
7. This use of colours is also to be noted in the several descriptions of snakes in *Moyse Sauvé*:
   (i) Une longue couleuvre au dos bleu, gris et blanc . . .
   (II, 270)
   (ii) . . . un beau monstre affreux,
   Qui, traisnant lentement ses jeunes flancs poudreux,
   Laisse sur le sablon une trace ondoyante, . . .
   Se glisse sur l'esmail des herbes et des fleurs,
   Adjouste un nouveau lustre à leurs vives couleurs,
   Revient sur soy, se cherche, en maint nœu s'entortille,
   Darde sa langue double, et dans l'or dont il brille,
   Entre-semé d'argent, de cinabre et d'azur,
   Se mire, . . .
   (II, 202)

Notes to Chapter 5

1. Cit. R. A. Hall, *A Short History of Italian Literature* (New York, 1951), p. 289.
2. Homer, *The Odyssey*, 23. 231.
   > 'Penelope's surrender melted Odysseus's heart, and he wept as he held his dear wife in his arms, so loyal and so true. Sweet moment for her too, sweet as the sight of land to sailors struggling in the sea, when the Sea-god by dint of wind and wave has wrecked their gallant ship. What happiness for the few swimmers that have

Notes to Chapter 5, continued

fought their way through the white surf to the shore, when caked with brine but safe and sound, they tread on solid earth!' Translated by E. V. Rieu (Penguin Books, 1946), p. 358.

3. Homer, *The Odyssey*, 8. 521.
'Odysseus broke down as the famous minstrel sang this lay, and his cheeks were wet with the tears that ran down from his eyes. He wept as a woman weeps when she throws her arms round the body of her beloved husband, fallen in battle before his city and his comrades, fighting to save his hometown and his children from disaster. She has found him gasping in the throes of death; she clings to him and lifts her voice in lamentation. But the enemy come up and belabour her back and shoulders with spears, as they lead her off into slavery and a life of miserable toil, with her cheeks wasted by her pitiful grief. Equally pitiful were the tears that now welled up in Odysseus's eyes', op. cit., p. 138.
4. Jean Chapelain, letter of 18 May 1638 to Balzac; *Lettres*, edited by Ph. Tamizey de Larroque, 2 vols (Paris, 1880–3), I, 238. Chapelain evidently considered the portrayal of the emotions as all-important in poetry for he writes:

> je souhaitterois qu[e] [Saint-Amant] fust peintre des sentimens, et qu'il représentast les mœurs et les passions qui me semble, avec nos anciens, *la principale vertu de la poésie et celle qui touche, qui esmeut, qui persuade et qui ravit.*

5. Chapelain, letter of 3 January 1639 to Balzac; *Lettres*, I, 354.
6. Richard A. Sayce, *The French Biblical Epic in the Seventeenth Century* (Oxford, 1955), p. 98.
7. Nicolas Boileau, *L'Art poétique*, III, 261.
8. Françoise Gourier, *Etude des œuvres poétiques de Saint-Amant* (Geneva, 1961), p. 217.
9. Sayce, 'Saint-Amant and Poussin: Ut pictura poesis', *French Studies*, 1 (1947), 241–51 (p. 246).

Notes to Chapter 6

1. Antoine Adam, *Histoire de la littérature française au XVIIe siècle*, 5 vols (Paris, 1948–56), I, 377.
2. Sainte-Beuve, 'Œuvres complètes de Saint-Amant', *Causeries du Lundi*, third edition, 15 vols (Paris, 1857–72), XII, 145–60 (p. 155).
3. Françoise Gourier, *Etude des œuvres poétiques de Saint-Amant* (Geneva, 1961), p. 128.
4. Maria Strzatkowa, 'Saint-Amant, poète du baroque français', *Towarzystwo naukowe w Toruniu prace nydzilau filologiczno-filozoficznego*, 3 (1955), p. 94.
5. Strzatkowa, 'Saint-Amant, poète du baroque français', p. 12.
6. André Beaunier, 'Un grand poète sous Louis XIII: Saint-Amant', *Revue des deux mondes*, 43 (1918), 210–21 (p. 220).
7. Cit. Samuel Borton, *Six Modes of Sensibility in Saint-Amant* (The Hague, 1966), p. 28.
8. Hemp was commonly grown in Flanders at that time and mixed with tobacco in order to produce narcosis (see Gerard Knuttel, *Adriaen Brouwer: The Master and his Work* (The Hague, 1962), p. 26). One wonders just how widespread the smoking of this narcotic mixture was and whether or not Saint-Amant himself might have indulged. Another sonnet, 'Voicy le rendez-vous', depicts a scene which closely resembles those secret tobacco inns painted by Brouwer:

> Voicy le rendez-vous des enfans sans soucy,
> Que pour me divertir quelquefois je frequente.
> Le maistre a bien raison de se nommer la Plante,
> Car il gaigne son bien par une plante aussy.
>
> Vous y voyez Bilot pasle, morne et transy,
> Vomir par les nazeaux une vapeur errante;
> Vous y voyez Sallard chatouiller la servante,
> Qui rit du bout du nez en portrait raccourcy.
>
> Que ce borgne a bien plus Fortune pour amie
> Qu'un de ces curieux qui, soufflant l'alchimie,
> De sage devient fol, et de riche indigent!

Notes to Chapter 6, continued

> Cestuy-là sent enfin sa vigueur consumée,
> Et voit tout son argent se resoudre en fumée;
> Mais lui, de la fumée il tire de l'argent.
> (I, 182–3)

The description of Bilot surely reminds us of one of Brouwer's smokers (see Plate 3). Could it be that the *cabaretier*, by a coincidence called La Plante, made his money from *two* plants? Leaving aside these considerations, it must be added that the picture of Sallard tickling the servant-girl is reminiscent of countless similar scenes in Dutch and Flemish genre-painting, whilst one cannot help but admire the way Saint-Amant has suggested the foreshortening of the girl's thrown-back head.

9. Berni himself was not without his antecedents in writing this kind of poetry. However, he was to give it, thanks to his *capitoli*, such a personal stamp that the adjective was derived from his name.
10. Vion Dalibray, *Œuvres poétiques*, edited by Adolphe Van Bever (Paris, 1906), p. 67.
11. Raoul Audibert and René Bouvier, *Saint-Amant, Capitaine du Parnasse* (Paris, 1946), p. 129.
12. Gourier, *Œuvres poétiques de Saint-Amant*, p. 96.
13. Strzatkowa, 'Saint-Amant, poète du baroque français', p. 94.

Notes to Chapter 7

1. Nicolas Faret, preface to Saint-Amant's collected works (1629), in *Œuvres de Saint-Amant*, edited by Ch-L. Livet, 2 vols (Paris, 1855), I, 9.
2. Théophile de Viau, *Œuvres poétiques*, edited by L-R. Lefèvre (Paris, 1926), p. 153.
3. Guillaume de Salluste du Bartas, *La Creation du monde*, v, 615.
4. Apollo's admittedly lesser role as a marine deity emerged as his cult spread to the Greek islands and colonies, especially Crete. The festival Delphinia, held in Athens towards the beginning of April — about the time navigation began again after the winter storms — sought to propitiate Apollo and probably commemorated the account in Plutarch's *Theseus* of how the hero took an offering to the Delphinium before setting off to Crete to kill the Minotaur.
5. Samuel Borton, *Six Modes of Sensibility in Saint-Amant* (The Hague, 1966), p. 132.
6. A less effective, yet still noteworthy, example of this combination of vague and concrete terms and lulling sounds is present earlier on in *Moyse Sauvé*:

> . . . les estoiles
> De la nuit taciturne illuminoyent les voiles,
> Et [. . .] une sombre horreur couvroit paisiblement
> L'air, le vague liquide et le ferme element . . .
> (II, 159)

7. Claude Binet, cit. Bruce Pattison, *Music and Poetry of the English Renaissance* (London, 1948), p. 37.
8. Pierre de Ronsard, *Abbregé de l'art poëtique francois*, *Œuvres complètes*, edited by P. Laumonier, S.T.F.M., 18 vols (Paris, 1921–67), XIV, 18.
9. Renée Winegarten, *French Lyric Poetry in the Age of Malherbe* (Manchester, 1954), pp. 3–4.
10. Françoise Gourier, *Etude des œuvres poétiques de Saint-Amant* (Geneva, 1961), p. 228.
11. Gourier, *Œuvres poétiques de Saint-Amant*, p. 235.
12. Théophile Gautier remarked, for example, that few poets of his own time knew much about music and included Hugo and Lamartine amongst those who were not even capable of singing 'juste l'ariette la plus facile'. ('Saint-Amant', *Les Grotesques* (Paris, 1873), 151–80 (p. 158.))
13. Paul Durand-Lapie, *Un Académicien du XVIIe siècle: Saint-Amant, son temps, sa vie, ses poésies* (Paris, 1898), p. 85.

Notes to Conclusion

1. Théophile Gautier, 'Saint-Amant', *Les Grotesques* (Paris, 1873), 151–80 (pp. 165–6).
2. Since Gautier a number of critics have linked Saint-Amant and Jacques Callot (1592–1635). Whilst it is true that they share a similar spirit and have both treated the same

Notes to Conclusion, continued

themes, one would not be justified in claiming that the poet was influenced at all by the engraver since both their spirit and their choice of subject-matter were common to a good many other poets and artists of the period.

3. Sainte-Beuve, 'Poésies complètes de Théodore de Banville', *Causeries du Lundi*, third edition, 15 vols (Paris, 1857–72), XIV, 69–85 (p. 73).
4. Gautier, 'Saint-Amant', p. 168.
5. 'L'Artiste', 14 December 1856, cit. Margaret Gilman, *The Idea of Poetry in France* (Cambridge, Massachusetts, 1958), p. 179.
6. Gautier, *Premières poésies* (Paris, 1873), pp. 341–2.
7. Gautier, 'L'Art', *Emaux et Camées*, edited by J. Pommier (Paris, 1945), p. 130.
8. Odette de Mourgues, *Metaphysical, Baroque and Précieux Poetry* (Oxford, 1953), pp. 93–100.

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