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The Modern French Theatre: the Catholic Plays of Henry De Montherlant.

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THE MODERN FRENCH THEATRE:

THE CATHOLIC PLAYS OF HENRY DE MONTHERLANT

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ABSTRACT

While certain French playwrights such as Anouilh, Giraudoux and Ionesco have gained popularity in America, other prominent French playwrights such as Lenormand and Montherlant remain virtually unknown. Perhaps the former group's popularity can be attributed to the pithy, trenchant nature of its dramas, while in the case of the latter group, the psychological, poetic nature of its plays does not appeal to American tastes. American audiences by and large lean toward the theatre of action, which has no appeal to playwrights such as Lenormand and Montherlant who concern themselves primarily with the theatre of the word, the theatre of ideas.

Montherlant is a prolific writer. He established himself as a novelist and poet before gaining prominence as a playwright. Early in his career he gave promise of becoming a champion of the Catholic intellectual movement of the 1930's, but his rejection of traditional Catholicism and his preoccupation with the mores of Ancient Rome abruptly severed any ties with religious and political causes.

Yet, Montherlant continued to write religious plays. This dissertation is concerned with three such plays which

Montherlant calls his "trilogie catholique": Port-Royal, le Maître de Santiago and la Ville dont le Prince est un Enfant.

In order to present a meaningful critical analysis of the Catholic Trilogy, the study includes two background chapters. Chapter I, "The Modern Theatre in French Culture," describes the literary bent of the French people, the strong influence of the Catholic Church in the social and political life of the French, and the nature of French theatre tradition. Chapter II, "Henry de Montherlant as Playwright," demonstrates the close relationship between Montherlant's life and his writing, and outlines the influence of his special brand of Catholicism on his work, particularly on his plays.

Chapter III, "The Catholic Plays of Henry de Montherlant," takes up each of the plays of the trilogy in an effort to determine their Catholic nature.

The conclusion states that in spite of the pessimism, nihilism and rigorism evident in each of the plays of the trilogy, there is ample reason to accept them as Catholic plays since they demonstrate a particular aspect of Christianity, namely, its asceticism.

All of the principal characters in the trilogy discover God as a manifestation of "le neant," a concept borrowed both from Christian and Roman philosophy. Soeur Angélique (Port-Royal) ultimately finds herself on

the brink of despair, having lost her faith in God and men; Mariana and Alvaro (le Maître de Santiago) give themselves up to a life of solitude and penance in an act of total renunciation, for only in this desire for nothingness can they hope to find God; Sevrais and l'abbe de Pradts (la Ville dont le Prince est un Enfant) find themselves shorn of all human comfort with the abbe discovering in himself the very traits he unrelentingly condemns in the youth he despises and completely misunderstands.

INTRODUCTION

It is curious that Henry de Montherlant, one of the most prominent French playwrights of the last three decades, remains virtually unknown in the English-speaking world. The majority of Henry de Montherlant's plays have not been translated into English which explains in part why he is not played in England and America, but it also raises the question as to why there are so few English translations of Montherlant. The most weighty reasons center upon a cluster of circumstances which could be accepted at face value were it not that all French playwrights of Montherlant's generation labor within this same framework.

The English-speaking world, and Americans in particular, find it difficult to understand and appreciate playwrights such as Montherlant whose work is serious, elevated, highly poetic, static and concerned mainly with ideas rather than with action. This is part of the cluster referred to, and when there is added to it the difficulties inherent in understanding the French mind, the French culture, then the problem is compounded.

Still another circumstance militating against the popularization of Montherlant in America is his treatment

of religious subjects which stress the rigorous, ascetic side of religion seen through the struggles of characters whose vision is distorted, whose minds are warped and whose frame of reference is conditioned by their nihilism and pessimism.

Such subjects are not pretty. Yet strangely enough there is little morbidity in Montherlant's plays, but there is much talk. Here again is an obstacle to American audiences who look for action in their theatre. The psychological nature of Montherlant's plays forces him to concentrate on meaning and interpretation rather than on action, thus rendering his plays static in the Classical style which he successfully attempts to imitate.

Montherlant is a prolific writer; he has written countless essays, numerous poems, several novels and more than a dozen plays. Three of these plays he classifies as his "Catholic trilogy," and it is these plays with which this study is concerned. They are Port-Royal, the story of the dispersal of the Sisters of the Jansenist convent of Port-Royal in the seventeenth century; le Maître de Santiago, the story of the declining military Order of St. James; and la Ville dont le Prince est un Enfant, the story of life in a Catholic boarding school.

It was felt that in order to understand the context of the "Catholic trilogy," something should be said about Montherlant both as playwright and as Catholic. In addition

it was thought that American readers would profit from orientation to the modern French theatre and to French Catholicism, neither of which can be properly understood unless there is some acquaintance with French cultural history. Therefore, in order to speak meaningfully of the Catholic trilogy, this study lays a background for Montherlant the Frenchman, Montherlant the Catholic and Montherlant the playwright. Chapter I considers the French culture, its artistic or literary nature, its integration with religion, or more specifically the Catholic religion, and its enduring tastes in theatre.

Chapter II treats of Montherlant the playwright with sufficient biographical material to shed light on the close relationship of his life to his work. It also treats of Montherlant the writer and of his special brand of Catholicism.

Chapter III delves into the Catholic trilogy with some background material on the nature of religious art included in an effort to establish standards for judging the Catholic elements in Port-Royal, le Maître de Santiago and la Ville dont le Prince Est un Enfant.

The Conclusion attempts to answer the question, "Are the plays of the Catholic trilogy Catholic?" Perhaps it is more to the point to state the question thus: "To what extent are the plays of the Catholic trilogy Catholic?"

CHAPTER I

THE MODERN THEATRE IN FRENCH CULTURE

For countries to understand one another each must be willing to accept not only their similarities but also their differences. Between French and American cultures there are similarities, but they are almost completely negated by manifold differences. Even when terms refer to the same objects, their connotations are so conditioned by cultural influences, that seldom do their extension and depth result in mutual understanding.

MODERN FRENCH CULTURE

If the modern mind finds it difficult to understand French culture it is because several paradoxical elements make it almost unfathomable even to the French mind. The Frenchman accepts his culture in its world-wide extension and in its provincial limitations in the same breath, an anomaly that is completely baffling to the foreign observer. But this is the way French culture has existed since the Age of the Enlightenment, and, indeed since the courtly days of Versailles and Louis XIV. In his penetrating study of France, John Cairns characterizes French culture as

> articulate and intellectualized, . . . accessible to the rational mind and unmuddied by the stirrings of folk culture. It celebrates no hoary past and is not

> overly deferential to past epochs of greatness. . . . Though it purports to concern itself with the nature and achievement of man, Frenchmen scarcely reflect that its definitions and approaches are often peculiarly French. Or it may be that they consider it only proper that the rest of the western world, at least, should hunger after what France is, what she has, and what she is ready to share.[1]

There is a tradition of France, a spirit of France which extends beyond continental boundaries and reaches far-flung regions immersed in French culture.

But what is this French culture? In the first place French culture is preeminently literary.[2] Since the Enlightenment, Frenchmen pursue their reading and writing with an avidity found nowhere else on earth--certainly nowhere in the English-speaking world. Not only are French men of letters held in high esteem, but they exercise considerable influence in national affairs. However, the French display a remarkable bent toward joining together in small groups--factions--ostensibly making battle for common causes, but always from a confusing assortment of points of reference. There exists a deep cleavage between the professional men of letters and the university men. The Académie-Française has shown itself extremely conservative in its elections to membership, while the universities lean to the left and find themselves frequently involved in left-wing and radical political strife.

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[1]John C. Cairns, France (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice Hall, Inc., 1965), p. 73.

[2]Ibid., pp. 73-74.

The twentieth century in particular has proved a fertile ground for writers eager to respond to France's perplexing exertions in the military, political, social and religious fields.[3] Such interests were generated in the preceding century, and the hodge-podge of philosophies and ideologies formulated then simply served as an overture to the cacaphonous symphony of the theorists, critics and savants of the present century. The French quickly turned away from classicism, and, after a brief but productive flirtation with romanticism during the nineteenth century, they swung toward realism. As Cairns remarks,

> the forms realism took were as different as the poetry of Alfred de Vigny was from that of Théophile Gautier or the novels of Alexandre Dumas from those of Balzac. The striving for realism and naturalism comparable to the exactness of science found technicians in Flaubert and Zola; for expression of inaccessible realities of the mind, in Baudelaire, Verlaine, or Mallarmé. But it was inevitable that young writers should turn back toward the facts of that external reality rejected by the symbolists, and about 1890 some at least began to insist upon the social and historical context within which alone the individual could find meaning and fulfillment. So the ties between literature and society and politics, evident in Stendhal or Balzac or Hugo, were reaffirmed by the nationalists Paul and Maurice Barrès. The Dreyfus Affaire intensified the commitment and deepened the divisions, separating the fiercely right-wing polemicists around Charles Maurras and the Action Française, from the Dreyfusard humanitarians and socialists such as Anatole France and Romain Rolland.[4]

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[3]Jacques Boussard, La France historique et culturelle (Bruxelles: Editions Meddens, 1965), pp. 267-269.

[4]Cairns, op. cit., p. 75.

Literary tension characterized the turn of the century until the impact of the War in 1914 brought in its train mixed but non-violent reaction.[5] Before the war, young writers were involved either in the Dreyfus Affair or in the polemics of Europe headed toward war. However, another trend spurned political quarrels and engaged itself with existing social evils. Still another group pursued their careers as artists divorced from political and social strife. Those who sought escape from engagement with the political and ideological bickerings of the day, content with bourgeois letters in a bourgeois society, were rudely awakened from their utopian dreams by the first of the World Wars.

A number of writers chose exile rather than commit themselves to a war they considered criminal in its origins and development.[6] Many appeared to ignore the conflict while others ridiculed the show of chivalry, honor and fervor which they found so inconsistent with the depredations, mass slaughter and destruction witnessed on all sides. Even while the war was in progress, young French writers repudiated the standards and symbols of causes they had always looked upon with jaundiced eyes. At the same time they cast eager glances toward the exotic Far

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[5] Ibid.

[6] Ibid., pp. 75-76.

East with its mysticism and adventure. Those who kept their gaze closer to home enveloped themselves in crusade-like efforts to bring man to a realization of his position and role in both the physical and social worlds. Writers of the post-war decade sought escape in the introspective novel, and extended their efforts to include the fragmented lives of their countrymen in whom they saw a bourgeoisie torn between demands of a religion they had never fully embraced and the demands of ardent nature seeking to fulfill itself blindly and passionately.

The impact of the Russian Revolution of 1918 threw France into an alignment of camps gravitating toward sympathy with the Communist Movement or with the antiliberal movement. The French social order was being demoralized from at least two directions: ideological disillusionment and advance.[7] The stress and strain showed itself in a class warfare curious among the French; not only was there strife among classes, but also within classes. Characteristically of the French, the strife was preeminently one of ideas which may best be described for the bulk of Frenchmen as a shift from surrealism to communism or the very reverse. Writers such as Roger Martin du Gard and Jules Romain reached into the nineteenth century for a suitable framework upon which to erect their ponderous accounts of twentieth

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[7]Ibid., p. 76.

century France and the prospering, shallow bourgeoisie, caught as they were dividing their loyalties between the glory that was France and modern technological change.[8]

Other writers were not content to chronicle their times.[9] From his South American exile Georges Bernanos inveighed against the pusillanimity of his countrymen, while Henry de Montherlant refused to be dragged along by the culture of mediocrity.[10] Still others selected one or another color of the decaying spectrum they saw about them and strove to paint man as a purposeless, meaningless creature of his times, or attempted to inject meaning and purpose by seeing man at his highest when his code of ethics is based on service.

Immediately before the outbreak of World War II, French commitment was precipitated by the Spanish Revolution which saw ideologies shift with the winds, and disillusionment follow upon frustration at the spectacle of man again tearing at himself from bases of belief difficult to reconcile with the ideals of Christianity advocated by Catholic Spain and Catholic France.[11] Some espoused the cause of Fascism. Montherlant was sorely tempted to

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[8]Boussard, op. cit., p. 267.

[9]Ibid., pp. 267-268.

[10]Cf., infra, p. 82.

[11]Boussard, op. cit., pp. 255-256.

pronounce in favor of the Fascist state, but his natural prudence prevented him from doing so publicly, at least to such a degree as would compromise him with his native France. When the outbreak of war seemed inevitable, Montherlant joined his voice with those seeking appeasement after having been disenchanted by the double-dealings of the Communists, the mass slaughters in Moscow, the deterioration of what had come to be called the Front populaire in France.[12] All this was superceded by the Nazi-Soviet Pact and then differences faded into the national cause for La Belle France at war.

Following France's capitulation, the majority of French writers supported the Vichy government.[13] However, this support sprang from passivity rather than conviction. Seldom was there commitment to Vichy. Most simply waited and hoped. The resistance of the Communist poets proved the one constant literary factor during the war years. After the liberation, there suddenly appeared a group of young poets who concerned themselves with metaphysical problems, dedicating themselves to rebuilding France from within. When Vichy fell the conservative literary element fell with it. At the very least it was temporarily discredited.

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[12]Yves Simon, La grande Crise de la République Française (Montréal: Editions de l'Arbre, 1941), pp. 137-168.

[13]Michel Decaudin, XX^e Siècle français: Les Temps modernes (Paris: Editions Seghers, 1964), pp. 184-186.

At the close of the war, and immediately thereafter Jean-Paul Sartre and Albert Camus dominated the literary scene.[14] Their stress on engagement with the present and their preachment of personal choice and responsibility furthered the cause of freedom and social commitment. The literature of engagement was opposed by a new, youthful movement. The right-wing elements returned to prominence as the left-wing saw itself falter. Older, familiar writers such as Romains and Duhamel joined the movement, while Mauriac directed his energies toward political problems. The once vibrant Action Française with its brilliant and vigorous leader, Andre Maurras, languored in Maurras' prison cell, and, as shall be seen later,[15] both fell victims to the Catholic Church's struggle with French Republicans.

Together with the Theatre of the Absurd there arose the anti-novel and the non-poem,[16] throwing off all connection with past stylistic greatness and charm so characteristic of centuries of French letters. Quickly a reaction set in which turned toward the glory of the past in a search for forms calculated to carry the burden of writing concerned with social commitment rather than with the introspective, neurotic probings that were then appearing as a

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[14]Cairns, op. cit., p. 78.

[15]Cf., infra, p. 127.

[16]Decaudin, op. cit., pp. 208-213.

counter-force to the Existentialists.

The one enduring theme which seemed to capture the imagination of French writers in general at the mid-century mark was a closer look at man with his multilevel social implications.

CATHOLICISM IN MODERN FRENCH CULTURE

One of the most puzzling facets of French culture is religion. The population of France is perhaps ninety percent Roman Catholic with only a smattering of Protestant and Jewish minorities.[17] The Frenchman readily calls himself Catholic whether or not he is faithful to the practice of his religion. He considers his baptism an indelible mark of his Catholicity, a religion for which he would willingly die, but one which he frequently finds himself unwilling to live.

Referring to this un-Catholic Catholicism Andre Siegfried suggests

> that any lack of comprehension, any sense of mistrust, that exists between France and the Anglo-Saxon countries can be attributed very largely to this single fact. English speaking Protestants have equal difficulty in understanding and in placing confidence in France, whether they regard her as a Catholic country or as a country which has broken away from her religious ties. In the first case they dislike her as

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[17]Georges Hourdin, "La Crise de Civilisation," Problèmes du Catholicisme Français, La Nef, Cahier numéro 5, Nouvelle Série (Paris: Julliard, 1954), p. 22.

> non-Protestant; in the second, as a nation of non-believers.[18]

A marked characteristic of Catholicism--and one might add of French Catholicism in particular--is its authoritarianism. The traditions of French ecclesiastical discipline have succeeded in forming a dependent nucleus of adherents, and have thus engendered a spirit lacking in personal responsibility, initiative and social freedom.

> As a result, the nation is divided among those who accept religious discipline and respect it; those who defend themselves by a skeptical adaptation of the external ritual of the Church without sacrificing their critical liberty; and those who, in violent reaction, have left the Church entirely.[19]

Probably the most satisfactory way of explaining the religious psychology of France is in terms of two conflicting points of view.[20] In the first place, France considers herself the eldest daughter of the Church. The history of France is often the history of the Church, not alone of the Church in France but of the Roman Church in general. The Medieval Church witnessed the reform of Cluny, one of the most significant movements of the era; the Crusades, originating in France, produced the Maid of Orleans, France's National Patron. The battle against heresy was

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[18]Andre Siegfried, "Approaches to an Understanding of Modern France," Modern France: Problems of the Third and Fourth Republics (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1951), p. 9.

[19]Ibid.

[20]Ernst Robert Curtius, The Civilization of France: An Introduction (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1932), p. 129.

conducted on French soil with fanatical zeal and the fight against the Protestant Reformation was the history of France during the sixteenth century.[21] In modern times France has continued to play a leading role in both the history of Europe and of the Church.

In the second place, from the Middle Ages to the present France has engaged in an active struggle with Rome. As Curtius observes, Roman authorities and the French have

> struggled with each other, and this struggle is not yet over. The great Revolution of 1789 meant a collective apostasy from the Church. No other nation has ever made such a violent break with Christianity. France has been the source of the most violent attacks on religion.[22]

The surface peace which Napoleon achieved in the form of the Concordat brought only temporary respite in the struggle which was renewed under the Third Republic and culminated in the abrogation of the Concordat by the Combes Laws of 1905. Considering these developments it seems safe to conclude with Curtius that "France is godless and sceptical, the land of irreligion. . . . France, the refuge of the Catholic faith; France the Champion of the emancipated reason."[23]

In order to understand the France of Montherlant,

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[21]Louis-Paul Deschanel, Histoire de la Politique Extérieure de la France (Paris: Payot, 1936), pp. 34-50.

[22]Curtius, op. cit., p. 130.

[23]Ibid.

the France of the early twentieth century, it is necessary to consider the movements in French culture which produced the twentieth century. The harvest of irreligion, or perhaps better unreligion, which France is reaping today is not the result of overnight change. If the general history of France stems from conflicting points of view of attachment to the Catholic Church and continuous struggle with ecclesiastical powers--particularly with the Vatican--the beginning of the nineteenth century may be said to be typical of this paradoxical conflict.

In the early nineteen hundreds religion in France evinced two prominent trends.[24] One, a negative trend, took the direction of state secularism, or laicisation, with its accompanying dechristianization of the working-class and peasants, together with general estrangement of the populace from the Church. Not to be overlooked in this same connection is the gradual loss of clerical influence in civil matters. What can be observed here appears not so much a simple cause-effect relation, but rather a spiral or network of interrelated factors which over a long period of time precipitated the crisis which was to rock the Church in 1905.

The other trend, a positive one, took the direction of renewal of the Christian order. It attempted to come to grips with pressing social problems and to work toward a

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[24]Hourdin, op. cit., p. 18.

deepening of faith through personal conviction and social action.[25]

The conflict born of these two movements is unresolved even to this day.

As was mentioned above, Catholicism is the religion of France. It was also stated that practice of religion is by no means uniform throughout the country. On the contrary, France can be roughly divided into three major sections according to practice or religion.[26]

1. The bulk of the faithful, practicing Catholics can be found along a strip roughly describing the borders and coastlands together with the ancient central province of Auvergne.

2. The interior peasant lands make up roughly two-thirds of what the French call catholicisme saisonnier, seasonal catholicism; that is, the practice of religion is linked with the most important events of life: mass on Palm Sunday and Easter Sunday, assistance at family baptisms, first communions, religious marriages and church funerals.

3. The large cities and urban areas, called even today mission country, where the church suffers its greatest loss,

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[25]William Bosworth, Catholicism and Crisis in Modern France: French Catholic Groups at the Threshold of the Fifth Republic (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1962), pp. 25-31.

[26]Hourdin, op. cit., pp. 22-23.

the working classes, completes the geographic picture. Referring to the working classes, Hourdin asserts, "C'est cette partie de la France qui a posé à l'Eglise les problèmes les plus graves car c'est là que la crise de civilisation a fait éclater les vieilles habitudes et les vieilles divisions ecclésiastiques."[27]

Psychologically, the working- and peasant classes in France present grave obstacles to complete understanding.[28] Geography is an important factor. In the South, for example, large numbers have fallen away from the Church where they seem to be enveloped in a form of neo-paganism mixed as it is with legend, superstition, Christian dogma, and even some pre-Christian beliefs and practices. In other areas, the practice of religion is almost totally neglected by vast numbers, while they continue to call themselves Catholics. There is a common saying about French Catholic peasants which seems to sum up their religious psychology: they are good Catholics, but poor Christians.

Statistics alone give a false picture of religion in France. In the mid-twentieth century France's total population was in the vicinity of 50,000,000 of which almost 45,000,000 were Catholic.[29] Although the Catholic

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[27]Ibid., p. 23.

[28]Curtius, op. cit., p. 151.

[29]Julian Park, "Religion," The Culture of France in Our Time (Ithaca, N. Y.: Cornell University Press, 1954), pp. 231-32.

population has grown since the turn of the century, the number of priests reached the high-point in 1913 when there were 59,000 diocesan priests. In 1950 they scarcely numbered 45,000. The number of priests belonging to religious orders, such as Dominicans and Jesuits, continues to increase, reasons for which will be taken up later.

The clergy have always played an important part in French affairs, but the opposition of the clergy to the Third Republic proved to be one of the government's most vexing problems--and this not discounting the turbulent issues the Third Republic witnessed from within and without. It was born in the strife of the Franco-Prussian War in 1870, endured the First World War and finally collapsed with the German Occupation during the Second World War.

The clergy opposed the Third Republic,[30] but it was especially the opposition of the hierarchy to the Republic which proved the most pressing point of conflict for the government. Napoleon, who had signed the Concordat with the Vatican, was keenly aware that the religious problem in France centered upon acceptance or rejection of Catholicism: belief in Catholicism or unbelief. He further realized that scepticism in religion produced scepticism in other matters as well. His successors shared this belief. Accordingly they sought to maintain good relations with the Vatican,

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[30] Ibid., p. 227.

even going so far as to offer asylum and military assistance to the Pope in his struggles with the Roman Republic. Oddly enough, the opposition of the hierarchy lessened toward the end of the century only to regain new strength with the separation of Church and State effected by the Combes Laws of 1904.

In one respect the Combes Laws (1904) proved disastrous to the Church in France, for it marked the end of an epoch--centuries of powerful clerical influence in internal affairs and French politics. It is true that the Combes Laws stemmed from strong anti-clerical feeling, and equally true that many Representatives in the Assembly who voted for the separation of Church and State counted themselves among militant Catholics.[31] Nevertheless, the break with the Vatican, though not final, was a severe blow to the clergy and to the religious orders which were obliged to seek official approval by the Republic, or suffer the loss of their property and face either dissolution or dispersion.

For some time before the French Revolution, the Republicans had sought separation of church and state primarily to free elections from the control of the clergy, since the clergy had long been considered the allies of the rich, the nobility and of the crown. Throughout the nineteenth century and even until as late as 1945, French Catholics

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[31]Raymond Recouly, La Troisième République (Paris; Libraire Hachette, 1927), pp. 185-191.

openly declared against the Republic and popular government. However, they switched their position quite suddenly in 1945 with the advent of the Communists following the Liberation. Finally, by force of circumstances they were compelled to do what Leo XIII had urged upon them half a century earlier, accept the Republic.[32]

Hourdin observes pointedly that the problems that the Church in France faces today are the result of *la laïcité de l'Etat*.[33] He further declares that such laicization has not proved a total misfortune for the Church or for France.

> En thèse, la laïcité de l'Etat est regrettable et nous la condamnons. En fait, elle ne date que de la fin du XIX° siècle et elle est la conséquence de cette coupure de la France en deux au moment de la Révolution, peut-être aussi d'une certaine autonomie prise par la politique au fur et à mesure qu'elle devenait une discipline plus compliquée et plus précise.[34]

Laicization affected French cultural life in two principal ways: first, in the creation of compulsory public education; and second, separation of Church and State with its concomitant rupture of the Concordat and expulsion of religious orders.

The Church no longer exercised an official role in the

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[32]Hourdin, *op. cit.*, p. 19.

[33]*Ibid.*

[34]*Ibid.*

government. In fact, its influence steadily declined in temporal matters to the chagrin of many Catholics, but to the satisfaction of others with greater vision and insight. Hourdin explains this phenomenon thus:

> Le clergé s'est senti libre, libre des pouvoirs publics, certes, qui ne le payaient plus, mais libre aussi des puissants du jour dont il ne partageait plus la sécurité économique. Pour les représentants de la religion, la liberté est une grande chose. Le clergé participe désormais, avec excès même parfois, à la vie pauvre qui est celle de la majorité de la nation et ceci lui a conquis une part de l'estime populaire. Les liens avec les pouvoirs français étant naturellement distendus, ceux qui attachaient les catholiques à Rome s'en sont trouvé accrus et facilités. Il est certain que le régime de la laïcité et de la séparation des Eglises et de l'Etat a brisé les derniers souvenirs du Gallicanisme et rapproché du Vatican l'Eglise de France. Les fidèles se sont, eux aussi, sentis plus libres et plus entièrement responsables de ce culte ou de ces écoles dont ils devaient assumer financièrement la charge. Ils sont enfin sortis, de leur ghetto. Cela, a été pour tous le commencement de la grande aventure.[35]

If this can be called a resurgence of religion, the problem of a steadily declining clergy augured ill for the future of French Catholicism. The Church long depended on the farm districts to produce her priests. However this source began drying up even in the last century. With her new impetus in the direction of social freedom and justice the Church was hard put to find priests dedicated to solving the social and economic problems of the lower classes. Gordon Wright, treating of the situation in France in 1935,

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[35]Ibid., pp. 20-21.

analyzes the problem in the following manner:

> . . . the training of the village priests was too often narrowly theological and even obscurantist; they were more inclined to reconcile the peasant to his lot than to aid and encourage him to improve it. In some country districts which have become de-Christianized there developed a violent hatred of "the men in black" who, it was believed had schemed to keep the whole village sunk in ignorance and superstition. This bitterness was fed by returning ex-peasants who had gone off to make a living in Paris or Lyon, and who brought back the radical doctrines of the cities. It was fed also by the Radical or Socialist politicians who sought the votes of subsistence farmers in the Center and South, and of farm laborers in the areas of large scale agriculture.[36]

The Church saw that its first task was to increase the number of its priests and to improve their quality. The first step the hierarchy took was to broaden its outlook: the service of the Church throughout France became its aim.[37] It stepped up the education of its priests, France being among the first countries to initiate a year of pastoral theology as a terminus of seminary training. There arose many opportunities for priests to continue their studies through programs organized at the parish level. All this indicates that the Church in France was becoming more and more conscious of its needs to secure and hold priests willing to meet the challenges of a growing urban

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[36]Gordon Wright, "Catholics and Peasantry in France," Political Science Quarterly, LXVIII (December, 1953), p. 529.

[37]Aline Coutrot and François G. Dreyfus, Les Forces Religieuses dans la société Française (Paris: Librairie Armand Colin, 1965), pp. 120-122.

society at the same time that it seeks to reclaim the peasant from his ignorant acceptance or rejection of his religious heritage.

Social Catholicism made its appearance in 1871 when efforts were made to solve three pressing and rather permanent problems:[38] (1) living wages for workers; (2) state intervention in social legislation; and (3) recognition of trade unions and workers' associations. This last problem was particularly acute, for through its resolution one of the most significant movements in modern France emerged, that of the Worker-Priests.

The Worker-Priest movement in fact was the outgrowth of an earlier movement called Catholic Action which flourished in France from 1814 until 1871,[39] and has maintained a precarious existence even to this day through sporadic movements centered in Paris and branching out to the provinces. Catholic Action is based on the principle of like working with like. Thus certain advanced Catholic thinkers, particularly among the clergy, thought that the only way the Church could reclaim the fallen-away workers was for the Church to go to the workers. This the Worker-Priest did; he took the Church to the factories and proletarian neighborhoods, a movement not without its dangers. As Bosworth

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[38]Hourdin, op. cit., p. 24.

[39]Ibid., p. 25.

shrewdly notes,

> The call of the milieu today is often so strong that it seduces members of the Church itself. . . . a number of the original worker-priests refused to obey the Vatican orders to stop factory work. And in company with their fellow workers, Catholic workers often find it difficult to resist the attraction of the extreme left in politics. . . .[40]

In addition, the Worker-Priests have met with much opposition from certain quarters and the movement has suffered reverses. The factory workers are often suspicious of priests sharing their plight and not a few of the relatively small number of priests actively engaged in the movement have succumbed to the materialism they sought to stem.

Despite the dedication of the Worker-Priests the movement has, for the most part, failed.[41] The same is true, in general, of other efforts of the Church to reclaim the working classes. With full realization of the dangers of the Communist threat staring it in the face, the French clergy has stepped up its social activity, particularly among the workers. The need for such activity was highlighted at the turn of the century when the workers showed supreme indifference to the predicament the Church found itself in when the Laws of Separation came into effect. This indifference continues to this day.

Two World Wars have changed little in the religious

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[40]Bosworth, op. cit., p. 326.

[41]Cairns, op. cit., p. 85.

culture of France. Julien Park says that the

> France of 1953 differs from the France of 1939 only in degree: the evils which confront her today are not new to her but are simply the older problems aggravated a hundredfold as a result of war and occupation. Certain of the new movements arising in the French Church are flowerings of seeds planted before the last war. For a long time, too, there have been minds in the Church of France which have realized that, whatever the setbacks and however long it may take, the "age of the worker will be fully realized."[42]

One of the major tasks of the Church today is to undo the damaging effects of identification with the reactionary forces of the preceding century, since they tended to place the Church at the same end of the spectrum as the aristocracy and nobility with its implicit neglect of the middle and lower classes. As Park remarks, the "harm done to the prestige of the Church by its attitude during the Dreyfus Affair, . . . was incalculable. It recovered some sympathy after the separation, but the social cleavages were still wide."[43]

The Dreyfus Affair to which Park alludes brought the issue of Nationalism into the foreground, and forged it into a political force. Dreyfus was condemned on two separate occasions for allegedly betraying military secrets. Factions took sides but the clouded issue was never satisfactorily resolved.

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[42]Park, op. cit., p. 235.

[43]Ibid.

A significant movement,[44] working for reconciliation of Church and State after the Combes Laws was the Christian Youth Movement. The idealistic and romantic tendency of the movement brought it under clerical censure, and in spite of its loyalty to the Church, it was dondemned primarily because it identified the Church with the cause of democracy. Eventually, the dominant movement of the day, Action Française, spelled out Nationalism as Royalism and returned to the principles that Napoleon had outlined a century earlier, that in the struggle against disturbing forces no political power could conquer in France without combining its efforts with those of the Catholic Church. However, after much delay Rome condemned Action Française for its confusion of Christian principles with political aims.[45]

The condemnation of the popular movement was a step of some consequence. Dansette sees its importance

> in the development of religious policies in France. It was put in motion by means similar to those used at the time of the ralliement and met with resistance from the same quarters. But there were two essential differences between the interventions of Leo XI and Pius XI. One is explained by the nature of the issues in question. In the case of the condemnation of the Action Française, abandonment of the monarchist regime was the indirect consequence of censures that were

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[44]Curtius, op. cit., pp. 147-149.

[45]Harry W. Paul, The Second Ralliement: The Rapprochement between Church and State in France in the Twentieth Century (Washington D. C., The Catholic University of America Press, 1967), pp. 148-185.

> dictated by religious motives; it was not the direct aim. The other difference related to results. Even though the abandonment of royalism was only an indirect consequence, it was permanent, whereas it had been a merely passing result of the appeal of Leo XIII.
>
> The decline of integrism and the appearance of new forms of Catholicism very different from the socially and politically conservative forms prevailing right up to the morrow of the first world war are to be explained by general factors unrelated to the condemnation of the Action Française. These developments would, however, have come much more slowly if the Action Française had not been condemned by the Holy See and had not temporarily excluded itself from the Church by its refusal to submit.[46]

After the Combes Laws of 1905, Royalist Catholics found themselves in the unusual position of a minority in an almost totally Catholic country.[47] They differed with Republican Catholics on more issues than on the long-debated school problem and laicization. But the return of large numbers of members of religious orders to fight by the side of their countrymen in 1914 appeased the discontents of both sides, so much so that by 1944, at the time of the Liberation, factional differences were all but forgotten, and Catholic Royalists played an important part in establishing the Fourth Republic.

During this same period, a considerable number of Catholic intellectuals worked to hasten the reconciliation of Catholicism and Republicanism.[48] At first their efforts met

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[46]Adrian Dansette, Religious History of Modern France, Volume II, Under the Third Republic (New York: Herder and Herder, 1961), pp. 412-413.

[47]Coutrot and Dreyfus, op. cit., pp. 35-36.

[48]Ibid., pp. 84-85.

with mixed reactions. Their patriotism and devotion to the Church were beyond question. They pointed to the dangers inherent in the unhappy alliance of the Church with Franco Spain, and earnestly recommended a close alliance between the Church and the French Monarchy. They denounced the Nazi regime and condemned Franco for accepting Nazi and Fascist aid.

Among these writers was Jacques Maritain who openly fought the Vichy Government, the government of Unoccupied France. Maritain wrote caustically:

> To assume that Vichy heralded in France the religious renascence would be too blatant an imposture for any Frenchman to give it credence. It is good that unjust laws be abolished; it is less fortunate for the Church of France that this justice be rendered by the armistice government. It may be of doubtful advantage for the Church to owe a debt of gratitude to a government towards which later on Frenchmen will feel little gratitude, and to seem the refuge as well as the compensation of temporal impotence. The Church of France is not eager to chain herself to a state clericalism which would ruin in the long run the spiritual revival of which she is proud. She knows moreover that her freedom can be real only in a France and a Europe set free. It is amongst Catholics that the resistance to German domination is most effective, as the Gestapo well knows. Several French Bishops have already suffered because of their firmness; it is they who, on French soil, are saving French honor.[49]

The French underground during World War II united Catholic forces and previously hostile groups, for they saw a common enemy in the Nazis.[50] French Communists who joined

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[49]Jacques Maritain, France My Country through the Disaster (New York: Longmans, Green and Company, 1941), pp. 67-68.

[50]Coutrot and Dreyfus, op. cit., pp. 92-93.

the Liberation front after Hitler began his invasion of Russia, affirmed that their allegiance was first to France and that their resemblance to Soviet Communists was purely academic.

The conjunction of these elements seemed a favorable time for concerted action in attacking social ills which continued aggravated after the war. However, the unyielding policies of the Church proved a stumbling block to any significant reform.[51] Important social reforms grew out of movements which freed themselves from Church control and which took on the lineaments of the Communist social reform groups. Among these, the most prominent were the Mouvement Républicain Populaire, the Jeunesse Ouvrière Chrétienne, and the Confédération Française des Travailleurs Chrétiens, the anti-Communist equivalent to American trade unions.

The gradual withdrawal of the Church from political life together with participation of the laity and clergy in social reform, has tended to adjust the opposition between Catholic and secular France. The anticlericalism of the nineteenth century and the early decades of the twentieth, for all practical purposes is dead.[52] Still France remains a secular state; its government is secular,

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[51] Ibid., pp. 93-96.

[52] Adrien Dansette, Destin du Catholicisme Français: 1926-1956 (Paris: Flammarion, Editeur, 1957), pp. 469-471.

unimpaired by commitment to any religion. The Church is making its influence felt through its social workers and, as is always the case in France, through its intellectuals.

The conversion, and in some instances, the reconversion of prominent intellectuals to Catholicism makes an impressive list. Since the turn of the century, the Church has received back into the fold Paul Bourget, François Coppée, J. K. Huysmans, Emile Faguet, Ferdinand Brunetière, Paul Claudel, Charles Péguy and Georges Bernanos. "It is never safe, or perhaps proper," says Julien Park, "to inquire into the motives of religious conversion, much less to sneer at them." Then he adds a word of caution: ". . . in these sensational conversions or returns, there were many elements which were on the fringe of religion: aestheticism, on the one hand, and social-conservative traditionalism on the other."[53]

However, there is every indication that the former emotional warfare is passé, and that Catholic intellectuals are confronting their opponents on their own terms in both philosophical and scientific discussion. The Catholic intellectual movement is aggressive, and its hostility to the Church has been on the wane since the Laws of Separation.

The French continue to occupy a prominent place in the intellectual world, and together with Germany, where there is an intense interchange of ideas through reciprocally

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53Park, op. cit., pp. 249-50.

translated theological works, it constitutes a formidable intellectual bloc in the vanguard of the Church. However, Curtius issues the following warning:

> To assert that France might rediscover her intellectual unity in the Catholic Faith would seem to be too audacious a suggestion. There is as much conflict as ever between the different points of view. Two points, however, are clear: Catholicism in France has an unbroken vital power, and all the religious energies of France are absorbed by Catholicism.[54]

Despite an apparent resurgence of faith, it would be foolhardy to assert that all is right with the Church in present-day France. Many of the ancient problems remain, and practice of religion is far from universal. Yet the French bear the stamp of Catholicism in France.

> Catholicism has made such a deep impression upon the soul of France that in many instances it survives loss of faith. The freethinker movement in France has its own orthodoxy, combined with the spirit of an order, a moral rigourism, and an almost monastic hostility to the world, which remind us of the Church. It is only in France that we find the phenomenon of "Catholic Atheism"; in France alone are there materialists like Jules Soury, who read the Liturgical Office, or romantic Nihilists like Barrès, who make the pilgrimage to Lourdes. In France, when anyone tries to establish a new religion it is always expressed in the forms of Catholicism: the outstanding example of this statement is Auguste Comte's "religion of humanity". In France there is less diffused religiosity than in Germany, but it is clear that there is no less religion. The difference in religious experience lies in this, that in France the needs of the spirit are subordinated to the striving for order and fellowship, for a clearly defined form and for a settled standard.[55]

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[54]Curtius, op. cit., p. 152.

[55]Ibid., pp. 153-154.

MODERN FRENCH THEATRE

The preceding overview of French Catholicism is necessary for a proper appreciation of the milieu in which Henry de Montherlant conceived and wrote his Catholic plays. It remains now to look into a specific area of French culture--the Modern French Theatre--in order to add the dimension which places Montherlant in proper perspective. This is all the more important for readers in America where neither religion nor theatre plays the vital role that each does in France. Where Americans prefer the theatre of action, the French choose the theatre of ideas. Theirs is a theatre of the word; ours is a theatre of action. Even the frothy plays of the French Boulevard theatre-the popular theatre--conform to this pattern, albeit to a much lesser degree. It must be pointed out, however, that such tastes represent a general preference; exceptions can be found, and if the exceptions are given greater prominence in this section than they rightfully deserve, it is simply to point out the strong contrast between what might be called the French essential theatre and the French popular theatre.

What has frequently been called the theatre of reassurance, that is, the theatre that caters to the tastes of the times, had its roots in Diderot and Beaumarchais, playwright philosophers of the eighteenth century. The

French theatre of the last half of the nineteenth century continued this trend of the preceding century and is universally recognized as a theatre of indolence and banality.[56] Drama confined itself almost entirely within the circumscribed limits of the "Well-made play," with its contrived situations, stock characters, and clever stage trickery. It traded in the superficial, seldom if ever pausing to give even a passing glance at what literary critics refer to as the universal. French plays related to life, but life caught up in the conventions of dramatic locution and stage machinery tantalizing a vapid public.

There was neither thought nor feeling in these plays. The rules of construction were automatic, and imitation followed imitation with persevering regularity. This is what the public demanded, and this is what it got.

> Vaudeville, comedy, and bourgeois drama seemed to join forces in order to give the maximum of good conscience to the ruling bourgeoisie, both in their virtues and their vices. Each performance persuaded the audience that man, life, and the real were no more than what they believed them to be. The public and its art closed in upon each other. Their agreement was so perfect that the theatre did not present the audience with an image of what it was, but of what it wished to be--hence the innumerable basic conventions which had almost become an institution. Everything took place as if the self-satisfied performance of mediocrity ennobled that mediocrity, and as if the closed doors of the bourgeois drawing room, on which the curtain usually went up, symbolized the sanctification

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[56]Jacques Guicharnaud and June Beckelman, Modern French Theatre from Giraudoux to Beckett (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1961), p. 4.

> by art of the limitations of the bourgeois' intellectual, spiritual and moral horizons.[57]

This kind of drama is not confined to the French theatre of the last century: Neo-classic pseudo-tragedy, the present-day French Boulevard theatre, much of twentieth century American realistic theatre, and, for the very moderns the vast bulk of television drama, all follow the same perfunctory course.

The shallow repetitiveness of nineteenth century French theatre engendered a clearly predictable rejection of drama as art.[58] The theatre world eventually became disillusioned; the playwright eager to cast off his chains.

Reform sprang almost simultaneously from two quite different sources.[59] In 1887, Andre Antoine inaugurated his Théâtre Libre[60] where he hoped to renew the vitality of the theatre through realism and naturalism, and in 1891, Paul Fort sought the same end through poetic drama in his Théâtre d'Art.[61] Both efforts eventually failed, but they initiated the impetus that has carried French theatre to one of the most glorious periods in its history.

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[57] Ibid., pp. 4-5.

[58] Ibid., p. 6.

[59] Ibid.

[60] Matei Roussou, André Antoine (Paris: L'Arche Editeur, 1954), pp. 63-96.

[61] Jacques Robichez, Le Symbolisme au Théâtre: Lugné-Poe et les débuts de l'Oeuvre (Paris: L'Arche Editeur, 1957), p. 86-89.

Theatre began its road back in 1890:[62] clichés and outlandish conventions were thrown out, and the reformers imposed order on the shambles of decadent French drama.

The two reform groups approached the problem of renewing theatre from opposing directions. Each looked carefully at reality. Antoine claimed that reality must be imitated, while Fort claimed that it should be interpreted.[63]

Guicharnaud and Beckelman observe that "The various forms of bourgeois theatre originated in Romantic theatre, but the Romantic theatre and its manifestoes were also at the root of the principles of both realism and symbolic theatre."[64] This can be seen more clearly if the term "imitation" be considered the central issue. What is to be imitated? The answer depends on the definitions of reality and truth. If truth and reality apply primarily to the social and psychological phenomena of everyday life, then the action of the play centers upon imitation. But if truth and reality be considered within and beyond what appears on the surface then there is nothing to imitate. It becomes the task of the dramatist to interpret, to explain (reveal), or to fabricate (invent). If, however, there be imitation,

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[62]Ibid., pp. 24-28.

[63]Joseph Chiari, The Contemporary French Theatre: The Flight from Naturalism (London: The Camelot Press, 1958), pp. 85-86.

[64]Guicharnaud and Beckelman, op. cit., p. 7.

it is the imitation of what is not readily perceivable, but of a reality that lies far beyond the senses.

Paradoxically, Antoine began his reform at a moment that proved inopportune as far as the lasting effects of the reform are concerned. Basing his reform on realism and naturalism, he chose the precise moment in history when these were coming into general discredit. By the year 1890, naturalism on the stage had been written off as dull and uninspiring. Still, Antoine's reform served as a cleansing agent for the French theatre in that he sought to reestablish

> la manifestation dramatique dans son rayonnement d'oeuvre d'art, et de déployer ses efforts pour enlever au spectateur l'impression qu'il vient à la comédie comme on entre dans une maison de jeu.[65]

This he did by putting humanity back on the stage. He called for a naturalness in speech and action hitherto foreign to the French theatre. With the "slice of life" technique dominant in his productions, he was careful to select stage properties and scenic elements with an eye to extreme realism, at the same time as he established a balance between the actor and his surroundings. To him the actor was the symbol of a living person in a life situation. He approached the theatre as he would a temple of worship, for indeed the theatre was his religion not his

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[65]Clement Borgal, Jacques Copeau (Paris: L'Arche Editeur, 1960), p. 46.

profession.[66]

The anti-naturalists under the leadership of Paul Fort fell to extremes in their efforts to avoid the depressing boredom of the original slice-of-life theatre.[67] They stressed simplicity in scenic design at first, but gradually they dehumanized their theatre with beautifully stylized presentations creating a cold, barren dramatic form--if indeed it was drama at all. However, it did re-emphasize man's metaphysical nature and his poetic bent. It opened the doorway for the kind of theatre that Frenchmen have always relished, the theatre of ideas. In so doing, it reopened the way to true tragic expression on a stage where it had once flourished.

During the twenties, French theatre veered toward a new sphere, one which probed the mysterious depths of the soul rather than explore the tangled problems of psychology and conscience. The impetus came from outside France,[68] particularly from Pirandello who introduced completely new types of character and action to the stage, departing from traditional verisimilitude in order to study the inner workings of his highly enigmatic characters. George Bernard

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[66]Wallace Fowlie, Dionysus in Paris (London: Victor Gollancz Ltd., 1961), p. 37.

[67]Guicharnaud and Beckelman, op. cit., pp. 10-11.

[68]Pierre-Henri Simon, Théâtre et Destin: la signification de la renaissance dramatique en France au XX^{e} siècle, Cahiers de la Fondation Nationale des Sciences Politiques, No. 103 (Paris: Librairie Armand Colin, 1959), p. 108.

Shaw, who couched his metaphysical discussions in witty, trenchant prose, won a place in the French theatre in spite of his outright rejection of the popular Cartesian thought of the French. He laid special demands on the French, forcing them to consider novel questions touching their morality and mores where before they had sought only clear-cut answers.[69] It was during this period that Henry de Montherlant's first published works appeared, and doubtless the Pirandelloish manner of many of his characters is an outgrowth of the influence of Pirandello on the French playwrights and novelists of the twenties.

In the meantime, outside of France, theatrical producers stressed physical staging where Wagner's influence was obvious. His dream was to create total theatre encompassing poetry, music, spectacle, philosophy, mysticism--a concept far removed from the staid didactic rhetoric delivered in repetitive conventional settings. Further impetus was given to plastic staging in France with the arrival of the Ballet Russe in 1910, synthesizing to some degree the efforts of Gordon Craig in England, Erler in Germany, Reinhardt in Austria and Stanislavski in Russia.[70] France was to move in this direction under the skillful hand of Jacques Copeau, the most influential spirit in the

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[69]Robichez, op. cit., pp. 326-331.

[70]Simon, op. cit., p. 29.

French Theatrical Revolution. He completely revamped the stage. He allowed free reign to designers to exercise their creative talents and afforded actors and directors a simple, uncluttered medium in which to express themselves. This breath of fresh air also aided the playwright, for now there was a cry for new plays which harmonized with the spirit of the reform, despite the reformers renewed acquaintance with the classics. However, the playwrights of the time were not up to the task, for it has been only in recent years that scripts have overtaken the advanced ideas of the revolutionary directors. It would not be fair to imply that theatre completely lost its appeal,[71] for scores of playwrights proved popular with the masses from 1900 to 1930, but their names are now confined to textbooks on history of theatre. The only playwrights of this early period who are given any serious thought today are Alfred Jarry for his Ubu Roi and perhaps Henri-René Lenormand for Le Temps est un songe. Anders limits significant playwrights to one name only: "A l'exception de Maeterlinck, les talents authentiques de l'époque ne sont guère entendus et exercent peu d'influence."[72]

Copeau despised the dullness and didacticism of the

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[71]Michel Corvin, Le Théâtre Nouveau en France (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1963), p. 22.

[72]France Anders, Jacques Copeau et le cartel des Quatre (Paris: A. G. Nizet, Editeur, 1959), p. 6.

French theatre. He hoped to remedy the theatre's ills by a renewed interest in the classic style, and to replace insipid anecdotes with pieces that followed a disciplined stage where aesthetic distance was soundly maintained and the style of presentation elevated and truly poetic.[73] Montherlant found this kind of theatre to his liking and eventually he abandoned the novel to concentrate on the theatre.

Copeau's return to the classic style made his reform measures eminently practical. It removed the costly burdens inherent in spectacular productions where greater emphasis was placed on costly scenery, richness of costume and intricacy of stage mechanics than on acting. Copeau made insistent demands on his actors requiring of them deep understanding of their roles and harmonious playing with the other members of the company.[75]

The first season of the Vieux-Colombier was interrupted by the War--1914. Copeau returned to France in 1919 after a five-year tour in America. He reopened his theatre in 1921 and kept it going until 1925--four of the most significant years in the history of French theatre in this

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[73] Ibid., p. 16.

[74] Ibid., p. 65.

[75] Ibid., p. 64.

century.[76] During these years at Vieux-Colombier Louis Jouvet and Charles Dullin received their training from Copeau, and later Gaston Baty received his from Jouvet and Dullin.[77] These three together with Georges Pitoeff gave to the French theatre between the two wars one of the most brilliant periods in its history. Much of what is considered the finest in present-day French theatre bears the stamp of these four geniuses of the theatre.[78]

Jouvet, Dullin, Baty and Pitoeff were daring directors.[79] All but Baty were actors. They knew theatre at the grassroots. They continually sought new plays, revamped the old masters, and clamored for new writers--even producing unknown playwrights when they knew they courted certain disaster. One or other of these directors either introduced or helped to popularize Ibsen, Strindberg, Chekhov, Pirandello or Shaw to the French.

Dullin possessed a keen sensitivity of perception and profound understanding of the theatre.[80] He depended less on theory than did his contemporaries, but held firmly to the unreality of theatrical presentations, and gave

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[76]Ibid., pp. 44-59.

[77]Ibid., p. 95 ff.

[78]Simon, op. cit., p. 31.

[79]Fowlie, op. cit., pp. 41-44.

[80]Ibid., p. 42.

attentive study to the script. He made use of highly stylized settings and introduced music to enhance his stage productions. While a great trainer of actors, he was not dogmatic in either his interpretation of texts or in the demands he placed on his actors. He worked with experimental playwrights and introduced to the stage the works of Sartre, Anouilh and Salacrou.

Russian born Georges Pitoeff followed Stanislavski.[81] Pitoeff held that the director was a super-actor and that his interpretations govern the play. For him the common ground for actor and director was "communion" with the text.

If Pitoeff looked on the director as super-actor, Baty looked on the actor as a super-marionette as propounded by Gordon Craig. Baty, possessed of an obsessive fear that production would be sacrificed to the literary quality of the script, strayed farthest afield in applying Copeau's reforms.[82] He did follow Copeau in positing the unreality of the stage, for his plays suggested an unreal world in which the audience might escape the demands of daily living. As Fowlie states, "The moral asceticism of Copeau found in the art of Gaston Baty its antidote where to the bare power of the word were added the supplementary powers of acting,

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[81] Ibid.

[82] Robichez, op. cit., p. 67.

miming, forms, colors, lights, voices, noises, silences."[83] And Fowlie continues, "If Baty is remembered as the opponent of the 'word' in the theatre, Louis Jouvet stands as its principal defender, as the director who created essentially a verbal theatre in which the text is given first place. . . ."[84] Jouvet was an actor of considerable merit and a director of great subtlety.[85] He served the playwright faithfully by studying the text closely, and proved eager to work with playwrights on their first ventures. Especially close was his relationship with Jean Giraudoux, but he produced plays of Jules Romains, Marcel Achard, Jean-Jacques Bernard and Steve Passeur.

Jouvet was primarily an actor. He incorporated the text as part of the character, and never ceased to express admiration for well written texts, capable of fluency on the French tongue.[86] Giraudoux's grasp of the French cadence gave Jouvet particular delight, explaining in large measure his preference for Giraudoux among his contemporaries.

The French theatre of the fifties was dominated by the figure of Jean Louis Barrault.[87] His vivid imagination

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[83]Fowlie, op. cit., p. 45.

[84]Ibid.

[85]Anders, op. cit., pp. 103-104.

[86]Chiari, op. cit., p. 90.

[87]Fowlie, op. cit., p. 50.

and ceaseless energy created a theatre which was at once vital and forward looking. Like Jouvet, Barrault found himself an able playwright in the person of Paul Claudel, although he produced a great variety of playwrights at the lavish, well-appointed Marigny.[88] Recently, however, critics assert that Barrault is out of touch with the mainstream of current theatre, particularly with what they refer to as his mechanical robot miming.[89] Fashionable Paris still finds it fashionable to attend Barrault's productions in which the general feeling is that of sharing.

One of France's most popular directors today is Jean Vilar, director of the Théâtre National Populaire.[90] For him, the role of the director is that of catalyzer. He is the interpreter of the play--its meaning and significance, and it is he who manipulates the actors to bring out all shades of meaning and significance. His productions are unique, vastly different from the stylized productions of the Comédie Française. His uncluttered stage follows in the traditions of Dullin and Pitoeff.[91] Vilar is acutely concerned with the text of the play, which he emphasizes through judicious selection of props and furniture. His

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[88]Corvin, op. cit., p. 106.

[89]Chiari, op. cit., p. 93.

[90]Marc Beigbeder, Le Théâtre en France depuis la Libération (Paris: Bordas, 1959), p. 230.

[91]Ibid., p. 216.

stage is almost bare, enclosed in cyclorama and accentuated by spotlights.

As impressive as are the contributions of these various "animateurs du théâtre," there is general agreement that "with the plays of Giraudoux and the subsequent discovery by the public of Claudel. . . , the French theatre. . . discovered itself."[92]

During World War II, the Paris theatre became a rallying point for the French and enjoyed an almost unprecedented popularity by using plays written during the period. In its attempt to negate the Nazi influence the Paris theatre did two things: it helped maintain the rich theatre heritage for which France is justly famous, and it focused its theatrical pieces mainly on exciting events rather than on the popular treatment of individuals, of characters. Generally, the new plays focused on events rather than on people. Fowlie again points out that

> the dramatic genres are impurely mixed in the plays of the last decade. Giraudoux mingles the pathetic with the ironic in every scene. Claudel joins the sublime with the realistic or the trite. Anouilh and Andre Roussin are constantly converting the comic into the tragic, and this applies to many of the contemporary plays that the terms comic and tragic have lost any well-defined meaning.[93]

Contemporary French theatre lists as one of its

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[92]Frederick Lumley, New Trends in Twentieth Century Drama (New York: Oxford University Press, 1967), p. 39.

[93]Fowlie, op. cit., p. 105.

brightest achievements, the reinstatement of poetry in the theatre.[94] Claudel, Gide, Giraudoux, Camus and Montherlant write incisive poetry far different from the cryptic prose of the naturalists of the early decades.

At the midpoint in this century three generations of playwrights were still popular in France: (1) those born before 1870, Claudel, Gide and Jarry; (2) those born between 1870 and 1900, Mauriac, Giraudoux and Montherlant; and (3) those born after 1900, Sartre, Camus, Anouilh, Beckett and Ionesco.

Most of these began their careers as essayists, novelists, journalists or poets and turned to the theatre only after having become famous in other fields. Mauriac, a relatively late comer to the theatre has always shown himself preoccupied with religion. His widely read column in Le Figaro serves as his means for projecting his views on world problems and disorders which he invariably treats from a religious standpoint. "His messages and judgments are guided by his deep faith of a Catholic, and his plays, also, but far more obliquely, reflect his moral and theological convictions."[95] In many respects, Mauriac may be considered typical of the French intellectual where the intrusion of religion is evident in his work. Montherlant

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[94]Pierre de Boisdeffre, Une Histoire Vivante de la Littérature d'Aujourd'hui (Paris: Le Livre Contemporain, 1960), pp. 642-643.

[95]Fowlie, op. cit., p. 111.

is one such.

Henry de Montherlant reached his peak as a novelist in the thirties and began as a playwright in earnest in the forties. "The pure elegance of style in Montherlant's plays rivals the vigor and clarity with which he describes human life and motivation,"[96] and Montherlant himself states confidently, "Dans mon théâtre, j'ai crié les hauts secrets qu'on ne peut dire qu'à voix basse."[97]

Giraudoux is another novelist turned playwright. While Mauriac and Montherlant maintain the polished French classic style, Giraudoux maintains the French precious style which brings him into closer contact with the problems and foibles of contemporary society.[98] The Giraudoux-Jouvet team produced a happy arrangement through which a harmony of creativity and production enhanced the French stage for more than a decade.

The third generation of playwrights concentrates on the Existentialist theme of engagement--engagement in problems of the immediate present, and the engagement of the audience as active listeners attending problems arising

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[96]Ibid., pp. 111-112.

[97]Henry de Montherlant, Notes sur mon théâtre (Paris: L'Arche Editions, 1950), p. 29.

[98]Chiari, op. cit., pp. 113-114.

from actual events and readily identifiable situations.[99] Sartre is well established as the leader of the Existentialist Theatre movement; his plays and those of Camus spring from a dialectic which embodies the Existentialist philosophical tenets and explores the problem of consciousness. Camus's style is similar to Montherlant's, but his outlook on mankind is markedly different: Camus is generally warm and sympathetic while Montherlant is cold and distant.

Anouilh's early work projects a bitterness and darkness reminiscent of naturalist theatre.[100] His later works have a basis in naturalism but are softened by the aesthetic distance their poetry effects. Although very much a theatricalist, Anouilh is picturesque and amusing even when he treats sordid subjects. He is sympathetic toward youth, and the triumph of youth in its simplicity and love over the scepticism and hypocrisy of age is a recurring theme in his plays.[101] Although chronologically Anouilh belongs in the third generation, the style and content of his plays place him more with the traditionalists than with the Avant-garde.

It would be inaccurate to assert that Montherlant

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[99]Boisdeffre, op. cit., p. 656 ff.

[100]Helmut Hatzfeld, Trends and Styles in Twentieth Century French Literature (Washington: The Catholic University of America Press, 1957), pp. 157-159.

[101]Chiari, op. cit., pp. 170-171.

belongs to the mainstream of the theatre of ideas. That Montherlant belongs to the theatre of ideas is without question, but he is far removed from the mainstream. The theatre of ideas has roots in a tradition which Montherlant embraces; it is his form which defies classification. Nonetheless he is more closely allied to the theatre of Claudel, Giraudoux and Marcel than to that of Sartre, Camus and Ionesco. The Avant-garde theatre, the theatre of the Absurd with its loose structure and anti-literary style has no appeal for Montherlant. To him theatre is style, literary style.

There are weighty points of agreement between Montherlant and the Avant-garde theatre, but they are restricted to the realm of ideas--to content--not to form. Witness the following comment from Montherlant's Notes sur Mon Théâtre:

> Je lis, noir sur blanc: "La vérité psychologique est le propre de l'observateur et du penseur, la vérité conventionelle celui de l'homme de théâtre. Le théâtre est un art essentiellement de convention: il obéit à des lois particulières, toutes différentes de celles des autres genres littéraires." Voilà contre quoi je m'insurge et ce dont j'espère bien, par mes pièces, montrer la fausseté.[102]

Montherlant accepts the freedom of action advocated by the Absurdists, and their reliance on ambiguity and equivocation to drive home a point which, in the end may not be resolved

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[102]Montherlant, op. cit., p. 33.

to the satisfaction of an uninitiated audience.

Montherlant writes again in his notes:

> Quand je lis Shakespeare ou Racine, je ne me demande jamais si c'est ou non "du théâtre." J'y vais chercher une connaissance plus profonde de l'âme humaine, des situations pathétiques et de ces mots qui "portent à leur cime une lueur étrange" (Victor Hugo); bref, quelque chose qui nourrisse ensemble le coeur et l'esprit. Sans doute même ce qui est proprement "du théâtre" est-il ce qui m'y intéresse le moins.[103]

Montherlant and the Avant-garde both look for "deeper insight into the human soul," but the two approaches are radically different. Whereas Montherlant is a psychological dramatist writing in the classic vein, the Avant-garde are psychological playwrights writing in a simple, direct disarming style. Each appeals to a limited cross-section of the French theatre audience, for the most part the intellectual audience. But the overwhelming majority of the theatre audience maintains a cold aloofness from each form, preferring the boulevard plays and the standard revivals to the intellectual challenge from the Avant-garde and from the classical plays of Montherlant. The reason is partly explained by Corvin in his luminous discussion of man as he finds himself in the twentieth century.

> C'en est fini du monde--et du théâtre--où tout s'explique, où tout se définit. Racine s'acharnait à ramener à la conscience claire les états d'âme les plus troubles; la démarche est inverse depuis une cinquantaine d'années. Des différents plans de conscience, le plus riche désormais, c'est celui où

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[103] Ibid., pp. 33-34.

> se situent les rêves, les angoisses de l'homme devant sa solitude ou devant l'absurdité du monde, le sentiment d'une culpabilité sans cause, les puissances de l'imaginaire et les déformations de la mémoire. Le réel n'est plus seulement complexe, mais discontinu. Les divers plans de conscience d'interpénêtrent, se chevauchent sans se laisser reconnaître; le principe d'identité est aboli; le même est l'autre, le rire est larme; Le temps n'est plus senti comme homogène, uniforme, mais la durée étant liée à la subjectivité d'une conscience déchirée, présent et passé se confondent dans l'immobilité de l'instant. D'où le sentiment d'une dérision, d'une duperie. L'homme ne connaît plus qu'une parodie d'existence et de faux-semblants, incapable d'entrer en communication et d'instaurer le moindre dialogue avec autrui, fût-ce au niveau des vérités le plus élémentaires.[104]

Roughly since about 1930, the French theatre has been a theatre of exploration. The trend set in motion by Antoine and the Théâtre Libre continues to flourish; works outside this mainstream are soon forgotten in their insignificance or irrelevance. Great freedom is accorded both the playwright and director through which a variety of forms has appeared expressing an equally varied series of subjects, resulting in genuine efforts to express the human condition through means far removed from the absurd realism of the naturalist movement.

The key words in the modern French theatre according to Robert Brustein are "aliénation and négation."[106]

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[104]Corvin, op. cit., p. 11.

[105]S. A. Rhodes, The Contemporary French Theater (New York: F. S. Crofts and Company, 1942), p. 11.

[106]Robert Brustein, "Nihilism on Broadway," The New Republic, 142 (February 29, 1960), 22.

Guicharnaud and Beckelman explain their acceptance of these terms in the following manner:

> Not all playwrights. . . are necessarily nihilistic. But all (those treated in Modern French Theatre) have tried to define man in metaphysical terms and outside of human institutions. Giraudoux's universe or Claudel's is no easier to live in than Sartre's or Beckett's; man is defined in terms of his agony, and the universe itself is seen as being fundamentally in a state of conflict. Giraudoux's search for harmony is not situated "within the social unit," Claudel's religion is hardly concerned with accepted ethics. On the whole, the hero of modern French theatre is a character who refuses to play the game of "adjustment" but rather tries to find himself through a higher game, if only that of theatre itself. According to the playwright's degree of optimism or pessimism, souls are saved or man is brought back to man. Whichever, the basic conflict is a vertical one in which man is not limited to socio-psychological tensions easily resolved through what Brustein calls "pious pronouncements."[107]

There are numerous implications in this statement but probably the most significant is that theatre reform in France cannot be considered superficial. The poetic nature of the reform produced a definite break with the didacticism and dullness of the 1900's. Today's theatre of ideas in France is as different from the theatre of Porto-Riche, Donnay, Curel, Hervieu, Brieux--all of the early 1900's--as Edward Albee's theatre differs from that of Dion Bouccicault. Sartre discussing a pressing problem adds weight and depth to our understanding; Giraudoux and Anouilh suit their style to the meaning and the sense in a manner better than any other Frenchmen have ever done. Montherlant

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[107]Guicharnaud and Beckelman, op. cit., p. viii.

and Claudel lend two kinds of spiritualism to the drama: Claudel writes Catholic plays, Montherlant plays about Catholics. They choose grand topics and treat them in well-written dialogue reminiscent of the classic period of French tragedy. Today's theatre-hero is one who, for the most part, bears the elements of his struggle within him, who need not look elsewhere for his battle ground. This is especially true of Montherlant's heroes who, as will be seen, are not really great men, but men who look upon themselves as great, thus lodging the seeds of conflict within their inimical natures.

SUMMARY

The preceding chapter sets the background for placing Henry de Montherlant in proper perspective. For centuries the French have been avid readers, and their men of letters, their intellectuals play an important role in their culture. It is impossible to understand French culture without probing into the religion of the people, the vast majority of whom belong to the Catholic Church. However, religious practice and belief are two different things for the French, much more so than for other cultures. The Church has risen and fallen with the fortunes of the monarchies and republics, which have succeeded one another with baffling frequency. A significant part of this culture has always been the theatre, with its stress on the play of ideas, and its

concern with the spoken word rather than action as the focus of its drama.

In the next chapter, Montherlant's place as a person, as an intellectual, as a writer and as a Catholic will be considered.

CHAPTER II

HENRY DE MONTHERLANT AS PLAYWRIGHT

The possibility of confusing one's personal opinion of a writer with what should be one's opinion of his writing, may lead to some uneasiness wherein it is felt that a literary work ought necessarily to be the expression of a lofty and profound personality. Conversely, to hold that a work should be judged solely on its value as a literary entity and that the personal life of the author is of secondary if not of remote importance, may lead one to miss some of the author's meaning. When an author's life is intimately related to his writings, a study of his life and his thought is not only a rewarding exercise, it may also be necessary. Such is the case with Henry de Montherlant.

BIOGRAPHY

Montherlant begins his first book with the pronoun I--and that not without significance. All of his works are autobiographical in that each reveals the unfolding of the destiny of a soul highly atuned to the world of intellect and spirit. The autobiography, therefore, is not the account of activity so much as the revelation of profound

movement in the soul. Even in his early novels where Montherlant recounts incidents occurring in his youth, the accent is always on the state of mind, the state of soul which prompted or accompanied these actions.

His candid--even impertinent treatment of traditional ideas and norms shocks at first encounter, with the result that no one is indifferent to Montherlant: one emerges decidedly for or against this man who is more Christian than Catholic, more Roman than Christian. Here is the man who, in defiance of the Gospel injunction, tries to add to his stature the one cubit that raises him above the world he despises, but which at the same time becomes his most effective means of being true to himself.[1]

The reason for the audacity, temerity and sensuousness on the one hand, and the sensitivity, caution, and asceticism on the other can be explained in terms of temperament and upbringing. The family fireside was a mixture of opposites and contraries which coupled with Montherlant's schooling and his interest in sports produced the man of letters who finds himself pulled in several directions at once, but a man who maintained his focus on self.[2]

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[1]Henri Perruchot, Montherlant (Paris: Gallimard, 1959), pp. 34-37.

[2]Robert Hays Sisler, Henri de Montherlant and Youth (unpublished dissertation, University of Pittsburgh, 1961), pp. 6-7.

Although Montherlant's focus remains constant, his approach to it changes with the condition of the self at a given moment. There are contradictions in Montherlant and in his works, but none that he does not explain--opportunist that he is.[3] As a consequence, numbers of his readers find themselves shifting positions, from antipathy to sympathy, from sympathy to antipathy, but never finding themselves in the middle ground of indifference. Further, indifference is foreign to Montherlant. One of the most trying stages of his life was the period where he found himself drifting towards mediocrity with no anchor to stabilize his fluctuations or star to guide him.[4] It was only when he returned to his basic philosophy of life--catering to self--that he regained his composure and experienced the happiest days of his life. Non-Christian? Yes. Anti-Christian? No.

Henry de Montherlant was born in Paris, April 21, 1896, the son of Joseph Millon de Montherlant and Marguerite Camusat de Riancey. His paternal family[5] originated in Catalonia and later, settling in Picardy, still maintained much of their original Spanish character and appearance.

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[3]Ibid., p. 5.

[4]Jean de Beer, Montherlant ou l'Homme encombré de Dieu (Paris:Flammarion, 1963), pp. 119-124.

[5]Louis Chaigne, Vies et Oeuvres d'Ecrivains (Paris: Editions Lanore, 1952), p. 6.

M. de Montherlant was a small man with flashing Spanish eyes which gave him a serious, severe, if not imposing, hard appearance. He was a lover of art and a passionate horseman. This combination of aesthete and sportsman is also evident in the son. But other than this hereditary trait, the young Montherlant owed little to the direct influence of his father who remained cold and distant, entrusting the rearing of the child to the women.

Henry's mother was the granddaughter of a Pontifical Zouave who combined piety, attachment to the Church and to the state with a life of sensuality that eventually led him to his grave.[6] Some of this frivolity passed on to Henry's mother, for before his birth she was engaged in a constant round of social activities, partying and what the French innocently call "le flirt." She almost died giving birth to Henry and was almost completely bedridden for the last twenty years of her life. No longer able to pursue her virogous social interests she concentrated all her affections on her son, desiring nothing more than to become his closest and dearest friend, and in general exercising over him a benevolent tyranny. Still, Henry was never close to his mother. In fact his attitude was one of secret opposition. He confesses in Service inutile ". . . chez nous. . . depuis cinq ou six ans, l'abus de confiance est devenu une

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[6]Ibid.

règle de vie."[7] Such was the Montherlant household. Henry rejected his mother's attentions but in later life he confessed that he found therein much to pique his conscience.

His maternal grandmother, an ardent Jansenist, lived an austere, retired life surrounded with all the trappings of somber religious conviction. She read only in books of asceticism, a practice uncommon enough even in present-day France, but especially noteworthy in the Montherlant household. But this was a family of strong contrasts: asceticism, rigor and mortification found alongside fiery, passionate lovers of life. However, as Louis Chaigne remarks, "Les deux milieux, si disparates, si contrastes, se retrouvaient dans une même concenption de l'honneur."[8] Chaigne explains

> Henry de Riancey, l'aieul ultramontain et royaliste, écrivait: "Nous servons pour l'honneur et pour le plaisir, non pour le profit." Et le père du futur auteur du Maître de Santiago, lorsque ce dernier eut dix ans, lui remit une bague à l'intérieur de laquelle il avait fait graver cette devise: "L'honneur avant tout."[9]

When Montherlant was sixteen he threw the ring away when his schoolmates returned it to him without the inscription.

Montherlant lived with his grandmother until he was

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[7]Henry de Montherlant, Service inutile (Paris: Editions Bernard Grasset, 1935), p. 21.

[8]Chaigne, op. cit., p. 6.

[9]Ibid.

twenty-seven years old,[10] and during this time she awakened in him an interest in Jansenism, an interest and sympathy which are evidenced in one of Montherlant's finest works, Port-Royal.

Robert Sisler, studying Montherlant's life as it reflects his views on youth, observes that the

> exclusive interest of the mother and grandmother is interesting because it supplies a key to Montherlant's attitude toward maternal love; while he enjoyed the attention when he was young, he later regretted the over-attention of these two women: "Depuis lors, j'ai entendu dire beaucoup que les enfants élevés par des femmes seules étaient mal élevés. Je crois bien n'avoir pas fait exception à cette règle."
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> The remark is significant for several reasons. The reputation of Montherlant as a misogynist is well-known. He exalts women throughout his work as objects of desire, but has only scorn and even hatred for them when they seem an impediment to the work of men. Nowhere does he admit an essential equality of the sexes. Woman is of a different essence from man and for Montherlant this explains the many difficulties of relationships with them."[11]

Montherlant's biographer and lifetime friend J.-N. Faure-Biguet relates an interesting incident in this same connection. On one occasion after Montherlant had been established as a man of letters, Faure-Biguet asked if he had ever knowingly borrowed passages from Sienkiewicz's Quo Vadis? As a child Montherlant had read extensively; Quo Vadis?was one of his favorite books, and, in imitation of his favorite authors, he had written several rather

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[10]Perruchot, op. cit., p. 21.

[11]Sisler, op. cit., p. 7-8.

lengthy novels which he took quite seriously. None, of course, have ever reached the public, but the professional approach of young Henry to his lifelong vocation is almost alarming. Faure-Biguet continues, "Il m'a répondu que ces emprunts étaient volontaires, et que les phrases qu'il 'prenait' à Quo Vadis?étaient pour lui des phrases fétiches."[12] Passages with magic powers! Faure-Biguet goes on to explain:

> Qui dira enfin la secousse qu'a pu produire sur le futur auteur des Jeunes Filles, la phrase presque initiale du livre: "Le lendemain de ce festin où Pétrone avait discuté avec Lucain, Néron et Sénèque la question de savoir si la femme possède une âme. . .?" Imaginez un petit garçon de neuf ans à qui l'on n'a jamais parlé de la femme qui pour lui dire: "Les femmes, c'est sacré. C'est ta mère, c'est la Sainte Vierge. Soit surtout bien poli avec elles. Baise-leur la main. Cède-leur la place dans l'omnibus," à qui, d'autre part les prêtres ont appris la valeur de "l'âme", et qui voit soudain que de doctes personnages mettent en doute justement que la femme en possède une. Et s'il est prédestiné à être de ceux qui, tout en désirant la femme, n'ont pour elle que peu d'estime, combien toute une partie de lui-même, cristallisera sur la phrase, en apparence inoffensive, de Quo Vadis?[13]

On all sides, therefore, Montherlant was conditioned for the role of misogynist--one of his salient traits.

Montherlant met Faure-Biguet at the lycée Janson-de-Sailly. They became fast friends when they discovered a mutual interest in writing. Montherlant was a serious student, but at Sailly did not prove a particularly

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[12]J.-N. Faure-Biguet, Les Enfances de Montherlant (Paris: Henri Lefebvre, 1948), p. 24.

[13]Ibid., pp. 24-25.

brilliant one. He was an avid reader and it was during these early school days that he stumbled across Quo Vadis? a work that was to have a profound effect on his life. According to Faure-Biguet Quo Vadis? "lui avait donné le coup de foudre pour Rome et l'antiquité. . ."[14] According to Becker

> this book awakened in him a passion for pagan antiquity with its love of beauty and frank sensuality. The influence exerted upon him by his classical studies was to alternate with the lessons of his Catholic upbringing, producing throughout his life and his work an alternation which was to lead to the pagan sensuality of Malatesta, on the one hand, and the asceticism of Le Maître de Santiago on the other.[15]

This opinion is reinforced by Faure-Biguet. While the two were at Janson-de-Sailly, they decided to collaborate on a novel about Neronian Rome, and Faure-Biguet remarks significantly, "On croirait que Montherlant retrouve sa patrie, les siens, l'atmosphère où il se sent chez lui. Et cela, remarquons-le, non dans la Rome chrétienne, mais dans la Rome païenne."[16]

In 1908 Montherlant discovered an interest that was to last the length of his life--tauromachy. Quennell points out the importance of this discovery:

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[14]Ibid., p. 17.

[15]Lucille Frankman Becker, The Plays of Henry de Montherlant (unpublished dissertation, Columbia University, 1958), pp. 9-10.

[16]Faure-Biguet, op. cit., p. 22.

> Montherlant was already trying his hand at literature--since he was nine he had been filling notebooks with tales, embryo novels and small dramatic pieces; but what he saw and felt in the bullring seems to have quickened and confirmed his gifts. Once he had registered his allegiance to the Sign of the Bull, he had begun his progress towards literary manhood.[17]

Montherlant spent the summer of 1910 in Burgos, Spain, where he had his first encounter with live bulls.[18] When he returned to France he was operated on for appendicitis. He used his lengthy convalescent period as a means to enter the college Sainte-Croix. His parents could not agree as to which school to send young Montherlant.[19] M. de Montherlant was for the Jesuit school where he himself had received his education; Mme. de Montherlant was for Sainte-Croix. Henry had made friends with some of the students at Sainte-Croix and he was eager to intensify these relationships. While the issue was still in doubt, he daily removed the clamps from his incision, thus prolonging his convalescence. He assured his parents that if they would send him to Sainte-Croix he would recover rapidly. They yielded, and in 1911 he enrolled at Sainte-Croix de Neuilly, where he soon became enraptured of the deep spirituality of the environment. Chaigne remarks

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[17]Henry de Montherlant, Selected Essays, ed. Peter Quennell, (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1957), p. 7.

[18]Faure-Biguet, op. cit., p. 54.

[19]Ibid., pp. 59-63.

> s'il eût reçu en partage une simplicité et une humilité que nous cherchons en vain dans son caractère, cette découverte eût-elle eu pour conséquence l'affermissement en lui de l'homme, de l'écrivain, du chrétien que semblait annoncer son premier livre?[20]

This first book was La relève du Matin, Montherlant's recollections of his days at Sainte-Croix.

Henry soon established himself as a leader and was elected president of the school's literary club.[21] During the course of the year he founded a secret order called la Famille whose activities and secrecy vexed the school administrators. A train of events ensued and precisely what precipitated the administration's drastic action is not clear, but the prefect denounced Montherlant from the pulpit as the ringleader of a troublesome group. The Superior, while maintaining that Henry was an intelligent student, yet pronounced him dangerous,[22] charged him with being the soul of a conspiracy, "le corrupteur des ames, l'introducteur du mauvais esprit,"[23] and dismissed him from the school. Such a peremptory dismissal profoundly affected the young Montherlant. He was never to forget what he considered a grave injustice,[24] and used the incident as

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[20]Chaigne, op.cit., p. 8.

[21]Faure-Biguet, op. cit., p. 74.

[22]Chaigne, op. cit., p. 9.

[23]Faure-Biguet, op. cit., p. 76.

[24]Ibid., p. 85.

the basis for one of the plays to be studied in detail later in this work, La Ville dont le prince est un enfant. There was a touch of irony in a remark of one of Montherlant's teachers who said that by the time Henry reached the age of twenty he would find reason to smile over his dismissal. Indeed, for a time, Montherlant did make a pretense of glorying in his expulsion. Even Faure-Biguet, his most intimate associate, seemed to be taken in, for he wrote,

> Je suis certain de ne pas exagérer en avançant que, de tout ce qui s'est passé dans la vie de Montherlant avant sa vingtième année, son renvoi de Sainte-Croix est l'épisode qui a paru le plus glorieux, celui que pour rien au monde il n'aurait voulu manquer.[25]

Madame de Montherlant intervened in the matter and kept the dismissal from reaching her husband's ears. In fact she claimed that she had removed the child from Sainte-Croix because the school lacked discipline.[26]

Montherlant was to remember his days at Sainte-Croix with more than passing attachment, looking upon them as his days of piety and spiritual vitality. Furthermore it was here that the thought of a literary career first occurred to him.[27]

After leaving Sainte-Croix he pursued his studies in

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[25] Ibid., p. 84.

[26] Ibid.

[27] Ibid.

philosophy, but not without difficulty.[28] He subsequently studied law, dabbled in painting and even took dancing lessons. All the while he experienced grave misgivings, suffering profound disgust with himself, and with an existence which, to him, seemed doomed to mediocrity.

The years 1912-1914, Montherlant's worldly period,[29] gave indication that his fears were not ill founded. He became increasingly dissatisfied with his milieu and discouraged over his banal existence. To add to his distress his father died during the year that the Great War broke out. With the thought of entering the war, he put his manuscripts in order, but his nother's importunities delayed his enlistment until her death the following year. Before entering, he threw himself wildly into sports. Faure-Biguet says:

> . . . jusqu'à l'âge de dix-neuf ans, l'auteur des Olympiques ne fut rien moins que sportif. L'équitation et la tauromachie ne sont pas des sports. Au collège, il fut toujours dispensé de la gymnastique, on ne sait pourquoi, et pendant les récréations, il ne jouait que rarement au ballon.[30]

In the meantime he prepared himself for a military career by enrolling in several training clubs. He did ambulance work and delved into his books, reading intensively in Pascal, Goethe, Nietzsche, and, through the works

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[28] Ibid., p. 89 ff.

[29] Ibid., pp. 96-102.

[30] Ibid., pp. 130-131.

of Barrès came upon d'Annunzio. All of these writers exercised profound influence upon his formative mind.[31]

At the time of his mother's death, Montherlant had already written his first play, L'Exil, but in deference to her memory he delayed some fifteen years publishing it since it contained many references to a strained relationship between the protagonist and his mother.[32] Thinking that some of these passages might be interpreted harshly, he kept the manuscript from the market until 1929.

While waiting to enter military service, Montherlant engaged in social recreation work in one of the poor parishes of Paris,[33] working with the street urchins at gymnastics. Occasionally he was seen in religious processions, carrying a lighted candle.

In 1916 he struck up a friendship with a young South American who accompanied him to Versailles where Montherlant worked on La Relève du Matin, memoirs of his life at Sainte-Croix.[34]

In September he joined the army on a loose arrangement whereby he could return from the front at his own pleasure.[35]

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[31]Ibid., pp. 132-137.

[32]Jean Sandelion, Montherlant et les Femmes (Paris: Librairie Plon, 1950), p. 138.

[33]Faure-Biguet, op. cit., pp. 147-148.

[34]Ibid., pp. 157-158.

[35]Ibid., p. 159.

On several such trips he attempted to locate a publisher for La Relève, but unable to find any he put the work on the market at his own expense.

In 1918 he was wounded by a shell burst,[36] and upon his release from the hospital he became an interpreter for the American Army until 1919. In 1922 he published Le Songe a forceful novel in which he tells of his war experiences through the eyes of Alban de Bricoule.

The twenties and thirties were Montherlant's most productive years. In the early twenties he renewed his sports activities, particularly track and football (soccer). During this same period he served as Secretary to a fund-raising organization, l'Oeuvre de l'ossuaire, whose purpose was to raise a memorial to the war dead.

In 1923 he wrote Chant funèbre pour les morts de Verdun, and in 1932 a parallel work Mors et Vita. Le Paradis à l'ombre des épées and Les Onze devant la porte dorée are the only works devoted exclusively to sports: soccer and track (1924). But these works went deeper than the mere treatment of athletics: as Becker observes,

> In these works, he expressed his admiration for the discipline of sports which are governed by a pre-established scale of values. Sports represented an exclusive "order" which continued the "orders" of school and war. This concept of a select group of human beings, bound together by a common interest

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[36]Perruchot, op. cit., pp. 19-20.

> and obeying a fixed set of rules, was to figure throughout his work, particularly in his theatrical production.[37]

Les Olympiques (1924) together with Chant funèbre pour les morts de Verdun established him as a writer in France. But with notoriety came a temporary distaste for writing causing Montherlant to leave France in 1925 to travel in Italy, Spain and North Africa.[38] Later he gathered his accounts of these travels in a trilogy entitled Les Voyageurs traqués, composed of Aux Fontaines du désir (1927), La Petite Infante de Castille (1929) and Un Voyageur solitaire est un diable (Published only in 1946.)

The trilogy is not so much a travelogue as a personal account of a crisis precipitated by suffering and despair. These Montherlant had sought to dispel through travel and pursuit of pleasure. In neither did he find satisfaction. Eventually the crisis passed, but it left a mark on him--a mark which constantly recurs in his work, particularly in his plays.

Others of his travels produced several volumes of meditations and soul searching: Il y a encore des paradis: Images d'Alger 1928-1931 (1935) and Coups de soleil Afrique-Andalousie (1950).

Montherlant writes of his retreat at Montserrat (1929)

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[37]Becker, op. cit., p. 12.

[38]Perruchot, op. cit., pp. 21-22.

in Pour une vierge noire (1930). This straightforward text suggests a conversion, for the experiences he relates are a departure from the empty life he had been leading for several years. The memories of Sainte-Croix reappear. Having had his fill of sensual pleasure, he was prepared to lead a more spiritual life.

> De cette crise se dégagea non pas certes un nouvel homme, mais sûrement un homme meilleur. Le premier pas vers une vie spirituelle, que est l'abnégation des intérêts du monde, je l'avais fait en 1925. Je m'étais mis dans les conditions d'une vie spirituelle, et ensuite quelque chose de semblable à cette vie était venu. Comme l'ange de Tobie, j'avais paru me repaître des nourritures terrestres, quand je goûtais un aliment du ciel.[39]

He wrote La Rose de Sable in 1930 in which he attacked the abuses of French colonialism. The work in its entirety remains unpublished, for Montherlant is convinced that it would harm French interests in North Africa. He writes:

> . . . ce livre est d'inspiration chrétienne, mais n'est pas bon pour une société vue en fonction de l'idée de patrie.[40]

In 1954 he extracted the love story entwined in La Rose de Sable, and published it under the title l'Histoire d'amour de la Rose de Sable. There is a strong resemblance between the protagonist of the story, Lieutenant Auligny and Don Alvaro Dabo of Le Maître de Santiago in

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[39]Montherlant, Service inutile, pp. 17-18.

[40]Ibid., p. 21.

their excoriation of French colonial exploitation. In Montherlant's words, ". . . je souffrais de la France quand je la considérais sous un aspect de puissance colonial et ensuite les épreuves qu'elle subissait . . ."[41]

Shortly after La Rose de Sable, Montherlant returned to France where once again he found little interest in his former literary and social life. He became disillusioned with the France he found which he saw as "le cancer qui ronge le monde européen c'est la vanité sociale."[42] It was then that he decided against publishing La Rose de Sable in its entirety. He considered his political message unsuited for French eyes, since much of what he wrote was open to unfavorable interpretation. Montherlant explains his position:

> Je suis effrayé des progrès faits, en deux ans et demi . . . par tout ce qui n'est pas l'honnêteté . . . . Je me demande comment ils pourront résister à ce qui les attaques de toutes parts, et les attaque avec l'aide de l'élite intellectuelle et social. . . Notre pays est miné au dedans, attaqué au dehors. . . . La France est un fromage mou . . . On m'a reproché quelquefois de n'avoir pas beaucoup d'amour, mais j'ai de l'indignation, qui est une forme de l'amour.[43]

And then with his usual insight he adds,

> Et enfin . . . je renonçai à le publier du tout comme une nation qui échoue un de ses vaisseaux de

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[41] Ibid., p. 37.

[42] Ibid., p. 19.

[43] Ibid., p. 40.

guerre pour que l'ennemi ne puisse l'utiliser.[44]

In 1934 he wrote his celebrated novel Les Célibataires, in which he treated the protagonist, Léon de Coantre, with somewhat the same indulgence he had accorded Auligny. Les Célibataires won for him the Grand Prix de Littérature from the Académie Française. In typical Montherlant fashion he divided his prize of ten thousand francs equally between the victorious French troops and the vanquished Moroccan rebels, for, he said, "les deux côtés on fait son devoir également."[45] Quennell further notes that

> Montherlant displayed a similar impartiality in his attitude towards current political problems, contributing to Right Wing as well as to Communist papers, and surrendering his whole-hearted allegiance neither to the Right nor to the Left. "Cette position strictement apolitique" (we learn) "est admise par tous les partis." It has, nevertheless created some confusion, and during and immediately after the Second World War exposed the writer to some unjust attacks. But such an attitude, whatever the risks it involved, was an essential feature of his scheme of life and work. He remains uncommitted . . . and since the Second World War he has deliberately refrained from any form of public controversy. ". . . A partir de la dernière guerre" (he remarks in a personal letter) "je ne me suis plus jamais exprimé sur mon pays ni sur l'actualité en mon nom propre. C'est pourquoi je me suis dévoué particulièrement au théâtre où l'auteur s'efface derrière des personnages."[46]

Les Célibataires is not essentially autobiographical, but as in almost all of Montherlant's other work his

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[44]Ibid., p. 41.

[45]Cited in Quennell, op. cit., p. 12.

[46]Ibid., pp. 12-13.

philosophy is clearly expressed. Montherlant uses Léon de Coantre as a symbol of scorn.[47] This is the story of a man unable to rise above mediocrity. His retirement to a country cottage is not so much a quest for solitude as an act of supreme pride similar to that of the protagonist of the play Broceliande.

Between 1936 and 1939, Montherlant published Les Jeunes Filles, a novel in four volumes, "a scathing attack on the mediocrity of the modern young girl and an impassioned defense of the rights of the superior individual to realize himself fully, unhampered by any fetters, particularly those of matrimony."[48] Several experiences had brought him close to matrimony, but in 1935 he resolved against ever marrying and Les Jeunes Filles is his apologetic on marriage. He says, "La Création artistique était incompatible avec le mariage, au moins pour certaines natures."[49] He was convinced that he owed more to his art than the time and affection consumed in matrimony allowed. He thought it unfair to anyone to ask that she share a life which offered no better than second place to a multitude of varied interests.

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[47]Pierre Sipriot, Montherlant par Lui-même (Paris: Aux Editions du Seuil, 1953), pp. 8,9.

[48]Becker, op. cit., p. 15.

[49]Montherlant, Service inutile, p. 23.

Three collections of essays delineate his political, philosophical and aesthetic ideas, as well as his basic views on dramatic technique. These are Service inutile (1935), L'Equinox de septembre (1938) and Le Solstice de juin (1940).

He served as war correspondent for the journal Marianne in 1940, but a light wound sent him back to Paris in 1941.[50] Here he pursued his theatre work in earnest, and, as was mentioned above, he took refuge from controversy in the theatre. "This medium permitted him to attain a certain degree of artistic objectivity, infusing life into a wide variety of characters, while, at the same time, expressing his philosophy by means of the protagonist of each play, . . . his personal spokesman.[51]

Montherlant began his work as dramatist at the invitation of Jean-Louis Vaudoyer, Administrator of the Comédie-Française.[52] Vaudoyer, aware of Montherlant's skillful handling of dialogue in his novels, presented him with a copy of Guevera's Spanish play concerning the death of the young woman married to the inheritor of the throne. Vaudoyer asked Montherlant to rewrite the play for the Comédie-Française. La Reine Morte (1942) resulted and became with

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[50]Becker, op. cit., p. 15.

[51]Ibid.

[52]Henry de Montherlant, "Comment fut écrite la Reine Morte," Montherlant: Théâtre (Paris: Bibliothèque de la Pléiade, 1965), p. 237.

Claudel's Le Soulier de satin the most popular play during the German occupation.

Port-Royal was completed in 1942, the same year which La Reine Morte was staged for the first time at the Comédie-Française. The following year witnessed the production of Fils de Personne at the Théâtre George. The management asked Montherlant to write a second play to accompany Fils de Personne, since it proved too short for a full evening's performance. He wrote Un Incompris, but when the Germans ordered all theatres closed by ten o'clock, the complete bill could not be staged and as a result Un Incompris has never been performed professionally.

Montherlant wrote Le Maître de Santiago in 1945 at the same time as he was working with the Swiss Red Cross for the benefit of young war victims. L'Étoile du soir recounts some of his trenchant thoughts on the plight of these unfortunates.

The first performance of Le Maître de Santiago proved even more successful than La Reine Morte. Demain il fera jour appeared the following year (1949), the same year in which Montherlant was acclaimed in a poll conducted by the weekly journal Carrefour the French author most likely to be read most widely in the year 2000.[53]

Celles qu'on prend dans ses bras opened at the Théâtre

53Perruchot, op. cit., p. 253.

de la Madeleine in 1950, and in the same year Jean-Louis Barrault staged Malatesta.

In 1951, La ville dont le prince est un enfant was published in book form and was hailed as Montherlant's masterpiece, even by the Comédie-Française despite his prohibition to have the play staged. He has, on occasion, allowed a few French and Swiss private schools to produce the play,[54] but it was still not until March of 1968 that he permitted professionals to stage the play.[55]

Textes sous une Occupation, a collection of essays written during the German occupation of 1940-1944, was published in 1953. The same year, he wrote a second version of Port-Royal, and the following year it was staged by the Comédie Française.

Although Montherlant claimed that his revision of Port-Royal in 1953 would be his last theatrical piece,[56] he has since written Broceliande (1956), Don Juan (1959), Le Cardinal d'Espagne (1960), and his most recent play la Guerre civile (1965). In between times he wrote le

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[54]Henry de Montherlant, "La ville dont le prince est un Enfant: Postface," Montherlant: Théâtre (Paris: Bibliothèque de la Pléiade, 1965), p. 946.

[55]Henri Gouhier, "Théâtre populaire et Comédie Française: La Ville dont le Prince est un Enfant," La Table Ronde, No. 242 (March, 1968), p. 119.

[56]Henry de Montherlant, "Port-Royal: Préface," Montherlant: Théâtre (Paris: Bibliothèque de la Pléiade, 1965), p. 981.

Chaos et la Nuit, a novel which created little stir in literary circles.

In 1960, Montherlant was elected to the Académie Française, an honor to which he reacted characteristically with apparent indifference.

At present Montherlant lives in semi-retirement in Paris. He continues to write and to make only infrequent appearances at the theatre even when his own plays are being performed.

MONTHERLANT THE PLAYWRIGHT

Montherlant grew up in a Paris where theatre was firmly established as a centuries-old tradition. Although it is true that during his youth French popular theatre was passing through one of its recurring periods of mediocrity, nevertheless the forces of reform were making themselves felt and to the young Montherlant the spectacle of actors unravelling a story held a strange fascination and favored his natural inclination toward the theatre. After securing a place among French men of letters, Montherlant turned to the theatre where he has since become one of France's most illustrious dramatists of the last hundred-fifty years. At present Montherlant's interest in theatre is most accurately described as academic. He says, ". . . voir jouer une pièce me donne toujours une impression moins

forte que celle que j'eus en la lisant."[57] Such was not always the case.

One of the most influential people in Montherlant's upbringing, his maternal grandmother, discouraged his youthful interest in theatre, not realizing the precocity or talent of the future author. Henry's family seldom allowed him to attend the theatre, but after seeing a production of Julius Caesar (depicting one of his favorite periods in history) he became entranced with the theatre, and when he was able to leave the house alone, became a frequent visitor at the popular theatre where the plays of d'Hervieu, Capus, Donnay, Bataille and Bernard were showing.

Montherlant turned to theatre as playwright after establishing himself as a novelist,[58] something not uncommon among French men of letters--Gide, Claudel, Mauriac to name three. But Montherlant's tastes have always been much more varied than the tastes of his fellow converts to the theatre; hence, there is no surprise that his plays are basically different from theirs. Mauriac's use of divine grace as deus ex machina yields simple solutions to uncomplicated plots. There is conflict in Mauriac: physical to a lesser extent than spiritual. But his spiritual conflict is

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[57]Henry de Montherlant, "L'Exil: Préface," Montherlant: Théâtre (Paris: Gallimard, Bibliothèque de la Pléiade, 1958), p. 9.

[58]Simon, op. cit., p. 108.

different from Montherlant's where there is no fixity of principle involving faith and morality. Montherlant's want of commitment allows him to project his plays from the base of his choice since there are no external drives or patterns to repress him. Mauriac is straitened by his commitment to cultural forces and customs, whereas Montherlant's freedom provides him with greater dramatic responsibilities.[59] Fernand Vial extends this point and comments, "Religious principles never penetrate his consciousness and still less his conscience. His philosophy is dominated by the conviction of the validity of opposite and irreconcilable points of view."[60] Since Montherlant studies problems from so many angles he is free to alter his viewpoint from one play to another without inconsistency.

Montherlant has explored a wide variety of problems--particularly those involving contradictions--which spring from his apparent indifference, or better detachment from worldly concerns, a detachment which in turn is a product of his pessimism and scepticism. Age, however, has brought mellowness: the impetuous author of Le Songe is unrecognizable in the calm, reflective attitude of La Ville dont le prince est un enfant.

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[59] Ibid., pp. 108-109.

[60] Fernand Vial, "Montherlant and the Post-War Drama in France," American Society of the Legion of Honor Magazine, XXII (Spring, 1951), p. 63.

When in December of 1942 the Comédie Française staged Montherlant's first public venture, La Reine Morte, the French literary world welcomed this expansion of the talents of a writer whose name had become a household word. For the French generation which grew up between the two wars the mention of Montherlant was likely to provoke heated discussion. Some reverenced him, others despised him, but none were indifferent to him. In the eyes of most such a controversial figure gave great promise, and it was generally conceded that Montherlant was probably the most naturally endowed French writer of his generation.[61] Boisdeffre remarks that all France expected much of Montherlant, but, he adds,

> il a perdu, très vite, la fraternité des hommes; il s'est complu, puis déifié dans une solitude hautaine, et l'orgueil a peu à peu fait le vide autour de lui. Il y avait pourtant en lui de quoi faire, mieux qu'un grand écrivain, un grand homme.[62]

Then he hastens to pose the question, "Pourqoui donc n'est-il devenu que le plus grand de nos rhétoriqueurs?"[63]

The answer, of course, is that Montherlant is Montherlant, an oversimplification that will be clarified in the following pages.

Generally speaking, Montherlant's theatre concerns

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[61]Pierre de Boisdeffre, Métamorphose de la littérature de Barrès à Malraux (Paris: Editions Alsatia, 1950), p. 277.

[62]Ibid.

[63]Ibid.

itself with reconciliation of contraries.[64] Despite his failure to maintain a firm grasp on both characters and situations in his attempted reconciliations, Montherlant's plays are reminiscent of the classic theatre of Corneille and Racine through his forceful, uncluttered style and simplicity of action. Montherlant's prose, like that of Giraudoux, is often more lyrical than that of his contemporaries who write in verse, Claudel for example.

It is not surprising, therefore, that critics look upon Montherlant as an anachronism. Jean Datain devotes an entire book to Montherlant as a man of the Renaissance,[65] living full-square in the twentieth century. Montherlant agrees with this judgment. He shows no interest in politics--a rarity for the French. Spiritually he is of another age, for although having been brought up in a Catholic home, educated by priests, his views on morality are more closely akin to those of pagan Rome than to any other age in history. His ethic is that of natural man, free of all restraint, all constraint. As a man of letters, he owes nothing to his contemporaries, Barrès excepted.[66]

Montherlant is a more complex individual than the mere

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[64]Simon, op. cit., p. 109.

[65]Jean Datain, Montherlant et l'héritage de la Renaissance (Paris: Amiot-Dumont, 1956).

[66]Boisdeffre, op. cit., pp. 313-314.

word "anachronism" suggests. His whole frame of mind is an enigma. He laughs at the world, but he takes himself quite seriously. His scorn for the world, however, does not go so far as to ignore the reading public. He wants it to read what he writes because he feels that it needs to know what he says about victims of society. His public remains with him because it knows that there is nothing personal in his contempt and that his barbs are aimed at groups which stand aloof in the ivory tower of self-sufficiency and which read criticism in much the same way that many churchgoers hear pastoral censure and apply it to others.[67]

But to concentrate on Montherlant's pessimism is not to understand Montherlant.[68] His impertinence, his audacity must be considered alongside his positive attributes, and these more especially as they apply to his plays. True one can never lose sight of Montherlant's basic orientation summarized in the dictum "Be true to thyself", but its manifestations in such a complex character are not the product of conformity to traditional mores, but more so the product of consistency with one's inconsistency. Montherlant views man as a vacilating entity constantly striving toward some form of self-realization. In his own life, and as Guicharnaud and Beckelman remark,

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[67]Ibid., p. 318.

[68]Simon, op. cit., pp. 111-112.

> In the course of his works, the effort is sometimes taken seriously, sometimes shown as illusory, sometimes considered for itself beyond all judgment. Man is not fundamentally political or charitable or religious or capable of love. All those characteristics are secondary. He is first and above all a being who strives toward a chosen image. The hero is he who strives the most vigorously, the most steadfastly, and often with the most cruelty.[69]

Montherlant's concentration on the soul removes his theatre from the realm of action and sets it squarely in the realm of psychology.[70] He is not concerned with the metaphysics of character nor of the situations in which the characters find themselves: he is concerned with their reaction to the obstacles which hinder their progress toward their objectives. The whole of Le Maître de Santiago is the story of Don Alvaro Dabo's struggle toward an objective whose truth or falsity is of secondary interest to the audience.

In this play and in several others, since the character is concerned with the metaphysics of his situation, Montherlant is also concerned with it, but only because it is consistent with the character to be so. Don Alvaro's struggle is not against God, but with what might be called the field of faith as psychological reality and the conflicting state of soul where humility and pride combine within the same person to produce anticipated ambiguities.

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[69]Guicharnaud and Beckelman, op. cit., p. 109.

[70]Ibid.

Montherlant is not looking for consistency with human nature where there are always inconsistencies, surprises, contradictions.

Montherlant was well aware that such an approach exposed him on the one side to fall into a pit alongside the naturalists and their imitators, and on the other, by ignoring the findings of science, limiting himself to time-worn themes under thinly disguised story lines. In his early plays Montherlant sought

> d'être à la fois un moraliste, c'est-à-dire celui qui étudie les passions, et un moralisateur, c'est-à-dire celui qui propose une certaine morale.[71]

His later plays and their accompanying explicatory essays[72] show clearly that his prime concern is the study of character and not the inculcation of a moral. Still the lessons are there. It is difficult for a play of any kind (particularly the kind of play that Montherlant writes) to avoid expressing or implying an ethic, and almost impossible for a viewer not to make a value judgment on the ethic that he observes. In this respect, Montherlant reaches back to the tragedies of ancient Greece where the struggles are generated by inner conflicts. There is a difference, however. The Greeks' struggles resulted from

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[71]Montherlant, Théâtre, (Pléiade), pp. 107-108.

[72]Cf. Montherlant: Théâtre (Paris: Bibliothèque de la Pléiade, 1965). This is a collection of Montherlant's plays, his critical essays and critiques of prominent French critics.

a revolt against some external code, "with the result that the audience often has the impression of being asked to approve of certain values rather than be moved by the pathos of the conflict itself."[73]

Such a struggle against a self-induced moral code is Montherlant's own struggle although he may claim that his plays are not autobiographical. This may be true, but it can be said with equal truth that he is never far from his characters. If the characters do not necessarily express his ideas--ideas found throughout his many notes and essays--they perhaps express something deeper, Montherlant's inner conflict. The lack of consistency in Montherlant's characters is not something that Montherlant is unaware of: it is something he creates deliberately in order to show the human side of personality. It is not easy to tell where Montherlant's sympathies lie, nor is it easy for an audience or reader to be sure where his own sympathies should lie. There are times when Montherlant turns against his own characters--Alvaro in Maître, Ferrante in La Reine morte, Georges Carrion in Demain il fera jour. This is Montherlant's way of moralizing.

His topics, Montherlant treats in the same way. There is a touch of cruelty in some of his themes. Un incompris recalls the Greek comedies in their ridiculing of topics

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[73]Guicharnaud and Beckelman, op. cit., p. 101.

treated with grave respect in an earlier tragedy. Montherlant treats the same theme seriously in Fils de Personne for which Un incompris was intended as companion piece. Broceliande is Montherlant's idea of a comic character. When he discovers that he is a distant relative of St. Louis, King of France, Broceliande repudiates everything connected with his past life in a frenzied sense of mockery. One cannot help feeling the same derision in Montherlant for Broceliande.

If Montherlant does all these things, it is apparent that his aim as playwright is quite different from that of other playwrights of his generation. As Hobson says, "He does not try, like Marcel Aymé, to construct an ingenious story; nor to be witty, like Roussin; nor to build a coherent poetic universe, like Salacrou; still less, like Sartre, to establish a new philosophy of existence."[74] His plots are simple; he concentrates his energy in the direction of depth--a probing into the soul, searching for the many-sidedness of the individual. "Les tragédies des Anciens," says Montherlant, "sont celles non seulement des membres d'une famille, mais aussi des divers individus qu'il y a dans un même être."[75]

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[74]Harold Hobson, The French Theatre of Today: An English View (London: George G. Harrap and Company, 1953), p. 173.

[75]Montherlant, Notes sur mon théâtre, p. 10.

Montherlant explains further:

> Une pièce de théâtre ne m'intéresse que si l'action extérieure, réduite à la plus grande simplicité, n'y est qu'un prétexte à l'exploration de l'homme; si l'auteur s'y est donné pour tâche non d'imaginer et de construire mécaniquement une intrigue, mais d'exprimer avec le maximum de vérité, d'intensité et de profondeur un certain nombre de mouvements de l'âme humaine.[76]

How does Montherlant obtain "le maximum de vérité"? One of his most effective ways is found in his novel approach to the drama. The self-pity afflicting so many of his characters he offsets by having the character gain a victory over self-- a victory which has all the markings of the sacrifice of a hero, a martyr. His most interesting characters, therefore, act more in compliance with a negative code of ethics than from rebellion against a traditional, ingrained system of morality.[77]

This approach is due in part to Montherlant's stoicism which makes him turn his back on the world of reality and toward an imaginary world which he can use as a background to accentuate the interior feelings and states of conscience of people in a struggle with themselves. Through this modified view, the audience is able to see into the character's basic evil propensities. It is not so much that Montherlant presents a false world as a different world

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[76] Ibid., p. 31.

[77] Pierre Trotignon, "Le Stoïcisme de M. de Montherlant," Le Théâtre Populaire, No. 21 (Novembre 1, 1956), p. 19.

from the sham and pretense he finds in the world of reality. In other words, Montherlant works within the free-moving panorama of an imaginary theatrical world. Trotignon explains the same thing in a somewhat different way.

> Nous nommerons donc stoïcisme cette prétence fictive de M. de Montherlant à son monde imaginaire, cet entrechat de liberté illusoire qu'il esquisse à la limite extrême de chaque action, serrant un peu plus fermement les noeuds qui le ligotent au réel.[78]

But Montherlant is not always successful in reaching this imaginary world. True, working in the realm of the imagination furnishes him the opportunity to pretend differently from other writers, but when he attempts to add dimension to his concretized characters, his reconstruction becomes vacuous, the apparent result of stratagem.[79]

Frequently ignoring logical evolution of character,[80] Montherlant is Shavian in his search into inner reality and surrounding complications. He appears interested primarily in developing a smooth line of exposition in the unmasking of a soul caught in the throes of an agony, the exaggerated dimensions of which are not always apparent to even the most attentive, scrutinizing critic. Perhaps this is what Montherlant means when he says, "il n'y a aucune règle pour faire une bonne pièce. Mais il faut

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[78] Ibid.

[79] Ibid.

[80] Ibid., p. 27.

beaucoup de malice."[81]

Nonetheless, Montherlant's fictitious stage-world fails because he uses the same traditional relationship between his fictitious conscience and the real world. Trotignon believes that "Montherlant fuyait dans l'imaginaire pour échapper aux menaces du concret."[82] But there lurk in this imaginary world numerous threats which, in the theatre tend to crop up as mean and petty character traits. By taking refuge in an imaginary world, Montherlant's plays reveal their creator's deep-seated hostility to the world of every day reality.

Montherlant's pessimism is the result of feeling rather than thought, an area which aligns itself with the French nihilistic tradition.[83] Montherlant sees confusion in the world and misery in man. Man's purpose then becomes to alleviate his own misery and this he can do only through the enjoyment of pleasures which satisfy his senses. But the man of intellect, according to Montherlant, rises above this sea of nothingness, above the turmoil of mediocre existence, and grasps the meaning of his nothingness. Man's conscience must be his guide, but a guide sufficient to itself without the trammels of codes and dogmas imposed from without. Such a tendency opened wide the

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[81]Montherlant, Notes sur mon théâtre, p. 9

[82]Trotignon, op. cit., p. 19.

[83]Simon, op. cit., p. 111.

gates of irony where Montherlant could discharge his arrows at whatever stood in opposition to his views. Eventually cynicism and scepticism gained control and Montherlant's trips to Africa and his acquaintance with the nihilist poets of the Middle East fixed these dark frames of mind in his soul.[84]

Not all of Montherlant is dark; there are gradations of the darkness of spirit extending to light gray. In one of the notes appended to Fils de Personne,[85] Montherlant cites criticism by Thierry-Maulnier and Henri Lenormand who advance the theory that Montherlant's heroes in sacrificing not themselves but others is an operation akin to exorcism. By exorcising the weaknesses of others, Montherlant's heroes feel that their own weaknesses are also exorcised. Actually Montherlant goes beyond this theory by introducing the bullfight as a ritual in which the matador slays his own evil propensities by killing the bull.[86] If Montherlant's characters are willing to cause others to make costly sacrifices, it is no less true that frequently his characters sacrifice to others that part of themselves which is most human and has the most relevance to their psychological makeup, even going so far as to sacrifice

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[84]Beer, op. cit., pp. 123-131.

[85]Henry de Montherlant, Fils de Personne (Paris: Gallimard, 1944), Note IV, pp. 190-200.

[86]Chiari, op. cit., pp. 222.

their happiness, indeed, their very quest for happiness.

Among Montherlant's characters, such an attitude is contagious. They see in others their own faults, despise them for the same, because they realize that this is what they are really like, but not what they wish to be. Montherlant's great skill in psychological drama manifests itself in the ironic way in which these petty characters make a show of sacrificing something they do not want in the first place, but in the end they stand revealed as they really are in their deception and pseudo-moralizing. La Ville dont le prince est un enfant is a case in point. The setting in a Catholic school gives Montherlant the opportunity to penetrate into a religious atmosphere where all is judged in terms of a rigid moral code. But Montherlant goes far beyond the pervasiveness of any moral code: he reaches out to psychological motivation and achieves a fusion of opposing forces within the character of the Abbé de Pradts, who under the guise of saving one of the students, Soubrier, from the pernicious influence of Sevrais, has the latter expelled, only to learn that Soubrier himself has been sent away by the Superior so that he can be free from the improper attentions of de Pradts. The Abbé finds himself in the same position as Sevrais. The irony of it is that in trying to make Sevrais pay for his weakness, de Pradts receives the same payment he had issued to Sevrais. Each has lost--the same object in the same manner.

What Guicharnaud and Beckelman call the "dialectic of sacrifice"[87] appears often enough in Montherlant to be regarded as a trait. Many of the playwright's characters get a fixed but warped view of themselves since they see only their qualities, their virtues, and are blind to all the destructive forces within themselves, particularly the most destructive of all, self-love. Montherlant makes this the central conflict of many of his plays; his characters find themselves unable to reconcile their ideals with truth--at least truth as Montherlant sees it at that moment. He is not being untrue to his art; his vision of truth changes from one play to another, but it is not so much truth that interests him at any given moment, but the impact that truth viewed from a superimposed psychology exercises on personality. This is one of Montherlant's cleverest dramatic devices and some of the best moments in his plays are the exploitation of characters in just such predicaments: Broceliande, Ferrante, Abbé de Pradts, Alvaro, Georges Carrion in their continuous soul searching are just such creatures.

Montherlant's technique is so entwined with his concept of character that the two cannot logically be separated. Despite his scepticism and his rejection of the world as society, his acceptance of the concrete world makes him

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[87]Guicharnaud and Beckelman, op. cit., p. 108.

sympathetic toward whatever exists (ontological being) as part of the totality of being. The imaginary world that he imposes upon his theatre prompted him to design some characters which never existed as such, but which took their form and shape from the fruitful imaginings of his own mind. This prompted Montherlant to write, "Il n'est pas un des personnages de mon théâtre avec lequel je ne sois d'accord. . .je ne suis aucun d'eux, et je suis chacun d'eux."[88] Such an attitude allowed him to enter into a dual relationship with his characters, exhibiting an approach unique in twentieth century drama. His attention is engaged by his attempt to design characters who resemble living people only in their agitation and introspection. He attributes to convention the acceptance of well-rounded, well-drawn characters, for they are not found in life.

Character is therefore Montherlant's chief concern. Most of his plays involve historical people whom he has reconstituted to serve his dramatic ends. His process of writing is simple: he looks into an historical event and sets out to explain it. His purpose is not so much to show what happened as to show the meaning of the event in terms of the psychological makeup of the character. "Je fais dire à chacun des personnages ce qu'il doit dire, étant donné son caractère. Aussi écrit-on que je me

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[88]Montherlant, Théâtre, (Pléiade), p. xiv.

contredis."[89]

What disturbs some critics more than the contradiction implied in Montherlant's delineation of character is the lack of motive the characters have for acting as they do.[90] Given Montherlant's talent and his penchant for psychological study, his characters for the most part will be well drawn. Still there is often a lack of proportionate motivation between the character and his actions. Why does Ferrante kill the Queen? Is it for state reasons? Possibly. But Ferrante must realize that the Queen dead will be more powerful than the Queen alive. Is it because of pride? Is he humiliated for having revealed his soul to her and in consequence fears that she will no longer hold him in esteem, nor even believe in him? Is it possibly out of insane cruelty? The answer cannot be gathered from the play, but the puzzle, vexing though it be, is nonetheless dramatic.

Georges Carrion undergoes a profound change from Fils de personne and Demain il fera jour, but the change like that of Ferrante or Malatesta is not a logical change, but a change resulting from forces closely paralleling those of the human condition.

Montherlant keeps the action of his plays simple,

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[89]Montherlant, Notes sur mon théâtre, p. 33.

[90]Gabriel Marcel, L'Heure Théâtrale: De Giraudoux à Jean-Paul Sartre (Paris: Plon, 1959), pp. 43-79, passim.

the structure tight. Almost all of his plays center upon one incident, conforming rigidly to the unities not because Montherlant feels that he must (this would be reason enough for him to violate every rule imposed on him), but because he feels this to be the most effective means for probing deeply into the souls of his characters.[91] In the classic vein of the Greeks and of the Golden Age of French tragedy, his plays are static and the narrative takes up at a point close to the moment of decision or recognition. In La Reine morte Montherlant focuses on an aged king whose political life is destroyed by a son's secret marriage. Port-Royal begins shortly before the Archbishop's appearance to expel the Sisters from the convent. Although very little action occurs on stage in the course of Le Maître de Santiago a great deal of soul searching is laid bare to the audience in a relatively short time, so that the audience has the feeling that much action has supervened. Nothing seems to result from the interior investigations of Montherlant's characters until the very end when the accumulation of repetitions of the basic static situation, the basic conflict, brings about a climax in a release of the pent up tensions.

In Port-Royal Montherlant quickly establishes the basic conflict, shows the convent divided into the brave,

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[91]Chiari, op. cit., pp. 220-221.

constant sisters, and the fearful, traitorous ones. The memory of Mère Angélique gives strength to the constant, but blinded by pride they really do not understand why they resist the Archbishop, and the reason for their final dispersal is as much a puzzle to them as it is to the audience. But it is this very enigmatic quality seen through the trials and sufferings of the sisters that is at the core of the dramatic conflict of the play.

Montherlant's probing is more incisive in La Reine morte where he focuses on two characters only, Ines de Castro and Ferrante. Although the final act of disgrace (Ines' murder) is incomprehensible the reason for Ferrante's and Ines' sufferings is apparent; their ill will and mutual disdain are evidenced throughout the play. They are two typical Montherlantian characters: their consciences vacilate not because they have no moral code, but because a code is precisely what they are constantly searching for. And yet they are not opportunists in the strict sense of the word. It might even appear that Ferrante's decision to murder Ines is as surprising to him as it is unintelligible to the audience.

Guicharnaud and Beckelman seem to offer the best explanation. In this respect, they say

> Montherlant has much the same attitude as La Rochefoucauld in the seventeenth century, who did not deny the courage of certain acts but investigated the motives behind the attitudes of courage and charity. And he discovered that ethics is not a motive but a

> result, that there are essentially no moral intentions, only bursts of passion justified a posteriori by the characters' rationalizations or the outer sanction of appearance.[92]

Chronologically La Reine morte was followed by Fils de personne, in which Montherlant turned from tragedy to satire, but his approach to character is the same. In the preface he states, "Fils de Personne est un drame de la qualité humaine. Un père rejette son fils--et le rejette peut-être vers la mort--parce que celui-ci est de mauvaise qualité."[93] Georges Carrion relinquishes his illegitimate son to his frivolous, impertinent mother, who loves the boy, Gillou, for what he is. The only love Carrion can muster for the boy is for what he should be. Here is the conflict of the play. Carrion, lawyer that he is, concentrating on Gillou's childish eccentricities can see no worthy future for him, and instead of admonishing the child and offering him encouragement, abandons him to his fate, and even worse, succeeds in turning Gillou against his fellow-men and against his country. There is something of Ferrante in Georges and something of Montherlant in all of his characters, "certaine cruauté consciente, une lucidité qui ne prête guère à l'indulgence, une dureté enfin qui est la forme épurée de l'amour."[94]

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[92]Guicharnaud and Beckelman, op. cit., pp. 194-195.

[93]Montherlant, Fils de personne, p. 17.

[94]Pierre de Boisdeffre, op. cit., p. 307.

In the sequel to Fils de personne, Demain il fera jour, the public generally thought that Montherlant had rejected the lesson of Fils, and typically of Montherlant he lets them think as they would. The setting is 1944. Georges Carrion will not allow Gillou to enter the Resistance movement, but insinuations that Georges collaborated with the enemy dictate that he allow Gillou to enlist, and in the first battle he is killed. To Montherlant, Carrion represented the French bourgeois during the Occupation. He is a perfectionist, a man without fault in his own eyes. He abandons his son because he can no longer find it in him to love something with defect. There is really no hero in this play. Carrion diminishing constantly in his own eyes as the war progresses, ends despising himself where before he had reserved such sentiments for others. Yet his blindness in his own regard compels him to project upon Gillou the contempt he feels for himself.

Le Maître de Santiago more clearly than any other of Montherlant's plays shows his detachment from, and his contempt of the world. The play's severity is found not only in its form, but also in its profound theme: depiction of a soul that rejects all material goods, rigid in its detachment from earthly things. Further, there exists an intractable air of unreality in both characters and situation. It is reminiscent of Corneille where the passions which make up the stuff upon which free will exercises

its domination are denounced almost before they appear.

The play demonstrates the agony of the expiring order of Santiago. Don Alvaro, like other of Montherlant's characters before him, hates mankind. He seems to relish whatever tends to destroy man, especially those personal elements within man to which he caters and which in turn destroy him. Mediocrity is something Alvaro, like Carrion and Ferrante detest. But in Maître Montherlant's denouncement differs: Marianna, Alvaro's daughter, rises to her father's spiritual stature in an act of total renunciation.

La Ville dont le prince est un enfant shows a side of Montherlant only suggested in his other works. For the first time, he selects a realistic setting and a totally different group of characters, although some bear the names of characters found in earlier works. Again there is no tragic figure, no tower of strength, no monster of pride, no tenacious unbending will. There are only students and teachers in the confines of a French boarding school. Montherlant has abandoned his Ferrantes, the monster of pride, his Malatesta, a ridiculous, stupid child of mature years, for active adolescents caught up in a questionable friendship, who dream of chivalry, purity and sacrifice and who naively mix their blood in a ritualistic sealing of friendship and show a maturity in many respects well beyond their years.

La Ville is a story that moves. When the Abbé de

Pradts decides to show confidence in the two boys, Sevrais and Soubrier, he unwittingly sets off a chain of events which results in a harrowing experience for all the principals. An innocent, but misinterpreted meeting of the boys, the dismissal of Sevrais by de Pradts, and the subsequent dismissal of Soubrier by the Superior because of the dangerous alliance between the youngster and the Abbé, all precede the necessary and highly dramatic explanations of both de Pradts and the Superior in the final scene.

MONTHERLANT'S STYLE

Although Montherlant took up playwriting only after he had established himself as a novelist, his early works show a flair for the dramatic style. The conversations in his novels are highly dramatic despite their literary elegance, and as dramatist Montherlant retains his taste for literary style, a quality which adds luster to, rather than detracts from his plays. To the French ear they are not so heavy as a private reading of the text might suggest.

Some writers thrive on complexity of makeup, being pulled in one direction and another, open to every influence, so much so that they lose their distinctness of approach, their style; there is no basic consistency, no fixity of method. This need not prove an obstacle to effectiveness as witness the writing of André Gide. Other

writers being more deeply concerned with self and the expression of their individuality, are indifferent to outside influences and tastes, and make a point of constraining their readers to follow them in the pursuits which they consider of primary interest. Montherlant belongs to this group.

His independence as a person is reflected in his independence as a writer; there is only one rule for him, to do as he pleases.[95] Yet his classic ear and his mastery of words produces a lyrical yet impassioned compact style reminiscent of the age of Corneille and Racine without the deficiencies that their rhetoric frequently imposed on their texts. Even though Montherlant is frequently given to lengthy speeches in his plays, these do not alter the basic construction of the text since Montherlant adheres to the principle of static theatre (after the Greeks) where violent action is injected by means of reports and explanations, and is not depicted on the stage. There are scenes in Port-Royal where two Sisters stand face to face and discuss at length their agitation, returning to offstage happenings with a regularity that could become tiresome under a less skillful hand than Montherlant's. The scene[96] between Cisneros and Jeanne in Le Cardinal d'Espagne

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[95]Montherlant, Services inutiles, p. 27.

[96]Henry de Montherlant, Le Cardinal d'Espagne (Paris: Gallimard, 1960), II; iii, pp. 100-133.

contains extremely little physical action, and most of it simply demonstrates Jeanne's waning mental powers. The Cardinal and Queen sit facing each other during the better part of this lengthy scene. Still it is one of the most dramatic in Montherlant's repertory. But instances such as these only bear out Montherlant's basic concept of theatre; a play should expose the inner drives, the passions, the dilemmas of soul at the moment of crisis.[97] Montherlant feels that the most satisfactory means of depicting such states is through elevated language, in spite of his public's hesitation to agree with him. "Les gens," he writes, "appellent 'froide' une pièce qui est bien écrite. Il leur faut beaucoup de points de suspension."[98] In other words, he is not attempting to create naturalistic dialogue; he is attempting to write in the manner of the classicists. When he is criticized for minor discrepancies of style he lashes out

> La dramaturgie moderne interdit les monologues, les apartés, les tirades. Mais notre théâtre classique est plein de monologues, d'apartés, de tirades; il foisonne même de scènes entières où l'on ne parle que par tirades. Notre littérature moderne interdit qu'on répète à peu de distance le même mot; mais Racine ne s'inquiéte nullement de répéter le même mot . . . De même pour les assonances, aujourd'hui prohibées. . . On passe trente ans de sa vie d'écrivain à changer des <u>comme</u> en <u>ainsi que</u>.

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[97]Montherlant, <u>Notes sur mon théâtre</u>, p. 31.

[98]<u>Ibid</u>., p. 19.

> Puis on s'aperçoit que les "Maîtres" n'ont jamais eu de tels soucis, et qu'on a été bien bête. . .[99]

Montherlant, therefore, prides himself in the purity of his style; irate critics and a clamoring public will not dictate methods and approaches to him. Many critics agree with Montherlant, among them Lemarchand who writes,

> Ce qui fait que pour beaucoup d'entre nous le langage de Montherlant paraît--ce qu'il est--à peu près unique en ce siècle, c'est qu'il continue, rajeunit, enrichit le langage jeune et vif, aussi éloigné de la sclérose que de la préciosité, que parlent, à travers toute notre littérature, les auteurs d'humeur et de passion.[100]

If Montherlant is anything, he is a writer of passion, because he is a man of passion, and his public life--what little there is of it--at times so shocking to his countrymen, may in part be due to Montherlant's playing a role he thinks best suited to what the public expects of him. Louis Chaigne who, on occasion has taken Montherlant to task expresses this feeling aptly:

> Je n'ai jamais sans regret parlé avec sévérité de Montherlant. Parmi mes aînés immédiats, il est de beaucoup l'écrivain le plus prestigieux. Est-ce notre faute s'il s'est presque toujours plu à ruiner la haute idée et la noble image que nous nous étions faite de lui . . .?[101]

At the same time that such an expression explains in some measure Montherlant the man, it also explains in large

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[99]Ibid., pp. 26-27.

[100]Lemarchand, "Port-Royal," Théâtre de France (October 5, 1955), pp. 16-17.

[101]Chaigne, op. cit., p. 41.

measure Montherlant the writer. If there is one thing more than another on which critics agree about Montherlant it is that he is unique among French writers. Most of his contemporaries are rhetoricians: the tripping quality of Giraudoux and Anouilh is to the French style what Sean O'Casey's lilting prose is to Irish rhetoric. Montherlant is not a rhetorician. The only exception is his novel, Le Songe. Henri Perruchot, commenting on Montherlant's style says,

> . . . Montherlant est un écrivain de la grande race. On peut même avancer, en étant sûr de ne pas se tromper, qu'aucun de ses contemporains ne se sera fait de l'art d'écrire une conception plus haute que la sienne. Il possède un style, une langue qui n'appartiennent qu'à lui.[102]

The ease and vigor with which Montherlant writes both his novels and his plays makes his style move even in the most static situations. The influence of Barrès on Montherlant is obvious,[103] but probably of greater significance, at least as far as style is concerned, is D'Annunzio. Montherlant himself says, "D'Annunzio m'a donné le mouvement. Mcn style était emmailloté; soudain, comme touché d'un charme, il fit craquer ses bandelettes et se mit à marcher."[104] It is strange that D'Annunzio exercized such

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[102]Perruchot, op. cit., pp. 105-106.

[103]Georges Tronquart, "Montherlant et Barrès," La Table Ronde, no. 155 (November, 1960), pp. 96-117.

[104]Faure-Biguet, op. cit., p. 152.

influence on Montherlant since Montherlant read the Italian poet only in translation. But Montherlant is precise: his youthful style had been somewhat wooden, but suddenly in La Relève du matin it began to leap from the page. At once he tightened his style, and from then on he persistently worked to make his writing lean and tough in the same way that an athlete trains himself to harden his muscles and maintain his conditioning. Although Montherlant wrote with ease, he never ceased editing and polishing his work, in accord with his definition of style: ". . . du style naturel littéraire, . . . un style parlé attentivement revu par la littérature."[105]

Montherlant's plays are not nearly so poetic as his novels, although there is rich imagery in most of the plays. He felt that the tightness of style obviated poetic expression. Such a statement may come as a surprise to one who reads Montherlant's plays where he finds an abundance of poetic images and lyric expression. But contrasted with his early novels, his plays are almost devoid of poetic expression. Montherlant explains his change of attitude in a letter to Henri Perruchot:

> J'ai horreur du théâtre "littéraire", du théâtre "poétic". Or, à partir de 1941, je n'ai plus écrit que des pièces. J'ai pris garde d'en bannir toute "poésie", ou de n'introduire dans une pièce qu'un ou

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[105]Henry de Montherlant, Textes sous une Occupation (Paris: Gallimard, 1953), p. 187.

> deux éléments de poésie, pas davantage. . . . Mais je pense qu'à côté de cela, qui est volontaire, il s'est passé en moi un phénomène involontaire: la substitution de l'esprit de réflexion à l'inspiration poétique.[106]

However, Montherlant cannot escape the poetic style. In the letter he refers mainly to poetic imagery for the poetic style is in evidence even in Montherlant's last plays, Don Juan, Le Cardinal d'Espagne and Broceliande.

Joseph Chiari sums up Montherlant the playwright thus:

> On the purely dramatic plane, Montherlant is the most gifted playwright alive, that is to say he is the one who has the power to grapple with a great theme and to produce a great play. He knows what he can do and what he cannot do; he is like Picasso, who has both the genius and the confidence which enable him to paint under the glare of arc lights and surrounded by film technicians. Montherlant knows what he can do with themes which are within his imaginative experience and, as he is an artist of great integrity, he confines himself to them. He meets his audience, not like a cheap conjuror who clouds by tricks and words the limitations of his trickery, but like a perfect athlete who has scrupulously trained for his performances, or like a medieval knight spiritually and physically prepared to fight a deadly duel, or better still--to use a simile more akin to Montherlant's temperament--like a bullfighter who stands in the arena, in the glare of light, knowing that when "the moment of truth" comes, he can only rely on his skill and courage to face the creative instant which turns death into a work of art.[107]

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[106]Perruchot, op. cit., p. 114.

[107]Chiari, op. cit., p. 222.

MONTHERLANT'S CATHOLICISM

When speaking of a writer two things must be remembered, the person and the author. A certain distance always separates the two, but one is generally a reflection of the other. In order to shed some light on Montherlant the Catholic, this section confines itself to a consideration of Montherlant the author. His works speak for themselves, and besides there is an abundance of material written by the author himself to explain, justify, extend and interpret his writings. In Montherlant there is considerable ambiguity--usually intended. Often, however, he finds it advisable to append notes to his plays to clarify their meaning or to explain his intent. On occasion he writes explanatory essays, particularly when irked by caustic critics who, he claims, do not or cannot understand his works. Montherlant is a severe and competent critic of his own work. After reading his explanations, one is certain what Montherlant intended, although the meaning may not be apparent in the original script. In addition, Montherlant's basic honesty and sincerity make his comments all the more fruitful since he has nothing to gain by cunning and deceit. The world already knows where it stands in his eyes--he is totally indifferent to it. Therefore when he says that a play means such and such, he can be believed. A word of warning. On occasion Montherlant's

wry humor impels him to jest. But the jest is obvious. However, he is generally serious when he speaks of his religious views.

This section, therefore, makes no attempt to judge Montherlant the man, but rather to make an assessment of his Catholicism, his Christianity, as seen in his work.

One of the distinguishing marks of contemporary French theatre is its tendency to shift its moral and ethical orientation; most modern playwrights do not accept traditional standards of morality. As was mentioned earlier[108] the French Catholic intellectual is Catholic in name only. His Catholic home and education backgrounds are part of a rich cultural heritage, but for many intellectuals the Church's appeal resides primarily in its ritual and pageantry, not in its spiritual vitality.

Montherlant's Catholicism is more an adherence to family tradition than the result of personal conviction. He makes this clear in the Preface to La Relève du Matin, where he says that he finds

> . . . ce Christ dans mon héritage et je l'accepte avec le reste, par point d'honneur et par piété, comme on accepte la succession de ses parents, ne vous apportât-elle que des ennuis. Pour rompre avec ce vieux Génie du foyer il me faudrait des raisons irréfutables. Je ne les ai pas.[109]

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[108]Cf., supra., p. 12.

[109]Montherlant, La Relève du Matin, "Préface", p. 23.

His attachment to Christianity is a matter of honor, not a question of allegiance to faith in a theological sense. In an article in La Nouvelle Revue Française, Montherlant speaks for Alban, his hero of Le Songe, in much the same way he speaks for himself. He explains that doubt clouds Alban's mind: he is not certain that there is a God, but if there is ". . . c'est le dieu des chrétiens plutôt que Jupiter ou Bouddha."[110] Practice of religion, according to Alban, is not hypocrisy even when one doubts its fundamental tenets. Such was the manner of Marcus Aurelius and Cicero: ". . . ces hommes y trouvent leur mieux intérieur aussi bien que la gouvernement de la cité; et par là même je me refuse à y voir une hypocrisie.;[111] And Montherlant sums up both his views and Alban's with a quotation from Aurelius Cotta's Nature des Dieux, ". . . un bon citoyen accepte la religion des anciens et la pratique, parce qu'elle est le fondement de la cité."[112] With remarkable penetration Montherlant observes, ". . . on ne saurait soutenir qu'il, Alban, soit un catholique exemplaire; on peut soutenir qu'il est un exemplaire du catholique."[113]

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[110]Henry de Montherlant, "Notes relatives à la religion et aux passions," La Nouvelle Revue Française (May 1, 1923), p. 760.

[111]Ibid., p. 761.

[112]Ibid., p. 759.

[113]Ibid., p. 757.

As with many other French intellectuals, Montherlant was captivated by Barrèsienne Catholicism,[114] whose appeal is primarily to the mysterious and its revelation through dreams and mystical experiences; it is akin to the athlete's respite from the rigors of training or to the mystical feeling that might come over a sensualist at the peak of his pleasure.

In a sense, Montherlant is a pragmatic Catholic. He is more impressed by living examples of religion (both good and bad examples) than he is by the ideal teachings of the Church. Having been blinded by so many uncommitted Catholics he equates Catholicism with poor Christianity, and the scandalous lives of Catholics lead him to conclude that to be Catholic is the opposite of being Christian. His Nietzschean views make him see Catholics adhering to a code of violence and lust, rather than their avowed code of charity, humility and purity. Paradoxical as it may seem, in spite of his lack of faith in the Christian God, he is still sympathetic to his Church.

Perhaps one of the reasons for this sympathy is Montherlant's understanding of Christianity. He realizes that it is a religion based on love and detachment from material things. In the following passage he frankly admits that Christian motives for action are repugnant

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[114]Pierre-Henri Simon, Procès du Héros (Paris: Editions du Seuil, 1950), pp. 43-46.

to him:

> Avant 1925 je m'accommodais d'un grossier amalgame du paganisme avec un catholicisme décoratif et fantaisiste, d'où tout christianisme était absent; je m'en flattais l'imagination; je faisais joujou avec Jésus-Christ. Ensuite vint le temps des "voyageurs traqués", emplumé de quelques blasphèmes postiches, à l'espagnole. Je tirai la barbe au Père éternel. Et voici qu'elle me resta dans la main! J'en fus d'abord un peu effrayé. Mais lui, me clignant de l'oeil; "Elle est fausse, je la mets à cause des importants qui sans cela ne me prendraient pas au sérieux." Puis, se passant la main sur la joue, il ajouta d'un air satisfait: "N'est-ce pas que je suis encore jeune? Et j'ai du mérite, pour sûr, avec les prières que je dois supporter, et les élus modèle série, auxquels je suis bien obligé d'ouvrir la porte." Par cette historiette (inventée de toutes pièces) je veux dire que Dieu est à ses heures un véritable gosse. C'est pourquoi je sais bien que je m'entendrai toujours avec lui. Maintenant je ne prétendais plus avoir de la foi du chrétien, mais du chrétien j'avais dans une grande mesure les sentiments; je me tenais à l'écart de la religion, mais je la respectais; . . .[115]

He separates himself from Christianity; he knows the Gospel but does not accept its doctrine of self-abnegation, humility, and the philosophy of life summarized in the Sermon on the Mount. His spirit of independence precludes any acceptance of a code which might show the least sign of weakness. Harold Hobson arrives at the same conclusion in this way:

> . . . because love, in the larger sense of compassion, is a feeling to which Montherlant is a stranger, those pages of his which are designedly Christian have always been incomplete. His Christian characters, like Don Alvaro, either have not known love, or, if they have been acquainted with it, one has never been sure that

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[115]Montherlant, Service inutile, pp. 23-25.

> Montherlant did not intend it to be in them a sign of weakness.[116]

In an extensive footnote which needs to be quoted in its entirety, Montherlant explains why he abandoned the Christian religion. This text first appeared in 1929 in Pour une Vierge Noire and details some of Montherlant's basic religious convictions:

> Je n'ai pas la foi, mais, quoi que je fasse, le baptême me maintient catholique. Cet abus du mot de l'Eglise, je ne veux pas en profiter: Je suis, c'est l'évidence, à l'extérieur du catholicisme. De là, je le regarde, dans des dispositions variables, et je prends de lui ce qui convient à ma vie spirituelle et à ma vie poétique, y compris une certaine pratique religieuse. Bref, j'use de lui humainement.
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> Je crois avoir de lui une vue plus saine et plus digne que celle que j'en prenais, ou plutôt que je voulais m'en faire, autrefois. Le jugement est la seule chose qui rajeunisse en vieillissant. Mais surtout rien ne vaut de quitter un objet pour le bien voir, et j'en sais quelque chose, ayant passé ma vie à sortir d'où j'étais entré. Et je vois que, s'il m'arrivait quelque jour d'être foudroyé par la "grâce", je me mettrais dans une ligne que je serais tenté d'appeler la ligne de coeur du christianisme, parce qu'il me semble la voir courir, comme la sève dans un arbre, au coeur du christianisme: elle est une tradition qui va de l'Evangile à Port-Royal, en passant par Saint Paul et par Saint Augustin (ne frôle-t-elle pas Calvin?). La devise que je lui donne est le cri de Bossuet: "Doctrine de l'Evangile, que vous êtes sévère!" et sa figure celle de la voie qui toujours se rétrécit.
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> Chercher à concilier Pan et Jésus-Christ sera toujours un exercise souverain pour vous faire jouer l'imaginative, si vous n'êtes pas croyant: cela mène à s'exciter l'esprit et se fouetter le sang, avec les biographies de tels papes marqués au sceau de la Bête, élixirs incomparables, qui vous redresseraient un mort, les Nérons auprès d'eux sont trop simplets. Mais si

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[116]Hobson, op. cit., pp. 189-190.

> l'on croit! L'Eglise catholique mêlant Jésus-Christ aux patries, Jésus-Christ à l'argent, Jésus-Christ au sport, que sais-je, donnant pour dames d'honneur à Jésus-Christ les trois Concupiscences en habit de fête, c'est un spectacle qui vous remplit d'une poésie trouble et âcre, si vous êtes au dehors, mais qui vous fige si vous vous mettez seulement un instant dans la peau d'un homme qui aime le crucifix.[117]

There is no equivocation here. There is no doubt as to Montherlant's position. Philippe de Saint-Robert puts it succinctly: "Montherlant a quitté la religion sur la pointe des pieds, sans blasphèmes, ni insultes . . ."[118]

Montherlant identifies certain contradictions in common Catholic practices, but there is a more basic contradiction of which Montherlant is aware, that between the spirit of Christianity and the spirit of the world. At one end of the spectrum of contradiction, is reason--or genius--with its demands for beauty and grandeur; at the other end faith--holiness--with its concern for self-sacrifice and love of God and neighbor. These two extremes produce the natural genius and the saint and in the great in-between is the vast spread of Christian culture. It is evident that Christianity fosters strong contrasts, particularly by persistently proclaiming its priority over the secular world and in so doing makes it possible for these contraries to endure. This explains for the most part why so many extremes exist in Christian culture, for Christianity has fostered

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[117]Montherlant, Service inutile, p. 25.

[118]Philippe de Saint-Robert, "Montherlant et le Catholicisme," La Table Ronde, No. 155 (November, 1960), p. 42.

their growth by continually pointing out the opposition inherent in the two spheres of reason and faith. Furthermore, the authoritarian position of the Church has created a clientele among its members which accepts out of a spirit of fear what it would often reject from conviction. In a sense, poets and intellectuals have frequently raised themselves above the authority of the Church and created for themselves a new world, a world which it is necessary to enter if one is to judge them fairly. Poetic truth is not religious truth.[119] A crucial problem arises, however, when boundary lines are crossed and two autonomous forces clash. But as Holthusen observes, the conflict is not irrevocable.

> There are aspects of genius which are beyond the saint's judgment--which are, in fact, a refutation of saintliness. The saint's role is that of breathing spiritually into the nostrils of an all too worldly Christendom, of imparting the vitality of faith to the body of Christian culture. Finally, however, Christian culture requires more than saintliness; it requires genius. Nor is the genius simply endured for the sake of culture. Indeed, Christian culture needs, demands, and above all loves the genius. It follows then that our search for the Christian poet is illusory unless joined by the quest for the greatest poet.[120]

Montherlant is, of course, aware of the conflict between what can be called the natural man and the man of

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[119]Hans Egon Holthusen, "What Is Christian in a Christian Literature?" Christian Faith and the Contemporary Arts, Finley Eversole, Editor (New York: Abingdon Press, 1962), pp. 93-94.

[120]Ibid., p. 95.

the Gospels. He finds a fundamental basis of agreement which suggests acquaintance with Thomas Aquinas' dictum that grace builds on nature.

> Nous n'avons jamais été un chrétien authentique. Mais nous avons toujours été quelqu'un pour qui le bien et le mal existent, et qui a adoré la morale naturelle à travers les formes de la machine catholique. . . La morale chrétienne pratique étant le plus souvent la morale tout court, je l'admire, et m'efforce de la suivre.[121]

Claudel frequently uses human means to bring man to God. In Partage de Midi, Mesa comes to an understanding of his sufferings by considering Christ's sufferings on the Cross. In Montherlant's Malatesta, the Pope pardons Malatesta because of the pleas of his wife, through which he is brought to some realization of the love of God. In one play there is betrayal; in the other devotion, but each reaches the supernatural through the natural.

Of course, good and evil are relative for Montherlant. Good is what appears good or at least justifiable. No moral code exercises sway over Montherlant. He cannot see how an individual can maintain his freedom and at the same time lend obedience to a code. His nearest approach to the spirit of Christianity is his love and sympathy for the poor, the unfortunate, the down-trodden. His feeling may not be what the theologian calls Christian charity, but it is a sincere pity. His entire book Le Sable en Rose,

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[121]Montherlant, La Relève du Matin, "Préface", pp. 22-23.

shows just such sympathy for the oppressed Arabs of Colonial France, at the same time as it weaves a story of sensual love, shocking in its boldness, but tender in its compassion.

Holthusen, continuing his analysis of Christian literature, assists the modern mind to understand writers like Montherlant.

> . . . the poet, as poet acts from a different primal source of insight into the world than does the religious man, be he priest, layman, or saint. The latter penetrates the mystery of God by way of the life of prayer, love and suffering. But for the poet, bliss and despair are his life and work! His happiness is that of a master craftsman. His weeping and gnashing of teeth are signs, not of readiness for repentance, but of being shaken by those creative powers which the theologian defines as "demonic." This is not to say that the poet is an aesthete or a formalist or a man of mere sensibility, or that he is able to attain at will a cynical distance from the prayer he writes, the song of praise, or the cry from the depths. The poet has material, content, ideas. He is an ethically and, at times, a politically responsible human being. He is, when he writes, present in his whole person with numerous nonaesthetic interests. Hence, if he is Christian his poem is an expression of his faith, though it is first of all an expression of his love of language and of his struggle with the angel of language.[122]

Montherlant is a poet with a passion for writing. In Service inutile, after describing a delightful period spent in his favorite occupation, writing, Montherlant concludes, "Que la divinité, si elle existe, trouve son

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[122]Holthusen, op. cit., p. 94.

bien dans tout cela: il y est."[123]

Montherlant glories in the aesthetics and the discipline of writing. Yet, in both his plays and his novels, there is something lacking in his aesthetics. His heroes often prove distasteful and often there is no apparent justification for their mode of conduct. Such is not to be explained in terms of Montherlant's imagined world of pseudo-Christianity, for even the tragedies of Ancient Greece promote a willing suspension of disbelief. If it is difficult to accept Montherlant's theatrical world, it is probably because his Christianity bears only a vague resemblance to the original. As Hobson states: "There is nothing in Montherlant that cannot be found in Christianity, but there is an enormous amount in Christianity that cannot be found in Montherlant. . ."[124]

As was stated in the section on Montherlant the playwright, his imagined world affords him great liberty of movement. However, without the solid foundation of a Christian moral code underlying the structure of his plays, Montherlant finds it difficult to be convincing and to answer the basic questions implicit in his texts. In the Postface to Le Cardinal d'Espagne, he writes:

> Le problème que j'ai évoqué principalement dans cette pièce est celui de l'action et de l'inaction, touché

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[123]Montherlant, Service inutile, p. 42.

[124]Hobson, op. cit., p. 192.

> dans Service Inutile dès 1933, et plus tard dans Le Maître de Santiago. Il me semble qu'ici il dévore tout le reste. Car il n'y a pas de problème plus essentiel pour un homme que celui de décider si ses actes ont un sens ou n'en ont pas.[125]

The play is deeply concerned with this problem; it is at the core of the dialog throughout, but in the last analysis the play proclaims that there is no meaning in man's actions.

Perhaps the disquiet in Montherlant's profoundly poetic spirit is partly explained by his inability to find meaning in man. But there is evidence of a quest. In many of his works he poses questions which proceed from the very depths of his soul. Am I a Catholic? Why am I not a better Catholic? Will I ever return to my faith fully? Am I not a better Catholic than those who claim to be good Catholics?

His first works gave promise of another Gide, Claudel or Mauriac. Apologists probed his writings searching for a new defender of the faith and just at the precise moment when they thought they had found their champion (in works such as Aux Fontaines du Désir and Les Olympiques, both works of deep spiritual understanding) Montherlant impertinently rejected their confidence and proclaimed his heritage as issuing not from Catholicism, "mais comme tenants d'un ordre du Tibre dont le Catholicisme fait partie."[126]

Although the Catholic spirit permeated Montherlant's

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[125]Montherlant, Le Cardinal d'Espagne, pp. 212-213.

[126]Henry de Montherlant, Le Paradis à l'ombre des épées, (Paris: Editions Bernard Grasset, 1924), p. 106.

studies at Sainte Croix, the core of the curriculum was the Greek and Roman classics. The richness of these two traditions, Catholicism and the classics, form the base of traditional European private education, but their opposing foci are capable of effecting a conflict within the soul that posits certain dangers. Graeco-Roman humanism turns toward man: it centers upon nature and seeks to cultivate the powers of body and soul; it calls for keen sensitivity, independence of mind, and absolute commitment to principle. Christianity is significantly different: life is a transitory thing, the first rule is self-denial, and the greatest virtue is charity which combines love of God and love of neighbor into two facets of the same disposition.

The resulting conflict between God-centered and man-centered ideologies has plagued man from Christianity's inception. The struggle is evident in Montherlant. Many of his works show this conflict, this dichotomy clearly: Le Relève du Matin is replete with examples; it overflows in Le Songe, Les Olympiques and Les Bestiaires; it shades off somewhat in Aux Fontaines du désir, in Service inutile and Les Jeunes Filles only to reappear in Le Solstice de juin and even more so in Le Maître de Santiago.

In his early works, Montherlant tempered his dual view of religion, thus giving a degree of assurance to Catholic observers who relied on his keen intellect and devotion to

family tradition to bring him around. They were mistaken. When Les Olympiques appeared, he left no doubt as to his position. It was clear that he rejected the Scriptures and that he gave a naturalistic, pagan interpretation to Catholicism. In Les Olympiques he puts one of the characters on guard against the Christians with, "Tiens bon, reste heureux et refuse-leur toute pitié. Comme le Christ qu'elle s'est choisie, si l'humanité est crucifiée, c'est qu'elle veut bien. Et tu peux toujours lui crier, comme avec bon sens les pharisiens: Tu n'as qu'à descendre de ta croix."[127]

That Montherlant found greater freedom of expression in paganism than in Catholicism is evident in his portrayal of inspiring deeds, themselves the outgrowth of pagan institutions. Christianity has not been able to produce similar effects in Montherlant. Probably the best explanation of this anomoly is Montherlant's nihilism. Both the Christian and the nonbeliever may look upon the world with a contempt which is the product of sad experience, disillusionment or from a consideration of the fleeting quality of its attractions. The thought of death, a frequent occurrence in Montherlant's plays, can be for both Christian and pagan a means of detachment from the world, but the Christian practices detachment in order to attach himself to something--to God. Self-denial, for the Christian is

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[127]Henry de Montherlant, Les Olympiques (Paris: Gallimard, 1954), p. 147.

not so much a practice as a frame of mind. In fact, the Christian, by attaching himself to God, shows that he is seeking the greatest good he can possibly conceive, that the detachment from self and from the world is proof of his love of God and his genuine love of self. Most of Montherlant's tragic heroes (Alvaro, Ferrante, Jeanne, Cisneros--even Soeur Angélique) have a certain "horreur de la vie,"[128] a severity reminiscent of the stoics and of an antiquated atheism. The Christian must love life. But because of the vanity of the world, he chooses in favor of Christianity with its promise of the fullness of life as opposed to the fruitless mediocrity of the world. Like many of Montherlant's heroes, the Christian tries to put the world out of his thoughts, out of his heart, because he feels that there is in his heart no room for both God and the world. Not that anything in creation is evil in itself, because for the Christian all is good, all comes from the hand of God.

In Service inutile, Montherlant mentions that he can call to mind only one verse from the Bible, a book which he looks upon as a demoralizing force in Western culture: "J'ai regardé la terre et elle était du vide et du rien, et le ciel, et il n'y avait point en lui de lumière."[129] But this is God speaking, decrying a world which has

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[128]Henry de Montherlant, "Ferrante et Alvaro," Montherlant: Théâtre (Bibliothèque de la Pléiade, 1965), p. 683.

[129]Montherlant, Service inutile, "Chevalerie du Néant," p. 61; Jeremiah, IV:23.

forgotten Him, a world without Him. This is the world of Montherlant's heroes, particularly the world of Jeanne. But as Jeanne looks within herself and around herself she sees a world completely different from the world the Christian knows. She finds nothing. And Cisneros, the Cardinal, concedes to Jeanne after their interview, incidentally one of the most dramatic scenes in all of Montherlant, "Ceux qui ont regardé ce qu'elle appelle le néant et ce que j'appelle Dieu ont le même regard."[130] This is precisely what the Christian cannot admit.

Such an attitude is strongly reminiscent of extreme Jansenism--more than a touch of which is found in Montherlant. His Jansenism is severe combining as it does the Jansenist quest for oblivion and the pagan exaltation of self. However, it must be added that severity in the Catholic Church is not limited to the Jansenists: there are parallel examples in St. Paul, St. Jerome, even in the gentle Bossuet, and in the American convert, Orestes Bronson. On the other hand it is just as easy to isolate examples of sweetness and tenderness: St. Theresa of Lisieux (not her counterpart of Avila, nor her co-reformer, St. John of the Cross), John XXIII, St. Francis de Sales and St. Vincent de Paul to name a few.

Just as with the saints, Montherlant's heroes do not

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[130]Montherlant, Le Cardinal d'Espagne, III, 2, p. 67.

find death fearsome. They long for it as a release from a world they despise and a condition of their entry into eternal bliss. Death is their inescapable fate but one accepted in the design etched by Christ in his thirty-three years on earth. At least this is what Montherlant's characters say. In Le Cardinal d'Espagne, Cisneros says to his nephew, "L'avenir dira que je suis mort avec une sérénité chrétienne."[131]

Much of Montherlant's facility in creating Christian characters lies in his readiness to establish common elements between his own life and the Christian's. Although he rejects the basic common element, faith, he sees notable similarities, and these he injects into his most passionate characters, so that on the surface their actions and dispositions often appear fundamentally Christian. The Christian ought to despise the world; Montherlant and his characters despise the world. The Christians accept absolutes; Montherlant and his characters do the same, but with certain important alterations. It is necessary at this juncture to establish whether this acceptance of absolutes conforms to the Christian view.

On the surface, Montherlant's characters speak the language of Christians, of mystics. But there is the ever-present element of nihilism so contrary to the

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[131]Montherlant, Le Cardinal d'Espagne, III, 2, p. 170.

Christian spirit: the rejection of the world by Ferrante through selfish motives is one instance. The same applies to Alvaro, Marianne, Cisneros, Jeanne, Angélique. Their rejection of the world is primarily an act of self-sufficiency rather than a quest for God. They know what they are to renounce, but not what they are to hold fast. Again the best example comes from Le Cardinal d'Espagne. In the poignant scene between the Queen, Jeanne, and the Cardinal, Cisneros, he says that it has been reported to him that she does not attend mass. She answers:

> LA REINE: On vous a dit que je n'allais pas à la messe. On ne vous a pas dit que je vais quelquefois à ma chapelle quant il n'y a pas la messe. Quand il n'y a rien, comme dans ma vie.
>
> CISNEROS: Dans votre chapelle il n'y a jamais rien, Il y a Dieu, toujours.
>
> LA REINE: Dieu est le rien.[132]

And later in the same scene the Queen says

> . . . il y a deux mondes, le monde de la passion, et le monde du rien: c'est tout. Aujourd'hui je suis du monde du rien. Je n'aime rien, je ne veux rien, je ne résiste à rien. . . , plus rien pour moi ne se passera sur la terre, et c'est ce rien qui me rend bonne chrétienne, quoi qu'on dise, et qui me permettra de mourir satisfaite devant mon âme, et en ordre devant Dieu, même avec tout mon poids de péchés et de douleur . . . .[133]

Such an attitude is far removed from Christianity, but it conforms to Montherlant's Christianity. Blanchet

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[132]Montherlant, Le Cardinal d'Espagne, II, 3, pp. 117-118.

[133]Ibid., p. 132.

sees certain basic flaws in Montherlant's characters which he feels are a reflection of Montherlant's own personality. He writes:

> . . . ses personnages catholiques nomment Dieu ce que lui-même . . . appelle le néant, pourvu qu'il puisse enfin exprimer par leur bouche ce qui en lui-même crie si fort. Quoi donc? Le besoin d'un dépassement de soi et d'un au-delà de tout; la tension vers un absolu qui la soustraie aux contingences, le sépare des médiocres, le ravisse au-dessus de lui-même, . . . et peut-être à lui-même. Dans le catholicisme, c'est cela qu'il aime; dans les personnages chrétiens inventés par lui, c'est cela qu'il met.[134]

Another close similarity between Montherlant and Christianity is the frequent use of the terms "le rien," and "le néant." These words occur repeatedly in the writings of the great mystics, but the meaning they attach to the term "nothing" is quite different from Montherlant's meaning. For the mystic God's presence is pervasive, but more importantly in the present considerations, it is transcendent. He is everything beyond creation but He is nothing that man can know fully. Jeanne is an atheist in the same sense that Montherlant is an atheist, that is, in a practical sense not in a speculative sense. Montherlant recognizes this: ". . . le nihilisme athée de la reine Jeanne, qui est un peu le mien propre. . ."[135] In the context of the play, Jeanne stands revealed as one for

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[134]André Blanchet, S. J., La littérature et le spirituel: Classiques d'hier et d'aujourd'hui, Vol. III (Paris: Aubier, Editions Montaigne, 1961), pp. 263-264.

[135]Saint-Robert, op. cit., p. 45.

whom God does not exist, does not count, is really nothing, a void having no bearing on her spiritual life. Father Blanchet explains this idea of nothingness further:

> Le mystique chrétien s'éprouve, lui aussi, comme "vide" de tout, mais ce vide est aspiration à la plénitude ou plutôt plénitude qui s'ignore; comme privé de Dieu, mais sa souffrance est cri vers la Présence, et ce cri est déjà l'oeuvre de la Présence: "Tu ne me chercherais pas . . ." La "nuit" où se reclut la reine--avec quelle volupté maladive!-- n'a rien de commun avec celle d'un saint Jean de la Croix, laquelle est attente de la lumière et déjà excès de lumière.[136]

The differences in St. John's "Dark Night of the Soul" and Jeanne's night of sensual reverie are poles apart. But Jeanne's sentiments belong to the core of Montherlant's basic view of man.[137] More will be said on Montherlant's view on Self later in this section.

In a letter to Philippe de Saint-Robert, Montherlant states:

> Le Christianisme est pour moi un fait que j'approuve en partie, et en partie réprouve. Mes ouvrages expriment tour a tour mon approbation et ma réprobation . . . . Toute mon oeuvre est une oeuvre où joue la dissociation, fondée sur le principe héraclitéen de l'harmonie des contraires et de l'équivalence. Mon attitude à l'égard du christianisme peut paraître "étrange" à ceux qui ne comprennent pas bien la base philosophique de mon oeuvre. Elle est l'aboutissement inévitable de cette philosophie pour ceux (extrêmement rares) qui ont bien vu cette base.[138]

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[136]Blanchet, op. cit., p. 258.

[137]Cf., supra., pp. 80-87.

[138]Saint-Robert, op. cit., p. 46.

In many modern writers whose works focus on man's spirit, faith and doubt are not mutually exclusive. There is a force in French writing, epitomized in Claudel, which accepts the traditional approaches to man's relationship to God with a tenacious and rigid devotion, an approach which the majority of Catholics adhere to as the only realistic approach. Their beliefs are based on what is referred to in theology as the "probable opinion of prudent and enlightened theologians." What is Catholic for one generation is Catholic for all generations. But there is another force which grapples with truth as it appears in the caleidoscopic manifestations of the Self. For them, the Self in all its ramifications is concrete reality. Therefore, some aspects of truth change, and the questions arising in each soul demonstrate this change irrefutably. Here is where the poet feels that his insight promotes the greatest understanding of the human condition, and he looks at these manifestations of truth no matter what their origin--Christian, Judaeic, Oriental. Evil, sin and the meaninglessness of life are tangible to him, and there is a sympathy for the godless, for the lost spirit. Even Christian writers feel free, indeed responsible to probe into these areas and to determine their own bases of reality. In some instances, authors considered outside the pale of the Church, such as Baudelaire and Camus, are looked upon by others as belonging within the group of Catholic authors

because their works always suggest some communication with the Church, with the Christian. Montherlant is often placed in such a group because of his preoccupation with paganism, bullfighting and sports. Although the differences existing among writers included in this group tend to disjoin what might be called a movement, there are remarkable similarities. There is always the concern with pagan antiquity, classicism and with the Renaissance. Gide and Montherlant find common ground in what Gide calls l'acte gratuit.[139] More consistency can be found in Gide's approach to Christianity although there are at least two distinct periods in his life: his life outside the Church and his life within it. But his concept of l'acte gratuit maintains him in readiness for any movement of the imagination. There is built into his concept the idea that no two beings are alike, and there are constantly changing differences woven into the same being. This is all the more apparent in Montherlant where Heracleitean differences seem the only reality. If such a view is formulated in the mind, how much more fruitful is it when it reigns in the imagination, as is the case with Montherlant. As has been repeatedly pointed out, Montherlant's heroes wish to be cut off from the world, and in effect really are. Gide

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[139]Léon Pierre-Quint, André Gide: L'Homme, Sa Vie, Son Oeuvre, Entretiens Avec Gide et Ses Contemporains (Paris: Librairie Stock, 1952), pp. 104-114.

summarizes this view when he says

> Je haïssais les foyers, les familles, tous lieux ou l'homme pense trouver un repos, et les affections continues, et les fidélités amoureuses, et les attachements aux idées--tout ce qui compromet la justice; je disais que chaque nouveauté doit nous trouver toujours tout entier disponibles.[140]

That Montherlant leans toward Gide's view is evident in his acceptance of Jansenism, his sympathy toward which he clearly expresses in Port-Royal. He delineated the foundation for his own breed of ethic in Service inutile, an ethic based on attachment to honor and integrity.[141] His philosophy rests on the belief that he is different from the rest of mankind and entertains the desire to be far removed from its vulgar, mediocre pursuits. Still he finds no refuge in the more cultivated segment of society, from which he remains aloof, looking on as an observer, firmly protected from contagion by a fortification of individuality and rejection.

Such an attitude not only estranges Montherlant from secular society, but also induces a spirit which is irreconciliable with Christianity. Self becomes the measure of man. Since the outside world offers no psychological refuge to Montherlant, his contemptuous glances at it serve only as a rebounding surface from which he returns into

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[140]André Gide, Les Nourritures Terrestres (Paris: Gallimard, 1921), p. 74.

[141]See Montherlant, Service inutile, 1935 Edition, pp. 264-269.

himself, where he can probe his imaginary world unhampered--expanding it, ordering it, exploiting it. Contempt for the world is so strong in Montherlant that there is never a genuine encounter with reality, there is always an avenue of escape.

In spite of this non-Christian exploitation of self, Montherlant, as was mentioned above,[142] is strongly influenced by Christian asceticism. Almost all of his main characters evince a remarkable detachment from material things, a detachment, however, that does not prevent them from seeking some measure of approval from the very world they despise. As Alvaro says, "Le parfait mépris souhaite d'être méprisé parce qu'il méprise, pour s'y trouver justifié."[143] Montherlant's sefl-sufficiency needs the world if for nothing more than to have an object of derision, a testing ground for its derision.

Still Montherlant's basic philosophy centers upon gratification of self. He says,

> . . . vie naturelle, vie innocente, souvent partagée avec les seules bêtes, prenant toujours tout mon temps, et étant toujours de loisir; ne faisant jamais, et n'écrivant jamais, que ce qui me plaisait, et au moment où cela me plaisait; et ne comptant avec personne.[144]

For the Christian, self-seeking is always contrary to the

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[142]Cf., supra., p.

[143]Montherlant, Le Maître de Santiago, III, iii, p. 112.

[144]Montherlant, Service inutile, p. 27.

life of grace to which he is committed. In Théâtre[145], Montherlant makes mention of a moment of ecstacy where no trace of prayer is involved. Without prayer, however, the ecstacy he speaks of is more likely the rapture of an art connoiseur before an inspiring painting. Even here there is a difference: the connoiseur is not so concerned with self that he forgets the painting; the painting is the cause of his exhilaration. Montherlant's ecstacy is a form of contemplation that does not contemplate, a form of prayer that does not pray. There is a ring of falseness about such an experience since it is circumscribed by the Self. Commenting on this experience Blanchet says that it is reminiscent of a man "enchaîné à son moi, et qui tôt reprend conscience de ses chaînes."[146]

Contemplation without God is a theological misorientation. But for Montherlant the Self is the real proving ground. His attitude is suggestive of some rather famous lines of John Henry Cardinal Newman, lines which caused no less stir than do many of Montherlant's texts relating to the same subject, and astonishingly enough in the same vein. Here is what Newman wrote in A Grammar of Assent.

> I am what I am, or I am nothing. I cannot think, reflect, or judge about my being, without starting from the very point, which I aim at concluding. My

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[145]Henry de Montherlant, "La Charité," Montherlant: Théâtre (Bibliothèque de la Pléiade, 1965), p. 672.

[146]Blanchet, op. cit., p. 264.

> ideas are all assumptions, and I am ever moving in a circle. I cannot avoid being sufficient for myself, for I cannot make myself anything else, and to change me is to destroy me. If I do not use myself, I have no other self to use. My only business is to ascertain what I am, in order to put it to use. It is enough for the proof of the value and authority of any function which I possess, to be able to pronounce that it is natural. What I have to ascertain is the laws under which I live. My first elementary lesson of duty is that of resignation to the laws of nature, whatever they are; my first disobedience is to be impatient at what I am, and to indulge an ambitious aspiration after what I cannot be, to cherish a distrust of my powers and to desire to change laws which are identical with myself.[147]

Montherlant could write "finis" to such lines; they are a summary of his philosophy of life. He resolves his dilemma in quite a different manner than did Newman. For Newman finding himself was finding God. For Montherlant finding himself (at least as seen in his writings) is finding only additional uncertainty.

Montherlant was aware that man's natural powers cannot maintain him at the heights. Without grace man falls back upon himself, and in such a condition it is solely with the force of his intellect that he can return to the rarefied atmosphere of natural contemplation; there is no other force assisting him, no grace to add a dimension to his natural power of contemplation. In a letter to Faure-Biguet Montherlant says,

J'ai dans le caractère ce genre d'élévation qui tient

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[147]John Henry Newman, A Grammar of Assent (New York: Doubleday Image Books, 1955), pp. 272-273.

> à l'imagination plus qu'à l'âme, et qui trompe certains hommes en les transportant au-dessus d'eux-mêmes d'une façon factice, pour les laisser, quant elle retombe, réduits à ce qu'ils sont.[148]

"Reduced to what they are." This is essentially why Montherlant's characters fail in the end. Underneath all their psychological probings, they are looking for an escape; their fundamental premise of withdrawing into Self has within it the elements of its own destruction. Even the notorious Don Juan of Montherlant recognized this dilemma: "Il y a en moi une exaltation et une passion qui ont besoin de recours à Dieu, même si je ne crois pas en Dieu."[149]

Perhaps this is as good a summing up of Montherlant's philosophy of life, his Catholicism as any: "I must take refuge in God, even though I do not believe in God."

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[148]Faure-Biguet, op. cit., p. 76.

[149]Henry de Montherlant, Don Juan (Paris: Gallimard, 1958), III, vi, p. 163.

CHAPTER III

THE CATHOLIC PLAYS OF HENRY DE MONTHERLANT

In the Preface to Port-Royal Montherlant writes, "Port-Royal achève cette 'trilogie catholique' qui comprend avec lui le Maître de Santiago et la Ville dont le Prince est un Enfant."[1] It is the purpose of this chapter to study these three plays in an effort to determine their catholic elements.

Given Montherlant's controversial nature and his self-styled agnosticism, the task of investigating the catholicity of "la trilogie catholique" becomes a necessity and a challenge. Just what is Catholic in these plays? How are they Catholic? And why can they be considered Catholic if there is anything Catholic at all in them? These are questions that this chapter seeks to answer.

Before advancing to a consideration of the "trilogie catholique" it might be advisable to pause over the critical implications of the word "Catholic" in the phrase "Catholic trilogy."

It is almost universally accepted among critics and Catholic critics in particular that there is no such thing as Catholic literature, Catholic art per se. Martin

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[1]Henry de Montherlant, "Port-Royal: Préface," Montherlant: Théâtre (Paris: Bibliothèque de la Pléiade, 1965), p. 982.

Turnell, writing on the philosophy of religious literature (more especially on the philosophy of religious poetry) says

> The problem of literature and belief is a complex one. The writer tries to give his reader an imaginative interpretation of the world as he sees it, or what is often called his "vision". The core of the problem is the relation between beliefs intellectually held and the writer's sensibility, or mode of feeling. We only get a truly Christian work of literature when the writer's whole outlook is informed by his beliefs, when we do not feel (as we do with so many contemporary Catholic writers) that intellectually held beliefs are either being imposed on experience from without, or are only very imperfectly assimilated into the experience.[2]

In effect, what Turnell is saying, and what most critics hold, is that no writer deliberately sets out to write Christian (Catholic) literature. The proselytizer or polemicist may have such an end in view, but not the artist. According to Turnell, Christian literature can proceed from any source as long as the sentiments it expresses conform to and give insight into truth. Yet it is conceded that such insight generally flows from a spirit imbued with Christianity. Turnell explains it thus:

> It is commonly but mistakenly assumed that the primary function of religious poetry is to provide the reader with some form of transcendental experience, and literary critics have contracted the bad habit of describing almost any poetry with a religious theme as "mystical". Poetry is a human activity. We expect religious poetry to interpret life in terms of religion certainly, but we also expect religion to conserve the natural human instincts. Now one of the most disquieting things about modern religious poetry is

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[2]Martin Turnell, Modern Literature and Christian Faith (Westminster, Maryland: The Newman Press, 1961), p. 2.

the failure of the poet's religion to do precisely that.[3]

Maritain, the eminent French philosopher, expands this theme.

> If you want to make a Christian work, then be Christian, and simply try to make a beautiful work, into which your heart will pass; do not try to "make Christian."
>
> Do not make the absurd attempt to dissociate in yourself the artist and the Christian. They are one, if you are truly Christian, and if your art is not isolated from your soul by some system of aesthetics. But apply only the artist to the work; precisely because the artist and the Christian are one, the work will derive wholly from each of them.
>
> Do not separate your art from your faith. But leave distinct what is distinct. Do not try to blend by force what life unites so well. If you were to make of your aesthetic an article of faith, you would spoil your faith. If you were to make of your devotion, a rule of artistic activity, or if you were to turn desire to edify into a method of your art, you would spoil your art.
>
> The entire soul of the artist reaches and rules his work, but it must reach it and rule it only through the artistic habitus. Art tolerates no division here. It will not allow any foreign element, justaposing itself to it, to mingle, in the production of the work, its regulation with art's own. Tame it, and it will accomplish nothing good. Christian work would have the artist, as artist, free.
>
> Nevertheless art will be Christian, and will reveal in its beauty, the interior reflection of the radiance of grace. For the virtue of art which reaches it and rules it directly, presuppose that the appetite is rightly disposed with regard to the beauty of the work. And if the beauty of the work is Christian, it is because the appetite of the artist is rightly disposed with regard to such a beauty, and because in the soul of the artist Christ is present through love. The quality of the work is here the reflection of the love from which it issues, and which moves the virtue of art instrumentally. Thus it is by reason of an intrinsic superelevation that art is

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[3]Ibid., pp. 18-19.

> Christian, and it is through love that this super-elevation takes place.
>
> It follows from this that the work will be Christian in the exact degree in which love is vibrant. Let's make no mistake about it: what is required is the very actuality of love, contemplation in charity. Christian work would have the artist, as man, a saint.[4]

Maritain lays down no guidelines for judging the "actuality of love," nor for judging the saintliness of an individual. Such a judgment is humanly impossible. Therefore, the critic is necessarily confined to pronouncing judgment on the artist's work, and for this end he sets up certain criteria that a religious work of art must possess in order for it to be genuinely Christian. But again these criteria are simply the products of the critics' own understanding and appreciation of religious principles. Montherlant feels that he, himself, is best qualified to judge the Catholic nature of his plays;[5] nevertheless, on numerous occasions he has presented the texts of his plays to the clergy and hierarchy in order that they might scrutinize and pass judgment on his work.[6]

The bulk of Montherlant's work (plays and novels) is

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[4]Jacques Maritain, Art and Scholasticism and the Frontiers of Poetry (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1962), pp. 66-67.

[5]Henry de Montherlant, "Résponse à des Critiques," Montherlant: Théâtre (Paris: Bibliothèque de la Pléiade, 1965), pp. 680-682.

[6]Henry de Montherlant, "À Monsieur l'Abbé C. Rivière," Montherlant: Théâtre (Paris: Bibliothèque de la Pléiade, 1965), pp. 847-850.

serious, intensely dramatic, indeed tragic. This presents yet another difficulty, for in his plays he juxtaposes contrary elements and attempts to fuse them, though they stand poles apart. As Glencross pointedly notes, in true tragedy

> What is contrary to Christianity is the "glorification of the human spirit" joined with "some measure of antipathy to the power which he [the Christian] opposes." And for the Christian the power that he opposes, whether it be psychological or physical is always the power of God. The Christian cannot accept the glorification of human defiance of God's will.[7]

Glencross analyzes the paradoxes found in Christian views on suffering and death. He says,

> The question which is the more manly and noble, to resist necessity or to accept it meekly is . . . the question that is at the back of the whole controversy. That it is more cowardly and weak to accept in the Christian way is perhaps implied, but what is significant is that resistance to necessity is seen as a glory or a virtue in a man. The implication is that the forces that overthrow man are evil and if the Christian likes to call them God, the more fool he.[8]

Then Glencross touches the heart of the problem:

> The truth of the matter is that there is here a perfectly true intuition: death is evil. The positive statement of this is that a man of some virtue should not die.[9]

Then he adds: "The glorification that is involved in a

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[7]A. F. Glencross, "Christian Tragedy," A Christian Approach to Western Literature: An Anthology (Westminster Maryland: The Newman Press, 1961), p. 65.

[8]Ibid., p. 66.

[9]Ibid.

tragic death is always that of virtue over the powers of evil; the antipathy and struggle is the traditional one of virtue with evil."[10]

Christian hope is another element militating against true tragedy. According to Glencross, hope

> is no more a compensation for death than Macbeth's courage or Cleopatra's disregard for the mundane world is a compensation. It is the very presence of spiritual value that makes death's victory so tragic. MacBeth, Cleopatra and the Christian score off death because they have stood by a spiritual value in face of necessity. Glorification of the human spirit and cosmic pessimism is there for all of them. It is only if one imagines that the Christian can see beyond his death that it becomes untragic and farcical like Milton's Satan.[11]

The conclusion which Glencross reaches is particularly apt in Montherlant's case, for his "trilogie catholique" deals with individuals who always have God in view, but whose analysis of their relationship with Him is always askew.

> Although it is the teaching of Christianity that there is no suffering that in the last analysis, is wasted, or that there is any evil in the world that finally and under God is an evil, yet to the individual Christian it does seem to be just the opposite. The Christian in practice cannot make the last analysis. In theory or in hope, some formulation or some vision of the world as it is in God's eyes can be made, but in practice, when it comes to death the cry is always, "My God, My God, why hast thou forsaken me." Yet the perfect Christian keeps to his cross as Macbeth keeps to his sword.[12]

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[10] Ibid., p. 67.

[11] Ibid., p. 68.

[12] Ibid.

Granted then that Christian art is difficult to produce, that Christian literature difficult to write and Christian tragedy a near impossibility, there still remains the task of evaluating Montherlant's "trilogie catholique." It might be added in passing that precious few works in the literature of the Western world conform to Maritain's injunctions. Therefore what we are seeking is insight into Montherlant's trilogy to discover what in it is Catholic (Christian) and to what extent it is Catholic.

In Montherlant's notes there is found, standing alone, a simple quotation from the Persian poet Saadi: "Je te loue, O Seigneur! de nous avoir refusé l'exacte connaissance du bien et du mal, et de l'avoir gardée pour toi."[13] This idea if one of Montherlant's guiding principles and it is evidenced in each of the major characters in "la trilogie catholique."

His view of life is succinctly stated in these same notes where he makes a rapid analysis of his feelings toward mankind as precipitated by recent international and interpersonal relationships. Then he concludes:

> Ce sentiment (bonne entente) repose chez moi sur quatre bases: 1. Ma philosophie, que chacun a raison, 2. Mon amour de la justice, 3. Mon goût pour la générosité chevaleresque, 4. Mon esprit fair play (combinaison de l'esprit d'équité et de l'esprit chevaleresque).

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[13]Henry de Montherlant, Carnets XXIX à XXXV (Paris: Le Choix, 1947), p. 37.

> Ce sentiment fonctionne aussi dans ma vie privée, où je tends toujours à défendre les raisons de mon adversaire, voire de mon ennemi, plus chaudement que les miennes propres, et jusqu'à m'en faire quelquefois un tort vif à moi-même. Mettons, si on veut le ravaler, que cet élan vers mon adversaire est chez moi une vraie manie.[14]

Perhaps it can be said without unfairness at this point that this is Montherlant's Christianity and if we are to find an exemplification of Christianity in his plays, these are precisely the things to be on the lookout for.

As Preface to le Maître de Santiago, Montherlant uses his essay on Greco's painting of Julian Romero, Commander of the Order of Santiago. He states:

> Les deux suppliants du "Romero" sont le réel, car, ces expressions que leur prête le peintre, il est plausible qu'à quelque moment ils les ont eues telles strictement que les voici; et en même temps ils transcendent le réel. Ils sont humains au possible; et en même temps ils réfléchissent le divin.[15]

This is precisely what Montherlant attempts in each of his plays: to show the human side of his characters with a touch of divinity attached. Montherlant is interested in individualizing his characters, but not at the expense of sacrificing universality of appeal. "Au delà des situations particulières, ce à quoi je m'attache toujours, c'est à traiter des problèmes qui se rapportent à la nature

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[14]Ibid., p. 39.

[15]Henry de Montherlant, "Sur le Tableau du Greco: Julian Romero," Montherlant: Théâtre (Paris: Bibliothèque de la Pléiade, 1965), p. 594.

permanente de l'homme."[16]

According to Henri Gouhier, a key to understanding Montherlant's concept of human nature--of tragedy in human nature--is the constant presence of misunderstanding, misapprehension.

> ". . . nous constatons que dans l'univers tragique de Montherlant, il y a des malentendus de l'homme avec lui-même, que ces malentendus postulent une certaine structure de l'existence humaine définie par le mot de Saint Paul: "Dieu seul connait le secret des coeurs."[17]

Gouhier suggests that everything in Montherlant's tragedies happens as though there were some secret of the heart, and that this remains hidden except from God who knows the innermost recesses of the heart. Moreover, Gouhier says, it is difficult to write a tragedy "de l'homme caché"[18] without understanding that a man's secret thoughts are hidden from all except God. And he continues, "De fait, Henry de Montherlant n'échappe ni ne cherche à échapper à la logique qui postule la présence d'un Témoin absolu sous les illusions de la connaissance de soi."[19]

All of Montherlant's characters, according to Gouhier,

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[16]Henry de Montherlant, "Présentation de Malatesta," Montherlant: Théâtre (Paris: Bibliothèque de la Pléiade, 1965), p. 544.

[17]Henri Gouhier, "La religion dans le Théâtre d'Henry de Montherlant," La Table Ronde, No. 212 (September, 1965), p. 6.

[18]Ibid.

[19]Ibid.

possess what Cisneros in le Cardinal d'Espagne calls "l'exaltation."[20] And Gouhier concludes: "Et ceci doit nous faire comprendre pourquoi la question de la religion dans ce théâtre ne se confond pas avec celle de la religion de son auteur."[21] On the surface this may seem to negate what Glencross, Turnell and Maritain say about a religious work flowing from a sainted soul. On the contrary. It is not necessary, nor even desirable that Montherlant be each of his characters, nor that each speaks for Montherlant. Given his understanding of human nature, and given the characters he treats, it is a tribute to his genius that he can present characters in the throes of this conflict between the human and the divine.

The difficulty that modern Christians encounter in Montherlant is his view of Christianity as a principle of extension. The Christians in his plays are completely detached from the things of this world, but even more astonishingly they are detached from themselves. They experience a liberation which frees them from passion, but a liberation which furnishes them with the opportunity of completely annihilating themselves. This is the way Montherlant sees the Gospel applied in the life of his

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[20]Montherlant, Le Cardinal d'Espagne, II: iii, p. 131.

[21]Gouhier, op. cit., p. 8.

tragic figures.[22]

Another disturbing feature to modern Christians is Montherlant's use of classic Greek and more particularly classic Roman figures as prototypes of his tragic characters. For Montherlant, the modern Catholic (and for him this means the Catholic from the time of the Renaissance) has little vital faith. Such a Catholic

> n'a guère que de la superstition. Sa foi véritable, c'est la foi dans la gloire, et ses dieux, ce sont les grands hommes de l'antiquité romaine (disons bien: romaine. Le Renaissant italien dédaigne les Grecs). C'est chez ces grands hommes qu'il cherche des exemples; des encouragements dans ses entreprises, à se remémorer les obstacles qu'ils vainquirent; des consolations dans ses épreuves, à en retrouver de semblables chez eux; la justification de ses penchants, de ses extravagances et de ses crimes. Malatesta meurt sans un mot d'appel vers le Dieu des chrétiens; ceux qu'il appelle, ce sont des héros de l'antiquité. Ce sont eux ses soutiens et ses saints.[23]

And in earlier notes, Montherlant says enigmatically, "Passer dans le christianisme et en sortir, à peu près comme les auteurs classiques, qu'il faut avoir connus et avoir oubliés."[24] Montherlant of course avows that he has left the Church,[25] but perhaps some of the frank admissions of Paul VI and of the more liberal element in the Church of aggiornamento find him closer to the Church than ever

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[22]Ibid., p. 10.

[23]Montherlant, "Présentation de Malatesta," (Pléiade), pp. 545-546.

[24]Montherlant, Carnet XLII et XLIII (Paris: Le Choix, 1948), p. 102.

[25]Cf., supra, pp. 111-113.

before. There is a similar rejection of superficiality by both the churchmen and Montherlant, and the Italian Renaissance Catholic which Montherlant scourges and with whom he identifies the modern Catholic, is also rejected by the Church. There would be common agreement on Montherlant's statement that

> . . .l'idéal de l'italien de ce temps-là (Renaissance) était. . ."l'homme universel". Mais on touche vite les limites de ces hommes universels. Dans leur conception de la gloire je retrouve ce caractère superficiel qui est . . . celui de toute la Renaissance italienne, et qui me la gâte un peu.[26]

The conclusion to be reached at this point would seem that of suspending judgment as to the Catholic nature of "la trilogie," and let the plays speak for themselves at the same time as we give consideration to what the playwright says of his plays and to what critics versed in religious literature say of them.

LA TRILOGIE CATHOLIQUE

Montherlant writes in Notes sur Mon Théâtre,

> Quand on m'a demandé de faire le scénario d'un film sur Ignace de Loyola, je me suis aperçu qu'une des raisons inconscientes pour lesquelles j'avais pu mettre en scène le jansénisme, dans Port-Royal, était qu'il n'y avait personne aujourd'hui pour représenter et défendre cette confession,--personne donc qui voudrait m'influencer, me contrôler, m'embrigader, me forcer à dire autre chose que ce

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[26]Montherlant, "Présentation de Malatesta," (Pléiade), p. 146.

que je voulais dire.[27]

Lemarchand finds that Montherlant succeeded admirably in writing his play without constraint.

> Dans ce Port-Royal, Montherlant, avec la plus belle aisance et justesse, retrouve, réinvente la langue si belle et animée, si pure et expressive--et toujours si vivante, dramatiquement vivante--de ces polémistes religieux de XVII siècle, nourris de bonnes lettres et dévorés d'indignation au spectacle des injustices qui leur sont faites. Indifférentes à celles qu'ils peuvent commettre pour peu que le génie s'en mêle, cela devient la langue des Provinciales.[28]

It should be kept in mind that Montherlant's Port-Royal is not simply a polemic tour de force, but also a highly dramatic, skillfully written play. As Gautier remarks: "Je crois bien que voilà Port-Royal la meilleure pièce de Montherlant--la plus haute, la plus noble, la plus sobre, la plus pure, la plus homogène, la plus ramassée, la plus courageuse--la meilleure. . ."[29]

Montherlant conceived the idea of writing Port-Royal in 1929,[30] but kept this idea germinating until 1940 when he began the play, which he completed in 1942. In the interim he began Don Fadrique, a religious drama which he

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[27]Montherlant, Notes sur Mon Théâtre, pp. 19-20.

[28]Jacques Lemarchand et Jean-Jacques Gautier, "Port-Royal," Théâtre de France (October 5, 1955), p. 17.

[29]Ibid.

[30]Henry de Montherlant, "Du Côté de la Souffrance," Montherlant: Théâtre (Paris: Bibliothèque de la Pléiade, 1965), pp. 1079-1080.

had planned originally as part of his "trilogie catholique," but which he subsequently abandoned and for which he substituted le Maître de Santiago. He rewrote Port-Royal in 1953 completing his "trilogie catholique," "qui comprend avec lui le Maître de Santiago et la Ville dont le Prince est un Enfant. L'ordre de chevalerie, le collège, le couvent."[31]

Montherlant's study of Jansenism began a life-long interest in what he looked upon as a kindred spirit:

> Dans le jansénisme je trouvais aussi des solitaires, des rigoureux, des dissidents, et une minorité: cette famille était et ne cessera jamais d'être la mienne. Comme celle des moines, elle n'était pas en trop bons rapports avec la société. Et puis, m'eût-elle été moins proche, le monde me paraît assez riant pour que j'y reste, mais assez vain pour que je me sente le frère de quiconque se retranche de lui, et quelle que soit la raison de ce retranchement: à mes yeux elle sera toujours secondaire. Enfin, dans le jansénisme je trouvais un Ordre, et j'ai raconté déjà comment, en 1919, j'avais été travaillé par ce concept d'Ordre.
>
> C'est alors que, frappé du caractère dramatique de maint épisode de Port-Royal, je résolus d'écrire un jour une pièce sur cette maison.[32]

The convent of Port-Royal came into historical prominence in 1602 when there entered the convent a young girl of eleven later to become Mère Angélique, superior of the religious house which had gained notoriety for its life

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[31]Montherlant, "Port-Royal: Préface," (Pléiade), p. 982.

[32]Henry de Montherlant, "Sur Port-Royal," Montherlant: Théâtre (Paris: Bibliothèque de la Pléiade, 1965), pp. 664-665.

of ease and comfort where once the life of seclusion and asceticism had flourished.[33]

The Papacy ordered the convent closed in 1708 and the following year the last of the Sisters took their departure. As Laudenbach wryly remarks: "Un des très grands chapîtres de l'histoire de l'esprit français s'achevait, comme il arrive parfois en France, par une bouffonnerie policière."[34]

At the point where Montherlant takes up the action of his play, he finds the convent divided into the brave and constant sisters and the fearful and traitorous. The memory of Mère Angélique gives strength to the constant, but blinded by pride they really do not know why they resist the Archbishop. Their trials and sufferings form the dramatic element of the play.

The Church authorities for some time had been making unsuccessful efforts to compel the Sisters of Port-Royal to sign an oath which condemned the propositions of Jansenius, Bishop of Ypres, who held that human nature was utterly corrupt and completely unable to accomplish good, and that Christ died for the predestined and not for all men. The convent of Port-Royal had been reformed on these principles and the Sisters looked upon them as essential

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[33]Roland Laudenbach, "Montherlant est de Port-Royal," Théâtre de France (October 5, 1955), p. 19.

[34]Ibid.

to their mode of life.[35]

The play opens with a visitor to the convent, father of one of the Sisters, pleading with her to sign the oath. She steadfastly refuses. Then we are given an insight into the turmoil and division within the convent as the Sisters await the arrival of Archbishop Pérefixe. The confrontation with the Archbiship is cordial at first, but when the Sisters persist in their refusal, Pérefixe is adamant, condemns the Sisters and orders their dispersal to other convents where they are to live in confinement and penance. The play ends with the arrival of the black-robed Visitandine Sisters who are to take over the convent and effect its reform.

The plot of Port-Royal is extremely simple. Montherlant is primarily concerned with his characters, and the play is essentially a probing into the inner workings of the souls of certain Sisters, in particular of Sister Angélique and Sister Françoise. "Le sujet," Montherlant writes

> de cette pièce est le parcours que fait une âme conventuelle vers un certain événement dont elle prévoit qu'il créera en elle une crise de doute religieux, et par ailleurs le renversement d'une autre âme conventuelle qui, sous l'effet du même événement, passe d'un état à l'état opposé. La Soeur Françoise est mise, à l'improviste, devant "la lumière". La Soeur Angélique s'achemine, d'un cours logique et prévu, vers "les Portes des Ténèbres."

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[35]Montherlant, "Du Côté de la Souffrance," (Pléiade), pp. 1079-1083.

> L'archevèque Péréfixe est le catalyseur de ces mouvements, qui ne sont pas les seuls. Car c'est lui aussi qui, par l'événement qu'il crée, découvre la trahison de la Soeur Flavie, et fait éclater l'enveloppe de froideur dont s'entourait, à l'égard des êtres, la Soeur Angélique de Saint Jean.[36]

Montherlant tries to strike a balance between the combined forces of Church and crown, and the Sisters. The former intrepid, brooking no opposition; the latter determined in their quest for that freedom of expression totally unacceptable to the Church to which they belong. Galland remarks:

> Cette tension entre des êtres de race spirituelle opposée, peut-être nécessaire à la marche du monde terrestre, se retrouve, sous une autre forme à l'intérieur même du catholicisme. Là, les peines infligées, comme les peines subies, sont le creuset où se purifient les âmes qui seront, plus tard, les mieux trempées. Montherlant va jusqu'à faire dire à la Mère Agnès: "L'Église a plus maintenu ses vérités par ses souffrances, que par les vérités mêmes." L'orthodoxie de cette pensée est contestable, mais elle est le clef de voûte de la "trilogie catholique" de Montherlant.[37]

Montherlant has noticeably softened the character of Péréfixe who, in historical accounts shows himself a firm and even insulting interrogator.[38] For the most part, Montherlant's Péréfixe treats the Sisters kindly, fatherly. When Soeur Angélique says softly:

> Les hommes qui nous persécutent doivent être l'objet

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[36]Montherlant, "Port-Royal: Préface," (Pléiade), p. 983.

[37]Georgette Galland, "Port-Royal," The French Review (October, 1955), p. 95.

[38]Montherlant, "Port-Royal: Préface," (Pléiade), p. 984.

spécial de notre tendresse et de nos prières.

Péréfixe replies in kind:

> Moi, vous persécuter! Je vous proteste qu'il n'y a que moi et une autre personne de la Cour qui empêchent qu'on vous persécute d'une autre sorte. Pourquoi me craignez-vous? On s'est fait ici une habitude de tremblement. . . Je veux que vous m'aimiez. Vous ne serez que meilleure de tout ce qui s'est passé.[39]

But at the same time, Péréfixe personifies an aspect of the Church which, according to Galland "prend la symétrie pour ordre, vérité et équilibre dans la diversité pour désordre, laideur et erreur."[40] Dramatically the Archbishop is as necessary to the Sisters as is the Superior to de Pradts in La Ville dont le Prince est un Enfant. As Montherlant explains it,

> l'un et l'autre jouent le rôle bienfaisant du sacrificateur dans les religions antiques. Les moniales sont bénies parce qu'elles souffrent; elles le savent, elles le disent. L'archevèque est béni parce qu'il est l'instrument de leur souffrance; il ne le sait pas, et ne le dit pas, parce qu'il est un homme superficiel; mais il souffre quelque peu de ce qu'il fait, et il le dit. De chaque côté on pourrait reprendre une parole des supérieurs dans la Ville. . .: "C'est en souffrant de nous, et nous faisant souffrir, qu'il a senti qui nous sommes." Ce "qui nous sommes", dans la bouche du supérieur, recouvre une réalité tant humaine que religieuse, et de même c'est ce qu'il recouvrirait s'il était prononcé par des personnages de Port-Royal.[41]

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[39]Henry de Montherlant, Port-Royal (Paris: Bibliothèque de la Pléiade, 1965), pp. 1062-1063.

[40]Galland, op. cit., p. 95.

[41]Henry de Montherlant, "Une Justification de Port-Royal," La Revue de Paris, No. 62 (March, 1955), p. 32.

Montherlant certainly realizes that his characters suffer, and he wonders what effect this might have on his audience since they will object that both Mère Agnès and Soeur Angélique cannot conceive of God nor feel his presence except in a spirit of joy or at least in some expression of their freedom of spirit. "La souffrance," Montherlant replies,

> pourrit Angélique; elle la mène jusqu'au doute: l'iréel n'est plus qu'un rêve, c'est la terre qui est la réalité. Mais, m'étant aventuré à faire dire par un personnage de ma pièce: "L'Eglise a plus maintenu ses vérités par ses souffrances, que par les vérités mêmes", et cette phrase ayant été ensuite approuvée par d'excellentes personnes ecclésiastiques, je m'aventurerai à dire, avec l'espoir sinon d'une semblable approbation, du moins de ne reçevoir par trop de démenti: il me semble de peu d'importance qu'une âme périsse si à ce prix la chrétienté progresse ou seulement survit, je veux dire: si le Dieu des chrétiens continue d'être dans le monde un Dieu vivant, et je m'imagine sans peine la Soeur Angélique, au plus profond de son désarroi, s'écriant: "O Mon Dieu! si vous existez, vous savez que ce qui naît à votre profit de nos souffrances vaut bien que par une de ces souffrances je me perde."[42]

Mère Agnès "suit de près son modèle historique. Paisible, soumise, non sans onction, mais capable à l'occasion de vigueur. . ."[43] Her true character is brought out in her closing dialog with the Sisters:

> La Mère Agnès, (à une jeune soeur). Je vous demande pardon, ma Soeur, si je vous ai jamais offensée. En raison de mes infirmités, permettez-moi de ne me mettre pas à genoux une seconde fois, et

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[42]Ibid.

[43]Montherlant, "Port-Royal: Préface," (Pléiade), p. 984.

de vous le demander seulement les mains jointes.
(Elles s'embrassent. Puis la Mère Agnès se retire dans le fond, où elle est embrassée par toutes les soeurs, qui lui baisent aussi les mains.)[44]

During the hours of anxiety and suffering, the wrongfully ambitious Soeur Flavie plans her betrayal of the Sisters. But in contrast to her infidelity and duplicity, and as the situation in the convent worsens, the young Sister Françoise passes from a simple and innocent faith to a faith that is militant and mystical. She is not overly concerned with signing the oath at first, but as she sees the steadfastness of the other Sisters and the traitorous behavior of Soeur Flavie coupled with what she feels to be the true spirit of Christianity exhibited by the Sisters she becomes emboldened. When Péréfixe condemns her along with the rest, concluding with

L'Archevèque: . . .Vous aussi vous serez retranchée.

She replies:

Je ne serai pas retranchée de Celui qui est en moi.

L'Archevèque: Vous en êtes retranchée déjà plus que vous ne croyez.

La Soeur Françoise: Monseigneur! Est-ce vous qui me dites cela? Notre-Seigneur a parlé au Démon plus doucement que vous ne parlez à vos filles. Il n'y avait que M. Bail, à ce jour, pour nous menacer de l'enfer, nous rapprocher des sorcières, des possédées d'Auxonne! Cela passait cependant. Mais il suffit que notre pasteur nous parle pour nous

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[44]Montherlant, Port-Royal, (Pléiade), p. 1062.

> faire pleurer! Si vous étiez un calviniste, encore, ou un étranger, que sais-je! un Anglais, un Espagnol . . . Mais vous, notre Père![45]

Her strong faith is not only contrasted to the weakness of the opportunistic Soeur Flavie, but to the darkness and despair which descend upon Soeur Angélique who is engulfed in a sea of doubt, feeling herself abandoned by God ("Qu'ai-je fait pour être à ce point abandonnée?")[46] and staring Hell in the face: ". . .me voici tout juste devant les Portes des Ténèbres, . . ."[47]

The lengthy scene between Mère Agnès and Soeur Angélique is one of the most dramatic and beautiful in all of Montherlant. Soeur Angélique lays her soul bare to Mère Agnès. Her temptations against faith, intensified by recurring dreams of imprisonment, darkness and despair, force her to reveal a sensitive religious spirit, but one which forges ahead on sheer volition with no supporting faith and no ability to pray. Mère Agnès, stable and gracious, tries in vain to comfort the troubled Soeur Angélique in her concern over her sleeplessness, her worries, her lack of faith and her disturbance over the importunities of both the civil and religious authorities.

> La Mère Agnès: Je suis bien résolue de ne plus m'affecter de telles malencontres, par l'expérience

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[45]Ibid., pp. 1059-1060.

[46]Ibid., p. 1074.

[47]Ibid., p. 1035.

> que j'ai qu'un quart d'heure de temps devant Dieu efface beaucoup de choses qui paraissaient de grandes choses, et qui en fait ne sont rien.[48]

But in the end, all emerges just as Soeur Angélique fears: she is sent, along with eleven others, from the convent to a life of complete seclusion (if not isolation) and penance.

Although writing of such thoroughly Christian women, curiously enough, Montherlant sees their roots implanted not so much in the Church as in pagan Rome:

> Port-Royal fait retour aux sources du christianisme primitif, comme les vieux-Romains faisaient retour aux sources de la Rome primitive.
>
> A Port-Royal on a . . . les pieds sur la terre, comme dans la vieille société romaine; il y a aussi loin de l'esprit posé de Port-Royal à celui des mystiques, qu'il y a loin des Romains à l'esprit métaphysique des Grecs. On est robin et procédurier comme dans la vieille société romaine. On a cette tristesse et cet amour de la tristesse qui me touchent sur les visages romains qu'on voit aux bustes. . . . On a l'orgueil et l'esprit d'exclusion qui de tout temps ont caractérisé la vieille société romaine.[49]

Perhaps this is Montherlant's way of saying that his characters are only human, for indeed the Sisters in their detachment, their consecration were no more than human. Again he writes:

> La célèbre lettre de la Mère Agnès à son neveu Le Maître, sur son mariage projeté, a une dureté romaine. . . Et terribles tels aveux d'Angélique de

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[48]Ibid., p. 1024.

[49]Henry de Montherlant, "Port-Royal et le puritanisme Romain," Montherlant: Théâtre (Paris: Bibliothèque de la Pléiade, 1965), p. 1085.

> Saint-Jean, sur la façon dont elle traitait certaines soeurs qu'elle n'avait pas à la bonne; son remords en est court. . .[50]

But Montherlant carries his comparison of the Sisters to pagan Rome almost to the extreme. "A Port-Royal," he says,

> on rejette les ornements et les astragales. Mais on garde tout un côté petit qui a une estampille très romaine. On interprète les songes, on croit aux signes et aux prodiges, on attend des livres saints ouverts au hasard cela même que les Romains attendaient des sortes vergiliannae: une prédiction de l'avenir. Les soeurs enterrées avec aux mains des suppliques à la divinité, en style de procédure, cela semble appartenir au plus antique rituel funéraire du Latium. Chez ces âmes généralement hautes, il y a une part de superstition sordide qui a une odeur de Trastévère. Et m'aventuré-je trop en rapprochant le dépeçage des Messieurs post mortem de pareilles opérations adorées des Romains? . . . Je ne serais pas trop surprise qu'on eut demandé aux entrailles de l'abbé de Saint-Cyran de saints présages.[51]

Individual characters are, nevertheless, very much the products of their environment. Even condensing the story of a lifetime into a play of three hours, Montherlant still paints a picture of real people. True he has selected the most dramatic moments of their lives, but moments which show the finished product. The Sisters' lives have been founded on order, a condition which endears them to Montherlant. Laudenbach sees this clearly.

> Depuis toujours, depuis Sainte-Croix de Neuilly, depuis bien avant même, il aime l'ordre, religieux ou militaire: oui, l'ordre. A Port-Royal, il n'est pas dépaysé, même s'il ne comprend pas qu'on puisse

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[50] Ibid.

[51] Ibid., pp. 1085-1086.

> s'adresser au ciel. Il aime aussi, tout autant que l'ordre, ceux qui disent non. Il n'est pas mondain. Les bavardes, les commères, il déteste ça. Ce solitaire qui ne se mêle au monde qu'avec maladresse et timidité, comment n'aurait-il pas eu un peu plus que de la curiosité pour ceux qui se sont retranchés du monde et qui bravent ses édits? Prudent pour ce qui est du gouvernement de sa vie, il préfère pourtant les imprudents aux comptables. . . . chez lui à Port-Royal, et que ces filles étonnantes, folles, saintes, sont ses cousines ou ses nièces. . . Elles l'enchantent, l'amusent, lui plaisent beaucoup plus que les femmes savantes qui de nos jours font de l'économie politiques.[52]

Montherlant, then, is sympathetic toward the Sisters of Port-Royal, to their cause, even though, in the final analysis, he is unable to understand how they can address themselves to God, submit themselves entirely to His will. But he does understand their problem. He makes the great struggle of the play not Jansenism, although it is evident where his sympathies lie, but rather the signing of the Formulaire. The Sisters are clearly devoted to their Church. Indeed, they cannot conceive of themselves as separated from it. But, as Rey states, "they believe in their movement with their whole hearts. Not to sign would make them guilty of disobedience, but to sign would take away from them their reason for existence."[53]

These are the issues in Montherlant's Port-Royal.

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[52]Laudenbach, "Montherlant est de Port-Royal," pp. 21-22.

[53]John B. Rey, "The Search for the Absolute: The Plays of Henry de Montherlant," World Drama, Vol. 3 (September, 1960), p. 189.

It is not a question of heresy; heresy is a frame of mind, one totally foreign to the spirit of the Sisters. Maulnier makes this clear.

> M. de Montherlant a donc su voir que son sujet, ce n'était pas le débat de la liberté humaine et de la prédestination, mais la passion de fidélité qui oppose aux autorités réunies de l'Etat et de l'Eglise, pourvues de tous les moyens de la contrainte temporelle et spirituelle, une minorité de faibles femmes opprimées. Là est la "pathétique" de la situation, pathétique qui s'apparente à celui des Dialogues des Carmélites de Bernanos . . ."[54]

Montherlant claims that he has given both sides a hearing. But his spirit of fair-play aligns him with the Sisters.

> Quand on lit les Constitutions de Port-Royal, ou les vies de telles religieuses, on ne peut pas n'être pas saisi de respect. Il ne s'agit pas de dire là c'est la vérité. Mais de voir que, une ligne logique étant suivie depuis un certain point de départ--le christianisme originel,--c'est à cela qu'on aboutit.[55]

However, Montherlant does admit that although the lines he has given to Mère Agnès are consoling and edifying, still they effect very little spiritual envigoration in the Sister's anxious souls. He recognizes that their anxieties are increased by their very femininity, their poor health and the difficulties inherent in living a community life.[56] These are not Montherlant's inventions.

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[54]Thierry Maulnier, "Le Théâtre: Port-Royal," La Revue de Paris, No. 62 (January, 1955), p. 149.

[55]Montherlant, "Du côté de la souffrance," (Pléiade), p. 1079.

[56]Ibid., p. 1808.

He supports his position by returning to primary sources:

> Il faut voir dans les Vies édifiantes l'épuisement où nombre d'entre elles se trouvaient; il faut lire la lettre ou une soeur anonyme décrit les effets que lui cause la seule visite de L'Archevêque Péréfixe dans la maison; il faut lire dans le même ouvrage la description, par une des soeurs de Port-Royal, d'un office célébré pendant que les Visitandine gouvernaient le monastère de Paris, une fois parties les douze "rebelles", et où les religieuses, prosternées, pleuraient tant "que le sol du Choeur fut tout trempé",. . .pour mesurer ce que continrent de souffrance ces lieux et bien d'autres lieux.[57]

The Sisters of Port-Royal lived in constant fear, and it is this fear, Montherlant says, that is the key to understanding their plight.

> . . . la peur intercèderait auprès de Dieu; et, pour Soeur Angélique, elle devrait intercéder auprès de notre féroce prochain. Voilà qui entre bien dans le renversement des valeurs apporté par le christianisme. La religion qui a mis le signe plus partout où il y avait le signe moins, et inversement, serait infidèle à son génie si elle ne permettait pas à l'homme de se faire un mérite de sa peur. Que cela soit consolant, et par là soit habile, on n'en disconvient pas, et mettons même qu'on y adhère, car les consolations ont leur prix dans les temps difficiles. Il y a toutefois de quoi rêver.[58]

To sum up: Without ever raising the key theological issue, Montherlant never leaves it in doubt. There is seen, in the play, the effect of grace. There is a parade of sisters--some timid, some strong, some weak, some confused. But by the end of the play we are given a fairly accurate picture of both the Church and the Convent. Each

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[57]Ibid.

[58]Ibid., pp. 1082-1083.

has attacked the opposition and defended its position; both are scarred, and in their own ways, both victorious. The Sisters demonstrate their heroism, their spiritual integrity, their firmness. The Church emerges as a solicitous father with a touch of rigor tempered by logic and common sense. Yet it cannot escape the humiliation incurred by allowing others to glimpse the feet of clay beneath the purple robes.

HOW CATHOLIC IS PORT-ROYAL

Montherlant says that he became acquainted with Jansenism through works which presented only a caricature of the true Jansenism. He adds that this distorted view was his sole basis of judging Jansenism until he came across Sainte-Beuve's work.[59]

> J'avais dépassé alors le catholicisme à l'italienne qui fut celui de ma première jeunesse et j'étais entré dans la sympathie et le respect pour le christianisme pris au sérieux. La découverte du vrai Port-Royal (découverte) faite dans le climat moral d'Alger, dont la grossièreté, par contraste, le faisait paraître plus merveilleux encore) me montra où était ma vocation. Toute la source émotionelle en était contenue pour moi dans cette simple phrase de Sainte-Beuve: "Port-Royal ne fut qu'un retour et un redoublement de foi à la divinité de Jésus-Christ."[60]

There are those, of course, who would deny to an unbeliever such as Montherlant the possibility of writing

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[59]Charles Augustin Sainte-Beuve, Port-Royal, 7 vols. (Paris: L. Hachette, 1867-1871),

[60]Montherlant, "Sur Port-Royal," (Pléiade), p. 664.

a Catholic play. But as was noted above, who is to judge another's spiritual worth? Again there are those typified by Jean Orcibal[61] who have delved deeply into the historical Port-Royal and compared the historical texts with Montherlant's play. They would seem to allow Montherlant no poetic license, no adjustments of historical perspective in order to present Port-Royal as he sees it. What Montherlant is trying to do is, not to write history, but to show the meaning of an historical event. Indeed, Montherlant adds copious notes gratuitously to the text of the play, but obviously he is unable to include the whole of history written on Port-Royal. Furthermore, he is well aware of his bias, for he admits it frankly.

> Avant de la (Port-Royal) commencer, la question que je me posai: "Ne me trompè-je pas? Suis-je fait pour cette oeuvre?" m'évoquait le religieux novice qui se demande s'il a bien la vocation. Maintenant, la contrainte de ne faire sortir de moi, dans cette pièce, que ma part chrétienne, ou de métamorphoser en élans religieux mes élans humains, me semblait parente, elle aussi de celle des solitaires, qui plièrent dans la discipline catholique des élans et des rêveries qui, deux cents ans plus tard, se fussent répandus en débordements à la Sand et à la René (l'idée est de Sainte-Beuve). Et du travail et des mouvements de l'inspiration je rêvais qu'ils n'étaient pas sans analogie avec ceux de la Grâce.[62]

Montherlant's Port-Royal expresses the Sisters' intense desire for purity coupled with almost unbridled pride.

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[61]Jean Orcibal, "Angélique de Saint-Jean devant les 'Portes de la nuit'," La Table Ronde, No. 155 (November, 1960), pp. 201-207.

[62]Montherlant, "Sur Port-Royal," (Pléiade), p. 668.

True devotion, for the Sisters, and in particular for Soeur Angélique, consists in total self-abnegation and the rooting out all traces of earthly attachment. They live as though in exile, looking upon the world as something far removed and worthy only of their contempt. Soeur Angélique's agitated spirit leads her to despair, and she lives in constant fear. Port-Royal shows us the Christianity of silent renunciation, the Christianity of anguish, the anomaly of a species of humble pride, of timidity and firmness--these consistently colored by the gloom of Jansenist views on grace and predestination.

Bordonove seems to give the most seasoned evaluation of the Catholic nature of Port-Royal. "Il est étrange," he writes,

> qu'un écrivain qui se déclare volontiers incroyant ait pu écrire cette [pièce]. L'hérédité n'explique pas tout. Non plus que l'education. Non plus que la psychologie. Non plus que l'intuition, voire le génie.
>
> Il y a aussi cette faim de paix et de silence, cette soif dévorante de pureté que l'on retrouve partout dans cette oeuvre, quelquefois suggérées, quelquefois hurlées à la face du public. Il y a ces nostalgies inexplicables, inlassablement répétées. Montherlant affirme qu'il ne peut "raisonnablement" croire. Est-ce avec la raison que l'on croit? En lui le christianisme a poussé profondément ses racines. Des évènements, des êtres inconnus ont coupé l'arbre; mais les racines subsistent, vivaces et résurgissent ça et là. C'est une chose étrange que L'Exil, par quoi s'est ouverte la carrière de ce dramaturge, renferme le sujet même de Port-Royal. Il écrivait dans L'Exil: "On m'a exilé de ma patrie profonde!" Les soeurs de Port-Royal sont, elles aussi, exilées de leur patrie profonde. L'oeuvre entière de Montherlant, et non seulement son théâtre est placée sous le signe de l'exil; c'est la quête acharnée d'on

> ne sait quel royaume de jeunesse perdue, d'on ne sait quelle assemblée de purs, dévots de l'Amour Immuable. Etrange, étrange pente chez "un incroyant." Mais foi sans don, caricature. Si Port-Royal contient un message, c'est celui-ci.[63]

Montherlant, then, has written a Catholic play, one in which Catholics are opposed to one another, each following his own conscience. To those who may object that neither the Sisters nor the Church authorities acted as they should, still it must be accepted that some people act this way and since Vatican II it is much easier for increasingly large numbers of Catholics and non-Catholics alike to discover in the Sisters' adamant refusal to be swayed from their resolve and in the Church's unswaying adherence to tradition and to authoritative control, the emerging Catholic with his quest for freedom and his deep concern for his spiritual life, as well as to have a deeper appreciation of the current efforts of the Church to abandon its position as a closed society and to channel its efforts in the direction of a movement joining with people of good will of every persuasion to further the kingdom of God on earth.

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[63]Georges Bordonove, Henry de Montherlant (Paris: Editions Universitaires, 1954), p. 88.

LE MAÎTRE DE SANTIAGO

Montherlant observes that there is a strong historical and psychological relationship between le Maître de Santiago[64] and Port-Royal.[65] In fact, he candidly admits in his notes,

> . . . bien des mois après avoir terminé le second Port-Royal, j'ai réalisé que j'avais avec lui récrit le Maître de Santiago. Les religieuses devant l'archevêque et sa suite, c'est don Alvaro devant don Bernal et les "chevaliers de terre". C'est la lutte entre ceux qui prennent tout à fait au sérieux, et ceux qui ne prennent pas tout à fait au sérieux, et la défaite inéluctable, toujours et en toute circonstance, des premiers.[66]

However, the two plays are different: le Maître de Santiago is simpler and of less significance historically. Montherlant takes the same object, but reverses the situation. Port-Royal opens with the father of one of the Sisters attempting to persuade his daughter that she does not belong in a cloister, while le Maître de Santiago closes with a father leading his daughter to the cloister. Furthermore, there is in Port-Royal the impetuous desire for reform while in le Maître de Santiago, the reticence of the knights

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[64]Henry de Montherlant, Le Maître de Santiago in Montherlant: Théâtre (Paris: Bibliothèque de la Pléiade, 1965), pp. 586-662.

[65]Montherlant, "Du côté de la souffrance," (Pléiade) pp. 1079-1080.

[66]Ibid., p. 1080.

of the Order.[67]

In Montherlant's play, don Alvaro Dabo finds himself the lone remaining member of the Order of Santiago who still possesses its original spirit. He lives in disgust for the world whose love of ease and comfort has replaced all notions of rigor and asceticism.

Don Bernal desires that don Alvaro's daughter, Mariana, marry his son. Since Alvaro is penniless, don Bernal suggests that he go to America to make his fortune and secure a dowry for Mariana. Don Alvaro flatly refuses and the play centers upon his rationalization of his reasons for refusing.

The Knights try to appeal to Alvaro's missionary spirit by telling him of a projected holy war to win the Indians to Christianity, but Alvaro sees in such conquests only vain-glory and futility, for he is convinced that the colonies are destined to be lost and that all human effort is doomed to failure. At the same time he sees a challenge, but one that could lead to his eternal damnation because of the grave risks of committing the most grievous of sins, that of pride.

At this point, a pretended messenger announces the King's wish that don Alvaro undertake the mission for the glory of God and for his personal well-being. Alvaro is

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[67]Henry de Montherlant, "Le Maître de Santiago: Post-face," Montherlant: Théâtre (Paris: Bibliothèque de la Pléiade, 1965).

about to accept when Mariana shows him the temptation into which he has fallen, and in order to win him over, she declares that she will give up the idea of marriage and live in seclusion with him so that together they can grow to understand that the world and life are nothing.

As was mentioned above[68] le Maître de Santiago is severe in form and theme, depicting a soul that lives in contempt of the world and completely alien to its allurements and completely detached from its spirit.

But Montherlant sees something more. "Le Maître de Santiago," he writes, "est le drame de l'amour de l'homme pour une vie haute et pure, dont le dieu des chrétiens n'est que le prétexte."[69] Then he adds, "Toutes ces pièces Maître, Malatesta, L'Exil, La Reine Morte, Fils de Personne sont des pièces sur l'amour."[70] It is not only that his characters are detached from something; they seek to attach themselves to something.

Granted that don Alvaro is severe, rigorous. But this is Montherlant's view of the Gospels. In a critical essay written in 1948, Le Blanc Est Noir, of which more will be said later[71], he attempts to prove that don Alvaro's words,

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[68]Cf., supra., p. 98.

[69]Montherlant, Notes sur Mon Théâtre, (Pléiade), p. 65.

[70]Ibid., p. 66.

[71]Infra., pp. 170-173.

so shocking to many modern Christians, are in reality so many paraphrases of Sacred Scripture and of Sacred writers.[72]

Montherlant contests his French audiences' ability to judge what is Christian in his plays. He ridicules the laughter which usually follows Mariana's line, "Je l'accueillerai (riches) comme une épreuve, et je m'efforcerai de la surmonter."[73] And Montherlant continues poignantly:

> Ainsi réagit une société qui se prétend chrétienne, à un sentiment aussi authentiquement chrétien, aussi b a ba du christianisme et du catéchisme. Par ce seul trait, cette société montre qu'elle n'est pas qualifiée pour juger de ce qui est et de ce qui n'est chrétien.[74]

Montherlant would be happier with his audiences if they were to discover what, to him, are the true shortcomings of his characters. "Je constate dans le Maître de Santiago," he explains,

> une assez vive absence de l'amour de Dieu. Ce n'est pas par amour de Dieu que Mariana, au troisième acte, désabuse son père, et jette tout au feu de ses gentils projets de "toi et moi", c'est par amour de son père, c'est par amour de l'être humain. Et ce n'est certes pas par amour de Dieu qu'elle suit son père au couvent. Fascinée, enveloppée, envoûtée par lui, elle accepte tout ce qu'il veut: à la fin elle y met un peu de

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[72]Henry de Montherlant, "Le Blanc Est Noir," Montherlant: Théâtre (Paris: Bibliothèque de la Pléiade, 1965), pp. 676-679.

[73]Montherlant, Le Maître de Santiago, II: iii, p. 639.

[74]Henry de Montherlant, "Le Maître de Santiago Est-il Chrétien," Montherlant: Théâtre (Paris: Bibliothèque de la Pléiade, 1965), p. 675.

> transcendence, mais cela est court; et je pense qu'il y aura bien des larmes quand le rideau sera tombé. Ajoutons que, d'une façon toute féminine, Mariana, en entrant au cloître, y a fait entrer avec elle son fiancé: "Grâce à lui je connaîs la pleine mesure du sacrifice. Comment ne l'en aimerais-je pas pour toujours?"[75]

Not only is the general public unable to probe the inner meanings of le Maître de Santiago, but the critics themselves run the gamut from adulation to repudiation. Typical of the latter, is the reviewer for the London Times who calls le Maître de Santiago "the most poetic and the least dramatic of M. de Montherlant's Christian trilogy."[76] The review continues: "It is an exquisite medallion of Spanish piety in its great period, a noble meditation of the El Greco portrait that inspired the writer. It is everything, in fact, except a play."[77]

The reviewer finds no characterization of Mariana and claims that her actions are clearly predictable and her renunciation of the world is no surprise at all. "She has no validity as a human being."[78]

Henri Massis of the Académie Française, on the other hand sees Mariana quite otherwise.

> . . . Montherlant . . . . , dans le Maître de Santiago

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[75] Ibid., p. 674.

[76] "Henri (sic) de Montherlant: The Christian Vein," Times Literary Supplement, (May 27, 1955), xi.

[77] Ibid.

[78] Ibid.

> a créé l'admirable figure de Mariana et qui a mis dans sa bouche les plus purs accents de charité divine que poète ait jamais fait entendre! Comment trouver des paroles de foi si ardente sans en sentir en soi brûler la flamme?[79]

A careful reading of the play and of Montherlant's copious notes, suggests that Montherlant, himself, is probably the best judge of the spirit of the characters, and the best judge of the meaning of their actions.

The problem at this point is to select from Montherlant's voluminous notes, the most satisfying and the most representative. However, two essays of Montherlant (both of which have been cited above) deserve special attention.[80] In the first he writes:

> Quant à Alvaro, qu'est son amour de Dieu, sinon l'amour pour l'idée qu'il fait de soi? Et, lorsqu'il aime enfin sa fille, c'est encore à travers cette idée, c'est-à-dire à travers soi, qu'il l'aime; il l'aime du jour, et du jour seulement, qu'elle préserve sa pureté à lui. Alvaro est un conquérant dégoûté qui se préfère à toute conquête. Il rend grâces à Dieu de le débarasser des hommes. Son Dieu est néant plus qu'amour. Il pique de-ci, de-là, le nom de Dieu sur un fond qui n'est que celui d'un Alceste haut et las, lequel pourrait être aussi bien bouddhiste que catholique. . .[81]

Montherlant violently rejects any notion suggesting that Alvaro is a false Christian.

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[79]Henri Massis, "Filiations," La Table Ronde, No. 155 (November, 1950), p. 95.

[80]Montherlant, "Le Maître de Santiago Est-il Chrétien?" (Pléiade), pp. 674-675, and "Le Blanc est Noir," pp. 676-679.

[81]Montherlant, "Le Maître de Santiago Est-il Chrétien?" (Pléiade), p. 674.

> . . . tout ce que j'ai écrit étant écrit et maintenu, je vois dans la suite du christianisme nombre de chrétiens semblables à Alvaro, auxquels il est impossible de refuser le nom de chrétiens. Ils n'y sont pas plus hérétiques que n'est hérétique l'inhumanité d'Alvaro.[82]

And he continues in the same vein:

> . . . don Alvaro et ses pareils . . . sont une "des familles spirituelles" du christianisme: il en font partie tout autant que la race des doux.[83]

Modern Christians, according to Montherlant,[84] are fearful of seeing on the stage what is repulsive in their own lives, and more importantly, of seeing a mode of evangelical behavior which inspires them with dread because it is so vigorous, so ascetic. In fine, they reject what Alvaro stands for. But Montherlant comes to his defense:

> Il n'est pas supportable d'imaginer que cette race des intransigeants puisse être exclue de la communion qu'elle chérit, parce qu'elle en a suivi la loi avec trop de pureté, et de vigueur, parce qu'elle a pris à la lettre ce qui n'est pour ses frères heureux qu'une rhétorique anodine et futile. Cette race, la mauvaise conscience des chrétiens de la compromission la persécute incessamment sur la terre. Persécutée incessamment sur la terre, elle prend sa revanche aux cieux.[85]

In "Le Blanc Est Noir," Montherlant presents an apologetic in which he attempts to justify, or at least explain, the words and actions of his principal characters.

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[82] Ibid.

[83] Ibid., p. 675.

[84] Ibid.

[85] Ibid.

He draws his support from Sacred Scripture and noted Christian writers. We can do no better than to quote him at length.

> On reproche à Alvaro de dire: "La famille par le sang est maudite", et d'avoir peu d'amour pour sa fille. Mais je lis: "Si quelqu'un vient à moi, et ne haît pas son père ou sa mère, son frère et ses soeurs, il ne peut être mon disciple". . . . "Laissez les morts ensevelir leurs morts, suivez moi!". . . (Le "mort" est un homme qui enterre son père!. . .) "Les familiers de l'homme sont ses ennemis". . . . Je lis aussi, de Saint Bernard . . . : "Nul ne peut servir deux maîtres. Le désir qu'a votre mère de vous conserver auprès d'elle est contraire à votre salut; il l'est également au sien. Il ne vous reste plus qu'à choisir: ou de faire la volonté d'une personne aimée, ou de faire le salut de deux âmes. Si vous l'aimez vraiment, vous la quitterez plutôt pour l'amour d'elle-même, de peur que, si vous quittez le Christ pour rester auprès d'elle, elle ne se perde elle-même . . . Car, comment ne se perdrait-elle pas en perdant celui qu'elle a enfanté? . . . Si je vous parle ainsi, c'est afin de condescendre à vos affections charnelles et de les aider en quelque sorte. Car la parole de Dieu est formelle et ne permet aucun compromis: s'il est impie de mépriser sa mère, le comble de la piété, c'est pourtant de la mépriser pour le Christ, car . . . "Celui qui aime son père ou sa mère plus que moi n'est pas digne de moi".[86]

There follows a series of critical accusations which Montherlant takes in turn and gives reply.

> On me reproche la volonté farouche d'Alvaro de préserver avant tout son âme et sa vie intérieure, et de rejeter le monde. Mais: "Appliquez-vous à la garde de votre coeur". . . . "N'aimez pas le monde ni ce qui est dans le monde. Si quelqu'un aime le monde, l'amour de Père n'est pas en lui". . . . "Prenez donc garde à n'aimer jamais aucune partie de cet ouvrage où Dieu ne veut avoir aucune part . . . On ne peut pas aimer Dieu et le monde; on ne peut pas nager comme entredeux, se donnant tantôt à l'un

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[86]Montherlant, "Le Blanc Est Noir," (Pléiade), pp. 676-677.

et tantôt à l'autre, en partie à l'un et en partie à l'autre. Dieu veut tout. . ." (Bossuet.)

On me reproche qu'Alvaro maudisse l'acte de chair. Mais: "Quiconque sême dans la chair recueillera, de la chair, la corruption."

On me reproche qu'Alvaro ne respecte pas l'amour de sa fille pour un jeune homme. Mais: "Si je soupçonnais qu'il y eût dans mon coeur un seul mouvement d'amour qui ne tendît pas à Dieu ou qui fût consacré a un autre amour que l'amour divin, ce sentiment infidèle et illégitime de mon coeur, je ferais tout pour l'arracher de mes entrailles et je ne le tolérais pas un seul instant." (St. François de Sales, . . .) Et encore, du même: "Il y a certains amours qui semblent extrémement grands et parfaits aux yeux des créatures, qui devant Dieu se trouveront petits et de nulle valeur. La raison est que ces amitiés ne sont point fondées en la vraie charité, qui est Dieu, ainsi seulement en certaines alliances et inclinations naturelles, sur quelque condition humainement louable et agréable." (Les vrais entretiens spirituels. . . .)

On me reproche le silence dont Alvaro s'entoure, et même avec sa fille. Mais: "Autant qu'il est possible, fuyez les conversations de ceux qui vous entourent; elles égareraient votre esprit en emplissant vos oreilles." (St. Bernard . . . .)

On me reproche la parole d'Alvaro: "Périsse l'Espagne! périsse l'univers! Si je fais mon salut et si tu fais le tien, tout est sauvé et tout est accompli", parole qui est sans doute, chrétiennement, la plus aventurée de ce personnage . . . , mais seulement pace qu'elle n'est pas assez expliquée. Il s'agit du corps de l'Espagne, de la matière de l'univers. Les âmes du monde entier bénéficieront du sacrifice d'Alvaro et de sa fille. Ne sommes-nous pas ici en plein dans la reversibilité des mérites?

On me reproche qu'Alvaro sente si fort de l'éloignement pour les hommes. Mais cet éloignement est prêché dans le livre qui est considéré comme le livre d'Amour par excellence, dans l'Imitation: "Vous devez être mort à ces affections humaines jusqu'à souhaiter de n'avoir s'il se pouvait, aucun commerce avec les hommes." Et encore: "Les plus grands saints évitaient, autant qu'il leur était possible, le commerce des hommes, et préféraient vivre en secret avec Dieu. Un ancien a dit: 'Toutes les fois que j'ai été dans la compagnie des hommes, j'en suis revenu moins homme que je n'étais.'" C'est un texte de

> Sénèque. Dans l'Imitation, la seule rencontre du Christianisme et du Paganisme se fait sur l'éloignement des hommes.
>
> Et Saint Paul, toujours très conciliant: "En vous interdisant de fréquenter les luxurieux, les avares, les voleurs, je ne visais pas tous les hommes. Car, alors, il vous faudrait sortir du monde. Je parlais seulement des luxurieux, des avares, des ivrognes qui se disent chrétiens. Ceux-là, ne mangez même pas avec eux!" . . . Eh bien! même de ce point de vue, le plus indulgent de tous, don Alvaro est justifié. Car, ce qu'on reproche à ses compatriotes, c'est de commettre des crimes sous le couvert du Christ. Saint Paul lui-même serait impitoyable.
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> . . . Il est stupéfiant que des catholiques ne reconnaissent pas un des visages certains de leur religion dans celui que leur présente le Maître de Santiago. Ou plutôt cela n'est pas stupéfiant, se je me souviens qu'ayant un jour cité les deux paroles suivantes: "Doctrine de l'Évangile, que vous êtes sévère," et "L'oeuvre de Dieu est une oeuvre de mort et non de vie", à un catholique pratiquant et militant, il sursauta et me dit avec indignation: "Je reconnais votre jansénisme!,--alors que la première de ces paroles est de Bossuet, et la seconde de Fénélon.[87]

Montherlant then sums up this lengthy but cogent rebuttal.

> . . . le catholicisme accueille aussi, on le sait bien, la race des doux; tout ce qui s'étend de l'humilité et de l'onction jusqu'à "cette incompréhensible facilité d'aller à Dieu et de s'unir à lui dans les mouvements de tendresse" (Lacordaire). Peu importe à laquelle de ces familles on pense appartenir. La question est de n'en pas exclure l'une qui, si manifestement, y a droit souverain de cité.[88]

Perhaps the objections which precipitated such incisive refutation arise from the actors' interpretation of their roles in performance. Montherlant recognizes this possibility

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[87]Ibid., pp. 677-679.

[88]Ibid., p. 679.

> . . . si le Christ tourmenté de Mariano Andreu (sur la scène), si les éclats et le rictus satanique d'Henri Rollan nous inclinent parfois à voir dans mon héros quelque chose d'un peu monstrueux, qui serait typiquement espagnol, ils nous trompent (emphasis added); je retrouve la race des intransigeants, voire des farouches, d'abord dans le christianisme primitif, où elle règne et donne le ton, et puis dans l'histoire du christianisme français, dans l'histoire du christianisme allemand, dans l'histoire du christianisme italien, presque autant qu'en Espagne: les exemples surabondent. Je dirai plus, ou plutôt je le laisse dire à mon confrère Jacques Lemarchand, critique théâtral d'un quotidien où il écrit: "Les chrétiens abandonnés que sont les chrétiens du siècle vingt . . . auront peut-être, tout au long de la pièce, l'amère surprise de retrouver, de réplique en réplique, et d'acte en acte, le visage qu'ils devraient avoir grande honte de n'avoir plus." Oui, c'est cela que je n'osais plus dire.[89]

The stumbling block for most audiences and most critics is the expectation to find in Le Maître de Santiago, a religious play in which one or other of the characters is a model Christian, little realizing that what they are witnessing is the struggle of characters who are sincere in their beliefs but who are misguided by these same beliefs. Montherlant writes:

> Je n'ai pas fait d'Alvaro un chrétien modèle. Il reste en deçà du Christianisme. Il sent avec force le premier mouvement du christianisme, la renonciation, le Nada; il sent peu le second, l'union, le Todo.[90]

Montherlant is not deceived into thinking that Alvaro and Soeur Angélique are perfect Christians; he is not

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[89]Montherlant, "Le Maître de Santiago Est-il Chrétien?" (Pléiade), p. 675.

[90]Montherlant, "Le Maître de Santiago: Postface," (Pléiade), p. 660.

preaching through them ideal Catholic doctrine; he is simply showing how some Christians live. History furnishes sufficient examples to show that even the Church herself holds up for the veneration of the faithful examples of men and women it has canonized who dedicated their lives to God in questionable activities. St. Vincent Ferrer, the Dominican roving preacher and politician, waged constant and bloody war against the Jews;[91] St. Peter of Alcantara carried his penance so far as to sleep in a room so small that he could neither sit, stand nor lie comfortably in it, and who to add to his penances wore a species of garment made of tin;[92] the enlightened St. Thomas Aquinas approved the Inquisition;[93] St. Joseph Benedict Labre lived in vermin,[94] and so on. The point is: these are ways in which people lived. If one were to write their lives, he could not pass over these idiosyncracies without distorting the truth. Montherlant has given us a picture--and that not so extreme if the above examples are considered--a picture of a soul in conflict with the world,

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[91]Abram Leon Sachar, A History of the Jews (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1948), p. 207.

[92]Herbert Thurston and Donald Attwater (eds.), Butler's Lives of the Saints. Vol. II (New York: P. J. Kennedy and Sons, 1956), p. 107.

[93]A New Catechism: Catholic Faith for Adults. Commission of the Hierarchy of the Netherlands. (New York: Herder and Herder, 1967), p. 222.

[94]Thurston and Attwater, op. cit., Vol. IV, p. 145.

a conflict heightened by his contempt and disgust for it.

IS LE MAÎTRE DE SANTIAGO CATHOLIC?

Is le Maître de Santiago a Catholic play? The question has already been answered: It is a Catholic play about a certain kind of Catholic.

In the collected theatre reviews of Gabriel Marcel there is a report of a debate regarding the Catholicity of Montherlant's Maître. Marcel states that the eminent Jesuit scholar R. P. Danielou asserted that there was Christian validity in the intransigence of Alvaro, but Marcel adds that Danielou admitted "que la charité telle qu'elle y est évoquée n'a que les rapports les plus lointains avec celle du Christ et des saints."[95]

But Montherlant recognizes that Alvaro is not a saint according to Christ. He says plainly that Alvaro is not a model Christian, that he is "this side of Christianity."[96] Marcel, who is for the most part highly critical of Montherlant's Christianity, conjectures, "J'ai l'impression qu'aujourd'hui, il serait assez porté à revenir sur cette sort de concession."[97]

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[95]Gabriel Marcel, L'heure théâtrale: De Giraudoux à Jean-Paul Sartre (Paris: Librairie Plon, 1959), p. 79.

[96]Cf., supra., p. 167.

[97]Marcel, op. cit., p. 79.

But Pierre Jobit takes an opposite stand: ". . . cet homme (Alvaro), cette femme (Mariana) qui nous intéressent et qui sont, réellement, d'autres Christ."[98] In 1960 Montherlant restated the theme and repeated the character of Alvaro in Cisneros, in le Cardinal d'Espagne, another play he considers "Catholic," one which could expand the trilogy into a quartet.

Montherlant details[99] the varied reactions which a school production of le Maître de Santiago elicited during rehearsals, and he decries the parochialism of the clergy affiliated with the school. They considered his play a scandal. But Montherlant affirms that the Théâtre-Hebertot presented the play eight-hundred times and that there were scores of productions outside Paris. And he adds,

> Or, jamais cette pièce, jouée dans tous les pays d'Europe, n'a provoqué la moindre inquiétude chez les autorités religieuses. Des séminaristes y ont été menés, en corps, par leur supérieurs. La pièce a été jouée par des collèges religieux, par des patronages . . . Et cependant on ne rêve pas: la première représentation (at the boarding school) en fut interdite par un Evêque. La morale, c'est que le regard qui regarde une oeuvre n'est pas le même, à quelques années de distance; que dis-je! à quelques mois. La morale, c'est que le pouvoir explosif de toute

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[98]Pierre Jobit, "Les moments mystiques dans le théâtre de Montherlant," La Table Ronde, No. 155 (November, 1960), p. 188.

[99]Henry de Montherlant, "Comment le Maître de Santiago faillit être créé dans un Pensionnat Religieux de Demoiselles," Montherlant: Théâtre (Paris: Bibliothèque de la Pléiade, 1965), p. 687.

> oeuvre va en s'affaiblissant,--et c'est une autre question, de savoir si cela est un bien ou un mal.[100]

Such severe indictment of those who cannot see the Christianity in the play, lends an air of urgency to Montherlant's eagerness that his play be accepted for what he intended, a Catholic play. The whole idea of the play is redemptive sacrifice, and even though Alvaro demonstrates extreme selfishness in his dealings with others--even with his daughter, Mariana--still Christian salvation for himself and for Mariana is paramount in his thoughts. The very same thing that Soeur Angélique was deathly afraid of losing is what Alvaro has uppermost in his mind of gaining.

There are remarkable similarities between Port-Royal and le Maître de Santiago.[101] They express the same intense desire for purity, the same spirit of renunciation, and in so doing produce similar conflicts. Soeur Angélique and don Alvaro are kindred spirits, both blinded by pride, sovereignly contemptuous of the world. Both are convinced that true devotion consists in total self-abnegation. But don Alvaro has hope where Angélique gives way to despair. Alvaro finds his salvation in sacrifice: all must be renounced since, to him, creatures stand between him and God. Angélique sees no salvation, her renunciation is

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[100] Ibid.

[101] Cf., supra., p. 164.

barren; there is no faith.

Le Maître de Santiago contrasts the empty Christianity of the Castillian Knights whose quest for God is more a matter of pride than of devotion, with the sincere, though proud, Alvaro. Port-Royal, on the other hand, depicts the Christianity of silent suffering, the turmoil in anxious souls. Alvaro and Mariana join hands in prayer and face heaven; Angélique and the Sisters are diverging spirits, scattered to their convent prisons--each to herself.

LA VILLE DONT LE PRINCE EST UN ENFANT

As early as 1913 Montherlant conceived the idea of writing la Ville dont le prince est un enfant, but it was not until 1951 that he set himself to the task of writing it in earnest.[102] His play is based on an earlier novel, la Relève du Matin, and together they form a sort of memoire of his early home- and school life.[103] The two works are further complemented by the play, L'Exil, "qui est un peu la suite de La Ville."[104]

There is evidence of more than a touch of anti-clericalism in L'Exil and La Ville, much more so in the

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[102]Henry de Montherlant, "La Ville dont le Prince est un Enfant: Postface," Montherlant: Théâtre (Paris: Bibliothèque de la Pléiade, 1965), p. 937.

[103]Ibid., pp. 937-938.

[104]Ibid., p. 937.

former than in the latter. But it is a tempered feeling. As Montherlant explains,

> Le mépris fait partie de l'estime. On peut le mépris dans la mesure où on peut l'estime. Les excellentes raisons que nous avons de mépriser. Qui ne méprise pas le mal, ou le bas, pactise avec le mal, ne sait pas mépriser? J'avais toujours pensé qu'on pouvait fonder quelque chose sur le mépris: maintenant je sais quoi: la moralité. Ce n'est pas l'orgueil qui méprise; c'est la vertu. Aussi sera-t-il beaucoup pardonné à celui qui aura beaucoup méprisé. Et encore j'ajoute ceci: qu'il n'y a besoin de n'être pas méprisable, pour mépriser.[105]

La Ville dont le Prince est un Enfant is concerned with those close ties among students which are called in religious orders "Amitiés particulières," and as Robert Kemp notes, "et le terme a été popularisé, plus qu'il n'en était besoin, par un gros livre de M. Peyrefitte."[106] Both the French expression and its English translation, "Particular Friendships," are pejorative terms. They smack of the wanton, the obscene.

Needless to say, that this is a very delicate topic to be treated in a play. However, as Lemarchand remarks, not only has Montherlant presented his subject and his characters delicately, but with intelligence, sensitivity and art.[107]

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[105]Pierre Sipriot, op. cit., p. 157.

[106]Robert Kemp, La vie des livres, I (Paris: Editions Albin Michel, 1955), p. 304.

[107]Jacques Lemarchand, in Montherlant: Théâtre (Paris: Bibliothèque de la Pléiade, 1965), p. 960.

Joseph Ageorges reiterates Lemarchand's assertion.

> . . . La pièce monte du mouvement insensible de la mer et s'approache de l'amour le plus sublime, tandis qu'une voix d'enfant solitaire chante la gloire du collège. Henry de Montherlant, dans la maîtrise de son âge mur, vient de réussir sa deuxième "relève du matin".
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> Si délicat et même scabreux qu'apparaisse le sujet, la façon dont il est traité fait que le livre devient une réaction contre les tentatives antérieures. L'habileté du dramaturge a été de composer, avec un sujet qui pouvait devenir si trouble, un drame d'allure classique, dépouillé, sans concession à la fausse émotion ni à la curiosité malsaine.[108]

The title of the play is from the Book of Ecclesiastes: "Woe to thee, O land, when thy king is a child."[109] The city is the school of La Relève du Matin. The Prefect of the "division des moyens" (intermediate level), Abbé de Pradts, is over-indulgent toward one of the younger students, Serge Souplier. But there exists a strong attachment between Souplier and an older student, André Sevrais, upon which the Abbé de Pradts looks with serious misgivings. He tries to keep the two boys apart, and in a confrontation with the two students, forces from them the promise that they will not see each other clandestinely. But circumstances bring the two boys together in what appears to be a compromising situation, but in reality is a sober, mature

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[108]Joseph Ageorges, quoted in Montherlant: Théâtre (Paris: Bibliothèque de la Pléiade, 1965), pp. 956-957. Montherlant includes many such testimonials along with his own comments following the text of la Ville dont le Prince est un Enfant.

[109]Ecclesiastes, X: 16.

discussion of their relationship. Sevrais proves his noble motives, but the compromising circumstances cause the Abbé de Pradts to dismiss him from school with the promise that he will not attempt to see Souplier again. De Pradts looks upon Sevrais' dismissal as a triumph, but it is short-lived. The Superior of the school in turn, dismisses Souplier. In a highly dramatic scene, he explains his reasons for acting to de Pradts. The Superior has found that de Pradts' attachment to Souplier, a really intractable, pusillanimous boy, is dictated by self-interest. The Superior points out to de Pradts that his solicitude should extend to all the students and that it is harmful both for him and for Souplier that he should single him out by his attentions. He reminds de Pradts of the sacrifice inherent in his vocation as a priest and that he cannot see God's blessing on such a human relationship. He further recalls that there were many previous occasions when Souplier violated school discipline, following which he should have been dismissed, but he was allowed to remain only through the supplications of de Pradts himself.

The play closes with the following dialogue:

> LE SUPERIEUR: Comme Sevrais, et pour les mêmes raisons, Souplier vient de quitter le collège.
>
> L'ABBE: Pendant que vous me reteniez ici à me parler! Et comment a-t-il pris cela? Que vous a-t-il dit?
>
> LE SUPERIEUR: Il m'a dit: "Je pense qu'ici non plus on ne me regrettera pas. J'ai laissé un très mauvais

souvenir partout ou je suis passé." Je lui ai répondu: "Vous nous laissez un souvenir brûlant. Un mauvais souvenir et un souvenir brûlant, ce n'est pas tout à fait la même chose." Vous, le souvenir qui vous reste est celui d'un épisode de votre vie que vous pouvez considérer sans gêne. Par son immolation, vous l'avez entièrement purifié.

L'ABBE: Non, non, pas de souvenir! J'avais des photos de lui. . . (Il prend dans un tiroir des photos, les déchire, les jette à la corbeille.) Autant de perdu pour la souffrance. Je veux que ce garçon n'existe plus pour moi. Oui, je vous en prie, je vous en conjure, faites-le envoyer dans un collège de province. Que je ne risque jamais de le rencontrer au coin d'une rue.

LE SUPERIEUR: Je vois donc à fond ce qu'est un attachement où Dieu n'est pas. C'est affreux.

L'ABBE: Non, ce qui est affreux, selon vous, c'est qu'on refuse de souffrir. Ah! je sais ce qui vous manque. Vous avez du respect pour la pauvreté. Il vous arrive--parce que vous êtes très pur--d'avoir du respect pour le péché. Mais vous n'avez pas de respect pour la faiblesse humaine.

LE SUPERIEUR: Je célebrerai demain la première messe à l'intention de votre faiblesse particulière. Quelle sera la prière qui se formera en moi, dans la solitude de l'autel? Je ne le sais encore, mais je crois, mais je suis sûr que Dieu me dictera celle même qu'il aura souhaité d'entendre. Dimanche, au prône, je demanderai à nos enfants de prier pour leurs camarades dont nous avons dû nous séparer. Si je le pouvais, je leur demanderais de prier aussi pour vous. Je le demanderais surtout à Sevrais. (Geste de l'abbé.) Oh! n'ayez crainte, je ne le ferai pas. Personne ici, ni élèves ni maîtres, ne doit soupçonner qu'il y a eu entre nous un dissentiment dans une affaire aussi lourde. Et je devrais demander à nos enfants de prier aussi pour moi: n'ai-je pas à me reprocher de ne vous avoir jamais mis en garde contre cette richesse de votre nature, qui vous a porté à une préférence si véhémente? Quant à vous, je vous conseille de fixer votre méditation de ce soir sur ce verset de l'Ecclesiaste: "Malheur à la ville dont le prince est un enfant!" Je pense qu'aux vacances de cet été une retraite vous sera salutaire: Nous en parlerons.-- Souvent, ces semaines dernières, quand je veillais

un peu tard, dans le grand silence du Carême, je voyais votre fenêtre allumée elle aussi; elle était la dernière allumée, avec la mienne, au-dessus du collège endormi. A quoi, à qui pensiez-vous alors? Il me semble que je le sais à présent. Et moi, à cette heure-là, c'est à vous que je pensais: nous pensions, vous et moi, à ce qui nous paraissait le plus en danger. Seulement, moi, je priais pour vous, d'une prière dont je ne suis pas sûr que vous ayez jamais priée pour ce petit.

L'ABBE: Je priais à ma façon: la tendresse aussi est une prière. Mais vous, avez-vous prié, fût-ce une seule fois, pour lui?

LE SUPERIEUR: Je n'ai pas, monsieur de Pradts, à rendre compte de mes prières. Et cependant . . . maintenant que vous êtes en règle avec Dieu, avec chacun de nous, et avec vous-même, le temps est peut-être venu que je vous dise un mot de moi. J'ai eu moi aussi, au début de mon sacerdoce, un dévouement trop exigeant, pour une âme trop frêle, que j'ai fatiguée. On m'ordonna de la confier à d'autres; cela me parut très dur; je le fis. Sept ans après, le vieux confesseur qui l'avait reçue étant mort, cette âme trouva tout simple de venir me demander conseil. Les risques avaient disparu; je l'accueillis. --Vous retrouverez un jour Serge Souplier.

L'ABBE: Il sera trop tard.

LE SUPERIEUR: "Trop tard": que voulez-vous dire? Et n'aurai-je donc connu de vous que des mouvements qui ne sont pas chrétiens? "Trop tard!" Qu'avez-vous donc aimé? Vous avez aimé une âme, cela est hors de doute, mais ne l'avez-vous aimée qu'à cause de son enveloppe charnelle qui avait de la gentillesse et de la grâce? Et le savez-vous? Et est-ce cela que vous avouez? Et était-ce cela, votre amour? Alors, assez parlé de lui; ç'a été une espèce de rêve sans sérieux et sans importance; bien plus encore que je ne le pensais, comme j'ai eu raison de vous en arracher! Il y a un autre amour, monsieur de Pradts, même envers la créature. Quand il atteint un certain degré dans l'absolu, par l'intensité, la pérennité et l'oubli de soi, il est si proche de l'amour de Dieu qu'on dirait alors que la créature n'a été conçue que pour nous faire déboucher sur le Créateur; je sais pourquoi je peux dire cela. Un tel amour, puissiez-vous le connaître. Et puisse-t-il vous mener, à force de s'épanouir, jusqu'à ce

> dernier et prodigieux Amour auprès duquel tout le reste n'est rien.
>
> (Le Supérieur se retire lentement jusqu'à la porte. L'abbé de Pradts revient vers la table, repousse vivement le prie-Dieu qui se trouve sur son passage, tombe assis sur sa chaise la tête contre ses avantbras qu'il a posés sur la table. On voit ses épaules secouées par les sanglots, pendant qu'une dernière fois s'élève, se suspend et retombe la voix d'enfant qui chante la phrase leitmotiv du Qui Lazarum resuscitasti. Le Supérieur est debout, immobile, contre la porte, et le regarde.)[110]

It was mentioned before that Montherlant would not allow La Ville to be performed on the French professional stage. Animated debate pursued Montherlant's refusal, but in a letter to the Archbishop of Paris, Montherlant clarified the issue.

> Ce qu'il y avait, dans les milieux catholiques, ce n'était pas crise de conscience, c'était divergence d'opinions, non sur la valeur de l'oeuvre, généralement reconnue, mais sur l'opportunité de la faire jouer.[111]

It is not that opportunities to stage the play were wanting, for the professional, amateur and educational groups urgently requested permission to mount the play.[112] But Montherlant, along with others, was fearful that the proper actors could not be found for the students' roles. He maintained this feeling until recently when he allowed

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[110]Montherlant, La Ville dont le Prince est un Enfant (Pléiade), pp. 933-936.

[111]Montherlant, "La Ville dont le Prince est un Enfant: Postface," Montherlant: Théâtre (Pléiade), p. 941.

[112]Ibid., pp. 941-943.

La Ville to be performed on the French stage.[113]

La Ville presents two main issues: Can the friendship of two young boys be honorable? Can the love of a priest for a young boy be harmful? Both issues are resolved in the play where at least one of the boys (Sevrais) loves strongly, but sacrifices nobly and the priest is reduced to despair and apparent loss of faith.

De Pradts shows an unbecoming smugness when he announces to Sevrais that he is to be dismissed because of his untrustworthiness. (Sevrais had met Souplier secretly after promising de Pradts that he would not see Souplier again, but in his meeting with Souplier, Sevrais had pointed out to his younger friend that their friendship should continue to be a noble part of their lives, one calling for sacrifice). De Pradts derides Sevrais: "Votre famille d'âmes nous est bien connue."[114] Sevrais is taken aback. His affection for Souplier is something noble, elevating, something generous in his own eyes, but condemned by a rigorous rejection as too intimate, too natural. In the final scene, de Pradts speaking to the Superior about Sevrais, indicates that he does not think that elevation of sentiment can accompany such friendships as that between Sevrais and Souplier, not realizing that he himself has

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[113]Ibid.

[114]Montherlant, La Ville dont le Prince est un Enfant, III:iii, p. 915.

fallen into the same abyss he makes reference to: "Je le voyais aspiré par la générosité comme par un abîme, par cette passion qui nous vient si souvent, d'agir contre nous-même. . .[115]

The Superior vainly attempts to show de Pradts that, for him human love is an obstacle to loving God. Like don Alvaro, de Pradts must detach himself from all earthly things.

In de Pradts' affection for Souplier, there exists frustrated paternal love, a strong urge for power and control disguised as apostolic zeal, and a relish for bizarre and stormy situations. The Superior identifies the problem clearly: "un attachement où Dieu n'est pas."[116]

Although de Pradts says, "J'ai commencé à l'aimer quand je l'ai vu en péril,"[117] he deceives himself. Certainly he is partial towards Souplier; he spies on him, searches his belongings for evidence of his waywardness, looking upon himself as his protector. He encourages the students to tattle; he is over-curious and imprudent. But when the Superior tries to point out his erratic behavior and attitude, he says that he is no worse than the rest of the faculty: "l'incroyance y est partout. Vous êtes

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[115]Ibid., III: ii., p. 921.

[116]Ibid., III: vii, p. 934.

[117]Ibid., p. 929.

dupe de la façade. . . . L'incroyance non seulement chez les élèves, mais chez les professeurs."[118] The kindness and understanding of the Superior are wasted on M. de Pradts: he is a man without friends, without love, without faith.

The primary conflict of the play, then, is not over the dismissal of a student, but the struggle between divine and human affection which rends assunder the soul of de Pradts. It is less the troubled friendship which unites Sevrais and Souplier than the jealousy of the Abbé.[119]

IS LA VILLE DONT LE PRINCE EST UN ENFANT CATHOLIC?

In the Preface to La Ville dont le Prince est un Enfant, Montherlant writes, ". . . j'ai aimé qu'une oeuvre dont je puis bien dire qu'elle a été écrite à genoux (emphasis added) invoquât moins ce qui trône dans les hauteurs que ce qui se cache dans les retraites et les ombres de la charité."[120]

Henri Daniel-Rops states that such an affirmation by Montherlant may surprise some readers, but he adds:

> A tout esprit de bonne foi, cependant, il apparaîtra qu'il y a, tout au long de ces trois actes, un respect,

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[118] Ibid., III:vii, p. 932.

[119] Georges Bordonove, op. cit., p. 80.

[120] Montherlant, "La Ville dont le Prince est un Enfant: A Monsieur l'Abbé C. Rivière," Montherlant: Théâtre (Pléiade), p. 847.

> une ferveur, une sorte de tremblement de l'âme qui viennent du plus profond de l'homme qui les exprime. Vraie au sens humain du terme et, en ce sens, catholique. . . cette pièce est aussi catholiquement vraie parce qu'elle respecte les hiérarchies authentiques, donne leur vraie place aux exigences de la conscience et laisse à la grâce son rôle décisif dans les destins humains. L'intention la plus profonde que semble bien avoir eue Montherlant en écrivant La Ville est celle-ci: bien loin de diffamer les maîtres de sa jeunesse, faire sentir qu'une certaine hauteur de sentiments, un certain appel de l'âme à soi-même, une certaine noblesse jusque dans les déchirements de la passion, ne sont possibles qu'autant que la foi leur sert de base. Tout cela, pour un homme qui se veut éloigné de l'Eglise, ne manque ni de courage ni de beauté.[121]

Then he adds, a propos the present discussion

> La Ville peut-elle choquer ou satisfaire les catholiques? . . . Il faudra certainement être profondément catholique pour accepter cette pièce et en entendre toutes les véritables résonances. Mais ma conviction, quant à moi, est faite: ne la jugeront scandaleuse que les pharisiens.[122]

Few critics have censured Montherlant for his treatment of the delicate subject matter of La Ville. The vast majority have only glowing praise for the play, both as an artistic achievement and as an elevated, Christian work. The following form part of the vast array of tributes. They are taken from notes appended to the collected plays of Henry de Montherlant, where, incidentally, he has also included the few objections which appear in a small number of reviews.

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[121]Henri Daniel-Rops, quoted in Montherlant: Théâtre (Paris: Bibliothèque de la Pléiade, 1965), p. 955.

[122]Ibid., p. 956.

> . . . Jouera-t-on cette oeuvre, cette grande oeuvre pathétique, sobre, vigoreuse, si audacieuse et cependant si noble, si prôche parfois de scandale et qui s'en écarte toujours grâce à cette hauteur de ton, à cette élévation d'âme, à ce goût de chevalerie et de jeunesse immarcescible qui n'appartient qu'à M. de Montherlant.[123]

René Bailly writes:

> Un sobre témoignage, dont on ne saurait se refuser à dégager, quoique puissent en penser certains, l'incontestable portée morale.[124]

Abbé Louis Cognet, director of Studies at Juilly, and supervisor of lectures at the Catholic Institute writes:

> Le livre refermé me laisse une intense impression de nouveauté. C'est la première fois, à ma connaissance, que le thème du collège est abordé, avec une profonde sympathie, avec une émotion et une délicatesse qui donnent à l'oeuvre sa tonalité originale. Pour un éducateur, il est difficile de rester indifférent en face de cette pièce. . . . En toute franchise, il me faut avouer que, pour ma part, je suis heureux que cette pièce ait été écrite. . . . Jamais Montherlant n'a rien écrit de plus parfaitement dépouillé, de plus net et de plus intense; les caractères y sont dessinés avec une sobriété chargée d'émotion. Les dialogues sont, à mes yeux, un véritable tour de force: sans vulgarité ni réalisme trop démonstratif, mais d'une absolue vérité. Ces qualités, certes, se rencontrent dans d'autres pièces de Montherlant. Il me semble pourtant qu'elles atteignent ici leur plénitude. . . . Je vois là non seulement un chef-d'oeuvre littéraire, mais un document humain d'une prodigieuse valeur.[125]

Jacques Lemarchand, close friend of Montherlant, yet generally a severe critic, writes:

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[123]Bernard Simiot, "Critiques sur La Ville dont le Prince est un Enfant," Montherlant: Théâtre (Bibliothèque de la Pléiade, 1965), p. 957.

[124]Ibid.

[125]Ibid., pp. 957-958.

> Combien je lui suis reconnaissant d'avoir indiqué, souligné, tout au long de ces trois actes, et avec courage, cette "tempête de l'esprit" dans laquelle sont pris directeurs de conscience et élèves dans un collège religieux. Et d'avoir eu la force de ne pas décrire le naufrage, et l'art de laisser deviner tous les naufrages possibles. "Même ce qui, chez nous, peut sembler être sur un plan assez bas est encore mille fois au-dessus de ce qui se passe au dehors. Ce qui se passe chez nous bientôt n'existera plus que dans quelques lieux privilégiés." Il me semble que cette phrase peut laver l'âme de tant de garçons, à demi victimes de ces tempêtes catholiques, et qui ne savent plus--lâchés dans le monde--s'ils doivent ou ne doivent pas rougir d'avoir été tels que Montherlant les voit,--tels, qu'ils ne peuvent pas oublier qu'ils ont été.[126]

And finally, Frans Muller, critic for Courrier du Soir, writes:

> Jamais peut-être rien de plus grave, de plus dépouillé, de plus chrétien n'a été écrit sur le sujet. . . . Ce livre est un chef-d'oeuvre que goûteront les lecteurs profondément chrétiens.[127]

La Ville dont le Prince est un Enfant is perhaps the most Christian of Montherlant's plays. In it he discovers the action of grace, of divine complacency in the Superior, in Sevrais, and even in Souplier. But as Robert Kemp notes: "C'est bien lui Montherlant l'instrument de la Grâce . . . . Mais l'auteur voit toujours grand. Il fait ce qu'il veut, et ne veut rien de moyen, de médiocre. Il transpose, il orchestre. Une syrinx lui devient grandes orgues."[128]

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[126]Ibid., p. 954.

[127]Ibid., p. 960.

[128]Robert Kemp, La vie des livres I, p. 309.

CONCLUSION

The preceding chapters have led us through the labyrinth of the background culture and the personal history and the peculiar talents and shortcomings of Henry de Montherlant. His Jansenistic upbringing was shown as one of the most important influences on his personal and professional life. Furthermore, had it not been for the long-standing tradition in the French theatre subscribing to the theatre of ideas and the theatre of elevated language, it is doubtful that Henry de Montherlant would have turned from the novel to the theatre, and become one of the foremost playwrights of the present century.

The great bulk of Montherlant's theatre is characterized by pessimism and nihilism, and herein lies one of the most serious difficulties facing the critic of the Catholic plays of Henry de Montherlant. Their refinement of style and their excellence of dramatic expression are widely recognized. But it is only with reservations that most critics accept Montherlant's plays as Catholic. Yet, despite the monstrous nature of at least one principal character in each play, the "Catholic trilogy" is certainly Catholic in nature.

For one to hold that Montherlant's characters provide

examples deserving imitation must be qualified. Montherlant has taken the Gospels literally: contempt for the world; detachment from creatures; sacrificing all to God; finding everything in nothing; dying in order to live. In their fanatic zeal for self-realization, Montherlant's characters destroy themselves and bring ruin upon those they most earnestly desire to help. But this destruction, this ruin, demand of the audience a judgment of the personal success or failure of the characters in the play. What criteria does the audience employ to judge such success, such failure? Herein lies the most potent argument in evaluating favorably the Catholicity of Montherlant's plays. In order to understand Port-Royal, le Maître de Santiago and La Ville dont le Prince est un Enfant, one must judge them against Christian standards. If to the Christian standards delineated in the Gospel is added the characteristic feeling of waste attendant upon tragic destruction, then the Christian elements assume broad proportions. There is this sense of waste about Soeur Angélique as she departs for her convent prison, with no hope to sustain her, no faith to guide her; waste in Alvaro and Mariana who voluntarily prepare to shut themselves within the cloistered walls; waste in de Pradts who sees himself abandoned and insulated when his greatest need is for companionship.

But each of these characters has his life centered

in God; to be sure, not the God of philosophers and sages, but a personal God who, as these characters see Him, requires of each the complete divesting of self. Essentially this is the God of Christianity. But zealots that they are, Montherlant's characters make of this divesting, this becoming nothing, their primary end in life, their God, so to speak. But it is God. His presence can be felt in the elevated sentiments of Mariana, just as His absence can be felt in the misunderstandings of Alvaro. But they are misunderstandings which he follows to the sacrifice of everything in life. This is strongly reminiscent of the God St. Paul speaks of as "God who shall judge the secrets of the heart,"[1] and who in this unfolding of each personal drama sees each one's personal salvation.

Notwithstanding Montherlant's incredulity and disavowal of Catholic practice, his plays give evidence of the Catholic intellectual whose frame of reference is Catholic tradition but who is unable to subscribe to the current code of Catholic dogma and morality. Nevertheless, "Le catholicisme n'en reste pas moins la plus grande tentation d'Henry de Montherlant, . . ."[2] This is part of the conditioning of French Catholicism, where all too often belief and practice are looked upon as separate facets

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[1]Romans, 2:16.

[2]Henri Massis, op. cit., p. 94.

of religion, and one is free to choose both, either or neither. Montherlant is yet to be convinced that Catholic teaching can satisfy him intellectually, but he has been convinced that it can satisfy him spiritually. As evidence, "la Trilogie Catholique" can be cited.

Perhaps Montherlant cannot subscribe to Catholicism because he is repulsed by the examples of Catholic living he witnesses. There is the feeling that Montherlant considers Angélique, Alvaro and de Pradts as better examples of Catholic living than that of self-declared pious Catholics whose religion is seldom translated into devotion to a cause, but rather employed as a means of security in mediocrity. Further, he looks upon his Catholic characters as better Christians than the so-called militant Catholics whose struggle exhibits neither courage nor conviction.

Montherlant's Catholic plays, therefore, are mainly plays about Catholics, not ideal Catholics, but Catholics who have existed historically, and whose salient features are the product of his fruitful imagination.

Perhaps, to Montherlant, Angélique, Alvaro and de Pradts are ideal Catholics. They follow their religious convictions with a devotion noticeably lacking in the majority of Catholics.

The question immediately arises: Are Montherlant's characters saved? No one can answer with certainty. But they have found themselves and they have found their God.

Alvaro and Mariana have found him in voluntary seclusion, to which of course they will bring their humanity with all its defects, but also with all its virtues. However, their intense pursuit of Evangelical perfection will not be without its difficulties for such ardent and untempered natures.

The Abbé de Pradts is an enigma. At the close of the play he is in a state of despondency. He has given up everything to follow Christ, and now he has neither Christ nor earthly goods. His salvation depends on what he does from that moment. If he follows the example of the Superior, his salvation is assured. It is not so much a matter of what he will do, as what he will become: it can certainly be inferred from Montherlant's plays that men are not judged so much on what they do as what they are. De Pradts has but to reevaluate his priestly vocation, and join the long list of sacrificial victims who spend their lives in quiet submission to a will which they cannot understand, or to channel his capacity for love in God's direction.

Angélique faces the darkness of doubt and despair, but her state at the end of the play suggests that of Catherine of Sienna who, thinking herself abandoned by God, bitterly complained: "Where were you, Lord, when I needed you most?" And she reports that the answer came

to her, "I was in your heart, fortifying you by my grace.[3]

The Superior in La Ville dont le Prince est un Enfant seems to have the answer for all of these misguided mystics: what is merely human in one's interior life should be spiritualized. He understands that all too frequently human attachments are means of avoiding divine love, but he also understands that God's secret ways, which can be cluttered with detours and snares catering to human weakness, can be the very means by which God draws men closer to Him.

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[3]Herbert Thurston and Donald Attwater, op. cit., p. 193.

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VITA

Denys John Gary was born in Jeanerette, Louisiana, in 1923 and graduated from St. Peter's High School in New Iberia in 1940. He then entered the order of Christian Brothers and after his initial training period graduated with a BA in history from The College of Santa Fe in 1947. He subsequently taught in Louisiana and New Mexico, and was principal of Mullen High School in Denver, Colorado, from 1959 to 1962. He then joined the staff of the College of Santa Fe where he is currently head of the Drama Department. He took his Master of Arts degree in Speech from LSU in 1955, and a Master of Arts degree in Education Administration from the University of Denver in 1962.

EXAMINATION AND THESIS REPORT

Candidate: Denys J. Gary

Major Field: Speech

Title of Thesis: The Modern French Theatre: The Catholic Plays of Henry de Montherlant

Approved:

Major Professor and Chairman

Dean of the Graduate School

EXAMINING COMMITTEE:

Date of Examination:

January 9, 1969