

THE TRAGEDY OF THE WOMEN IN MONTHERLANT'S THEATER

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Montherlant's Success as a Writer. Henry de Montherlant is considered to be one of France's greatest living writers. He has received numerous prizes and awards for various works, and in 1960 he became a member of the French Academy. During his younger years, he wrote novels which made him a spokesman for his generation, a generation which has experienced two wars and much philosophical bewilderment. In his later years, mainly since 1940, he has devoted himself to the theater, having produced at least fourteen plays, half of which have been played at the Comédie Française.

The success of his theater, both in France and elsewhere, is well established. To those, however, who are not acquainted with his plays, the question arises: why are they successful? One reason for their success is his style of writing. It is vigorous and masculine. Other reasons are his originality of ideas, his continual search for the ultimate truth, and his authenticity that gives his works a timeless quality.

The Psychology of His Theater. Every theater audience looks beyond the overt action that is on the stage to see the underlying action, or the psychology of the characters and the theme and plan in which they move. Montherlant, like other writers, conforms his characters and themes to his own philosophical ideas. A discussion of his philosophy will be given in chapter III.

Montherlant's theater is a "théâtre de la douleur."¹ Every play, whether it opens upon a crisis or begins with a carefree mood, ends in tragedy. The main characters ultimately destroy themselves because of a passion that they cannot control. This destruction is in the form of solitude or death because of excessive pride, excessive sensuality, or a blindness to one's true character or that of the persons about him.

The Tragedy of the Women. Another important fact, but one which has not received as much recognition as has the tragedy of the heroes, is that the women in the plays are also tragic, every one of them. Although their tragedy is usually not so severe as death, except in La Reine morte, the women nevertheless suffer, often as much or more than the men do, and as a direct or indirect result of their own actions. In Montherlant's plays where the masculine role is dominant, the hero is usually portrayed as having tragic qualities, although the women often provide the final stimulus which results in the tragedy.

If, then, the heroes are already tragic, why are many of the women made the instruments of destruction? Surely this negative role that Montherlant gives the women must relate to his own ideas about them. Much has been written about Montherlant and women in an effort to determine his attitude toward them, and many writers think that he scorns women, believing that their only use is to gratify the man's sensual desires.

Status of the Women. The women in his novels were generally depicted as inferior to the men. However, a study of the women in his

¹Henry de Montherlant, Fils de Personne (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1964), introduction by France Anders, p. 14.

theater reveals that the situation has been reversed; many of these women are portrayed as being far superior to the men, both in their common sense and in their ability to love. Why, then, are they also tragic? Of course, some are doomed to tragedy, just like the men, because they possess the qualities that bring about the tragedy, such as having excessive pride or passion; but many symbolize the ideal femininity in a woman.

Definition of the Problem. Because of the realization that the women in Montherlant's theater are all tragic, even though usually more flatteringly portrayed than the men, the theme for this paper has been evolved. In order to develop this study of the tragedy of Montherlant's women, it is also necessary to know his biography, paying special attention to the details about his relationship to women and to other events which he has used as a basis for his beliefs and for some of his plots.

The organization of this study will include, therefore, a biography of Henry de Montherlant, followed by a chapter discussing his philosophy, two chapters containing the discussions of his plays, and the conclusions.

Half of Montherlant's plays have a setting in contemporary France; the other half are historical or legendary plays, set in France, Greece, Italy, and Spain. Some of these plays are patterned after real incidents and characters; others are written only to fit the mood of the time.

The first chapter on the plays will discuss those with a modern setting: L'Exil, La Ville dont le prince est un enfant, Celles qu'on prend dans ses bras, a trilogy (Un Incompris, Fils de Personne, and Demain il fera jour), and Brocéliande.

The second chapter on the plays will discuss his historical or legendary plays: La Reine morte, Pasiphaé, Malatesta, Don Juan, and three religious plays (Le Maître de Santiago, Port-Royal, and Le Cardinal d'Espagne).

Within each discussion will be an attempt to point out the essential characteristics of each woman, as well as why she is tragic, and to relate these characters and events within the plays to Montherlant's own life and philosophy.

The conclusions will summarize the main points of the previous discussions and will try to make some observations regarding Montherlant's reasons for his portrayal of the women in his theater.

CHAPTER II

BIOGRAPHY

Family. Henry de Montherlant was born April 21, 1896, in Paris. He was an only child. His mother, an emotional, nervous, and delicate woman, remained an invalid after his birth and until her death, twenty years later. In addition to Henry, there were five persons in the Montherlant household: his mother, his father, his maternal grandmother, an uncle, and a grand-uncle. His homelife can be described as slightly claustrophobic.¹ His father was always in financial trouble, and his grandmother worried incessantly.

His family can claim aristocratic heritage, as his father was of Catalan origin that dates from the fifteenth century. One ancestor was a cup-bearer to Louis XIV, and another was guillotined in the French Revolution.² His maternal grandfather, the Count de Riancey, who died during Henry's early childhood, had been a Zouave of an infantry corps in Algeria, as well as a sub-director of the Compagnie d'Assurances générales contre l'Incendie. According to a rumor, "ce vieux beau," having been handsome, fascinating, and a lavish spender, was ruined by women.³

¹Peter Quennell (ed.), Selected Essays, by Montherlant, (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1961), p. 7.

²"Biographical Sketch," Time, 27:58, January 27, 1936.

³Jacques-Napoléon Faure-Biguot, Les Enfances de Montherlant (Paris: Henri Lefebvre, ed., 1948), p. 14.

Montherlant's maternal grandmother, born Potier de Courcy, was the strongest personality in the household. She had the most influence of anyone on her grandson, for she outlived both his parents and provided him a home after their deaths until he was nearly thirty years old.

During Henry's younger years, his grandmother grew quite morbid due to her daughter's illness, her inability to get along with Henry's father, the extravagances of her own husband, and the bungling actions of her son and her brother. She surrounded herself with objects of gloom and mourning, which included pictures of her best friends on their deathbeds. After her own death, a horsehair belt, called a cilice, was found among her belongings. This was a relic of the Jansenist religion, to which some of her family had belonged. One can see this Jansenist influence in Montherlant's play, Port-Royal.⁴

Montherlant's father was a small man with a swarthy complexion; black hair, mustache, and eyes. Above all else, he loved horses and art objects. Resembling his Catalan ancestors physically, he seemed also to have had the character of a Spaniard, being taciturn and rather somber of mood. He had wished to be a cavalry officer. He had little influence upon his son; they were not close to each other, and an innate affection was not enough to overcome the distance.⁵

His mother, Marguerite Camusat de Riancey,⁶ a pretty woman, was, between 1890 and 1895, a society girl enjoying flirting, dancing, the

⁴Ibid., pp. 16-17.

⁵Ibid., pp. 14-15.

⁶Henri Perruchot, Montherlant (Paris: Gallimard, 1959), p. 17.

opera, and parties. When she was twenty years old, Henry was born; and, because of a severe hemorrhage, she never recovered from the birth, spending the remainder of her life in bed or on a chaise longue. Her only reason of living henceforth was her son; and, during his adolescence, she became his friend as well as his mother, whereby he not only enjoyed her affection but also experienced moments of harshness and conflict in this relationship with her.⁷ This possessive quality of maternal influence has left its imprint in his novels and plays, for frequently feminine guile and possessiveness play an ugly part, whereas masculine affection is portrayed as honest and uncomplicated. His uncle and grand-uncle, of whom little has been written, nevertheless provided character types for Montherlant's famous novel, Les Célibataires (1934), since they were rather eccentric bachelors.⁸

Early Schooling. Montherlant's elementary school was Janson de Sailly. He applied himself seriously to his work; but his compositions placed him at the seventh or eighth rank of his class, no more. Yet, under this rather expressionless surface was a personality that was already dedicated to literary purposes by the age of nine. Henry would get up at six o'clock in the morning to read and to write his own stories in order that this very precious pleasure would not interfere with his schoolwork.

Discovery of Quo Vadis? His friend, Jacques-Napoléon Faure-Biguet, also was dedicated to writing; and, during this early age, both boys

⁷Faure-Biguet, op. cit., p. 15.

⁸Quennell, op. cit., p. 8.

discovered Quo Vadis? by the Polish author, Henryk Sienkiewicz. Henry greeted this book about ancient Roman life as if it were a part of his own. This love of the pagan attitude of the Romans has influenced him throughout his life. Some of its qualities which can be seen in him and his works are the Roman love of the gladiatorial games, from which bull-fighting is a descendant; the influence of the hero Petronius--voluptuous, skeptical, and sensitive to all forms of beauty; love of nudity; scorn for mediocrity; superior detachment.⁹

Concerning women, Montherlant read in Quo Vadis?: "Le lendemain de ce festin où Petron avait discuté avec Lucain, Néron et Sénèque la question de savoir si la femme possède une âme . . .?"¹⁰ Faure-Biguet believes that this inoffensive-appearing sentence could have been the main influence in Montherlant's attitude toward women, for the former said that if Henry is predestined to be of those who, while desiring a woman, have for her only little esteem, this may be due to the question raised by Quo Vadis?, whether women have souls.

Adolescence. At the age of eleven, Henry de Montherlant began his precocious puberty. It was also during this time, 1907, that he left his school, Janson de Sailly, and entered Saint-Pierre at Neuilly near Paris, where he remained until 1910. He became enamored with a little German girl of illegitimate birth. Also, he would cut from magazines pictures of nude statues and paste them carefully in an album which he kept locked and hidden.¹¹ When he was thirteen, Montherlant wrote a story

⁹Faure-Biguet, op. cit., pp. 18-22. ¹⁰Ibid., p. 24.

¹¹Ibid., pp. 43-44.

which is significant to this study of his theater. It was entitled Urion and was about a sort of young Tarzan of ancient Thrace, who had never approached a woman. Once, while chasing a she-wolf that he had intended to kill, the closeness of the beast after he caught it aroused an instinct within him that made him release the wolf and go toward the grotto of the sirens.¹² This sensuality toward animals is a theme that he expanded years later in his play, Pasiphaé.

In 1910, Montherlant's parents decided that the school Saint-Pierre would not solidly prepare him for his baccalaureate. Several schools were subsequently considered: the Jesuits, by his father, who had himself been brought up there; Sainte-Croix by Henry, his mother, and his grandmother. Henry wanted to remain with two friends who were going from Saint-Pierre to Sainte-Croix, also at Neuilly. His grandmother wished especially that he not attend a Jesuit school because Henry's maternal great-grandfather had fought against the Jesuits during his entire political career, and she also wished to keep Henry's father from having too much influence over him.

Henry helped to sway the decision his way by using his own health as the deciding factor. He had recently had an appendectomy, and every day during his convalescence he would open the clamps on the incision so that it could not heal. Then he would plead to his father that he would not be cured unless he got to go to Sainte-Croix. He won. However, his father imposed one restriction: Henry's director of conscience would be

¹²Ibid., p. 51.

a Jesuit, since his father did not approve of the Riancey influence.¹³ Thus, in this small but important episode in Montherlant's life, one can see the preponderance of feminine influence that abided in the household. Although it was a victory for Henry, it was also a victory for his grandmother.

Bullfighting in Spain. In the summer of 1909, Montherlant went to Spain, where he fell in love with bullfighting. From 1910 on, he studied the art of the matador and began killing small bulls near Burgos. He loved the art with such a passion that he succeeded well enough to have his skill mentioned in a Nîmes newspaper in October, 1911.¹⁴ When, in June of 1911, he passed the first part of his baccalaureate, he left immediately for Spain and the bullfights. It is interesting to note that his parents would let him go alone to Spain; but in Paris, at this time, he could not go out in the evening by himself.

Expulsion from Sainte-Croix. The next fall, he returned to Sainte-Croix at Neuilly for what would be his best and last year. He entered the study of philosophy, along with about ten other boys who were chosen as a select nucleus, and was unanimously elected the president of this group. He was tremendously popular among his classmates in this group, which named themselves, "La Famille." This attempt to distinguish themselves from the mediocrity of the other schoolboys highly displeased the director, and Henry did nothing to ameliorate the situation. As a result of some incident, which Montherlant has never explained, he was sent away

¹³Ibid., pp. 59-62. ¹⁴Perruchot, op. cit., pp. 18-19.

from Sainte-Croix, although he was allowed to complete his study for his baccalaureate. His father was told nothing of his dismissal. His mother simply pretended that she had withdrawn him because there was too little discipline at the school and that his father had never wanted him at Sainte-Croix in the first place.¹⁵ This painful incident inspired the play, La Ville dont le prince est un enfant, completed in 1951.

Human Contact. After finishing his baccalaureate, Montherlant began his study of law at the Catholic Institute, as well as taking his first steps in the social world, to the delight of his parents. Associations with girls did nothing to his heart, but they excited his imagination and his vanity. However, in spite of all the gaiety, invitations, and dances, Henry was lonely and missed his life at Sainte-Croix.¹⁶

Perhaps his loneliness was due to the fact that he preferred masculine company to feminine, although women excited him. One can see that the greater part of his early life outside the family circle was lived in a "male order."¹⁷ First, he found it at Sainte-Croix; next, in the Catholic Institute; much later, in the war; and finally, in sports. He seemed to see in these masculine relationships a pure friendship; in war, especially, men were strongly linked together through sacrifice and heroism, and women were excluded.

¹⁵Faure-Biguet, op. cit., pp. 72-84.

¹⁶Ibid., pp. 94-97.

¹⁷Germaine Brée, Twentieth Century French Literature: An Anthology of Prose and Poetry (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1962), pp. 352-53.

In 1913, Montherlant began to study design, having for models some Italian girls in the Montparnasse Quarter. He also joined a popular sporting club, Auto.¹⁸

It was during this period that Montherlant dated a girl who was always late. Although he liked her very much, he decided one day to leave her forever if she did not arrive on time. The girl was late, and he did leave her, although it was not easy to do; but he felt he owed it to himself and his self-respect.¹⁹ He early wrote this episode into a novel, La Femme en retard et punie which, however, did not appear in that form. Instead, he later rewrote it into a short play, Un Incompris.²⁰

Of his years between 1912 and 1914, Montherlant says that they were like a desert. He had not yet begun to live, to have real human contact. Of course, there were the Italian models, but of them he said that they were not human contact. He admitted that he did not like the young men he knew and that the only sentiment they inspired was pity.²¹

Parents' Deaths. In March, 1914, his father died. Being influenced, perhaps by his grandmother's pictures of her friends on their deathbeds, Montherlant drew his father on his deathbed, his mouth opened in a last spasm of agony.²²

¹⁸Perruchot, op. cit., p. 19.

¹⁹Faure-Biguet, op. cit., pp. 104-08.

²⁰Jeanne Sandelion, Montherlant et les femmes (Paris: Librairie Plon, 1950), p. 3.

²¹Faure-Biguet, op. cit., p. 117. ²²Ibid., p. 111.

When war broke out in 1914, he was indifferent to it until he learned that one of his friends had enlisted. Montherlant asked his mother, who was now in failing health, if he could enlist, also, but she told him:²³ "Attends donc pour t'engager que je sois morte. Tu n'auras pas longtemps à attendre." This brief interchange with her, according to Montherlant, was the inspiration for L'Exil, his first play, written in 1914.

In August, 1915, his mother died. Montherlant expressed deep sorrow at her death, feeling that he had not loved her as much as she had loved him, at least, that he could not be demonstrative about his love for his family. Montherlant remarked to Faure-Biguet:²⁴

. . . je n'ai jamais pu être démonstratif qu'avec les êtres que je désire . . . Quand ma mère m'embrassait, je me crispais; je n'ai jamais aimé qu'on m'embrasse. J'ai été effroyablement dur avec elle, et même dans les derniers temps, quand elle était touchée à mort et le savait. . . . Dans l'intérieur où j'ai été élevé, les hommes étaient sans pitié pour les femmes. Peut-être est-ce pour cela que moi, plus tard, j'ai été plus gentil qu'il ne le faut avec elles.

In remembering his mother's death, he said that at first he felt only a dreadful indifference; later, the pangs of grief came. He admits:

". . . j'étais lié avec elle comme avec une soeur."²⁵

Madame de Montherlant left a letter for her son to read after her death. In it she asked him to follow in the right way, admitting that she knew it would be an effort for him. She also asked him to take care

²³Henry de Montherlant, Theatre, Bibliothèque de la Pléiade (Paris: Gallimard, 1958), "Note de 1954," p. 12.

²⁴Faure-Biguet, op. cit., p. 138.

²⁵Sandelion, op. cit., p. 218.

of his grandmother, to show her a little affection, although she knew that would be difficult for him, too. She told him she loved him, but that she should have developed his conscience further, although she knew there were many diverse influences around him. She also spoke of Heaven and Hell, saying she hoped that they would try to find each other in the better place some day;²⁶ and she requested that Henry not enter the mortuary room, remembering, no doubt, the drawing he had made of his father on his deathbed.

After his mother's death, Montherlant refused to let his play, l'Exil, be published. He did not want people to say that it was his own story, that his mother prevented him from enlisting, and now that she was dead he could tell his story. In fact, he held back his literary debut for five years after her death, in respect to her memory. Similarly, although he had been unfeeling in his actions toward his grandmother, he nevertheless postponed until after her death his trip to Africa, a trip he had long been wishing and planning to take.²⁷

World War I. In September, 1916, he was accepted by the auxiliary service, and with his grandmother's help and influence, he was able to become a member of an infantry regiment, still keeping his auxiliary status. He longed for actual combat, however. His grandmother, suppressing her own anxiety for his safety in favor of his personal happiness, finally succeeded in getting him transferred to the infantry, where he was sent to the front.²⁸

²⁶Ibid., p. 138. ²⁷Faure-Biguet, op. cit., pp. 140-41.

²⁸Montherlant, Théâtre, op. cit., "Note de 1954," p. 17.

He was made a second-class soldier, was wounded twice, and over a period of two years sent about three hundred letters and cards to his grandmother, all of which she kept.²⁹ Apparently Montherlant had ability as a soldier, for he could have become an officer. However, he refused all promotions, because he did not want to command his comrades in undertakings that he had not planned and which seemed often to be conceived without concern for the men's lives.

After his second injury, he became an interpreter for the American army and was trying to persuade the authorities to return him to a combat unit when the Armistice intervened.³⁰

When he returned from the war, he published le Songe, a story of warfare and an even greater success than his La Relève du matin, which was his first book, begun in 1916, published at his own expense in 1920, and which was an overnight success. In 1924, he produced Les Olympiques and Chant funèbre pour les morts de Verdun, the dominant theme in both being brotherhood.³¹

Post-War Restlessness. On his return from the war in 1918 and until the death of his grandmother in 1925, Montherlant lived quietly in Paris. During the first few months, he and four friends organized an "Ordre," a club having a very select membership, whereby they sought the fraternity that had been so glorious to them as soldiers. When the "Ordre" was dissolved, Montherlant turned to sports, hoping to continue the "male order" in track and football.

²⁹Faure-Biguet, op. cit., p. 163.

³⁰Perruchot, op. cit., pp. 19-20. ³¹Quennell, op. cit., p. 9.

Nearly thirty now, he began to feel the approach of both a physiological and a moral crisis. Physiologically, he was overpowered by a gross sensuality. Morally, he felt a need to act, to write, to live as he pleased. He was greatly influenced during this period by Barrès.³² Mohrt further explains: "Ce que Montherlant cherche, depuis la guerre, c'est quelqu'un à tuer: des taureaux . . . ou des femmes."³³

After the death of his grandmother, Montherlant liquidated the family estate, packed two suitcases, and left Paris. Over a period of seven years, he traveled in Spain, Africa, and Italy. Although these were difficult and lonely times for him, he wrote several novels: Les Bestiaires, Aux Fontaines du désir, La petite Infante de Castille, Un Voyageur solitaire est un diable; and a short play, Pasiphaé. His last work before he returned to Paris was a long novel, La Rose de sable, of which only a portion has been published, entitled, L'Histoire de l'amour de la rose de sable. Back in Paris in 1932, he was eagerly welcomed by the literary public.³⁴

Decision About Marriage. After two ill-starred engagements, Montherlant decided that a marriage would not be compatible with his way of life; its minor details would be a nuisance; he would be unable to seek out his yearned-for complete detachment; and he wanted to be free to accept any of the possibilities which he had considered: war; the

³²Michel Mohrt, Montherlant, "homme libre" (Paris: Gallimard, 1943), pp. 83-87, 103-104.

³³Ibid., p. 80.

³⁴Perruchot, op. cit., pp. 21-23.

austerity of a religious life, if he should become a believer; even greater austerity, in the absence of religious belief; or other adventures.³⁵

He became engaged for the first time in 1924, then broke with the girl; he became engaged a second time in 1934, but broke this engagement, also. Both were serious, to the point of having contacted notaries, etc.; but he realized that his artistic temperament would not let him accept married life.³⁶ Of this decision, he admits that Tolstoy partly influenced him. In fact, Montherlant had written an article about Madame Tolstoy, wife of the Russian author, in which he violently opposed her actions.

Each time he became engaged, he took Tolstoy's diary, which he had marked with his own annotations, such as "Quelle sottise!" "Idiot!", and gave it to his fiancée, telling her to read it to find all the reasons why they should not get married. Upon reading it and seeing all the annotations that he had added in the margins, the woman would begin adding her own chilly responses to both Tolstoy's and Montherlant's remarks.³⁷ What happened immediately after the reading is not known, but probably a deterioration of the engagement was not long in coming.

Later Years. Having returned to Paris in 1934, Montherlant wrote for various publications which were politically opposed, declined invitations from Spain to visit the front of the republican Spaniards and

³⁵Justin O'Brien, "Bullfighter in the Academy," Reporter, 25:56, September 14, 1961.

³⁶Perruchot, op. cit., pp. 24-25. ³⁷Sandelion, op. cit., p. ix.

from the Hitler government to attend the Congress of Nuremberg; and, in general, maintained an apolitical position until the outbreak of World War II. Because of his injuries in World War I and others incurred from his bullfighting, Montherlant could not enter actual combat; instead, he went as a correspondent for a weekly paper, Marianne, to zones of combat near the Oise and the Aisne, while continuing his own writing. Throughout the duration of the war, he published his writings, being careful not to offend the Germans, but neither to participate in any of the activities they proposed to him.

After the war, Montherlant tended more than ever to withdraw, to slake this thirst for retirement which had actually begun in 1940. Since the war, he has remained in Paris, refusing to attend literary meetings, belonging to no groups, attending the presentations of his plays in Paris theaters, but ignoring those given in other countries.³⁸

A description of Montherlant as he lived in 1944 would probably fit that of his later years, also. He lived alone, seeing few persons, his accommodations so simple that he took his meals at restaurants, as many did during the war. His name was not listed in the Paris phone directory. He liked to take long walks at noon, enjoying the sunshine, his liberty, and his anonymity. His only pleasures were his work, reading, and contemplation.³⁹

Since the war, when it became easier to buy groceries, Montherlant eats his meals at his home, an old residence which overlooks the Seine

³⁸Perruchot, op. cit., pp. 25-28. ³⁹Mohrt, op. cit., pp. 208-09.

from the left bank. His salon is filled with statues and busts of ancient mythological figures: Artemis, Dionysus, etc., which give mute witness to his continued fascination for the human body.⁴⁰

Prizes and Honors. Montherlant has received several prizes and honors during his long literary career. In 1934, the Northcliffe-Heineman Prize from England was given him for his novel, les Célibataires, the money of which he gave to the London hospitals. Also, in 1934, he received the Grand Prix de Littérature de l'Académie Française, the 10,000 francs of which he sent to the commander-in-chief in Morocco to divide equally between the victorious French soldiers and conquered Moroccan soldiers. The same year he was offered a prize of 20,000 francs from the Tunisian Foundation to spend a month in Tunisia and write a book about the country, undoubtedly from the political viewpoint. Montherlant, wishing to maintain his independence as a writer, refused the prize.⁴¹

In 1961, Montherlant entered the Académie Française, excused from having to make the formal announcement of his candidacy to the other members. He was the second in the history of the Académie to enter it thus; Paul Valéry (1871-1945) was admitted at his first application.⁴² Although many have not agreed with Montherlant's ideas, there cannot be much disagreement about his skill as a writer, since it has been recognized by the various honors accorded him.

⁴⁰Sandelion, op. cit., pp. i-ii.

⁴¹Montherlant, Théâtre, op. cit., "Index biographique," p. xliii.

⁴²O'Brien, loc. cit.

CHAPTER III

PHILOSOPHY

Montherlant has undoubtedly contributed much to French literature. Although it is still too soon to see the proof of his endurance, his classical style and choice of theme will probably insure an immortality for his works. In 1949, the newspaper Carrefour asked its readers which French writer would be the most widely read in the year 2000; Montherlant's name appeared at the head of the list.¹ Certainly, if volume as well as quality were a criterion to consider, his reputation would be firmly established: between 1920 and 1958 he wrote over twenty-seven novels, plays, and essays, producing them at an average rate of one every year and a half.

Synchrétisme and Alternance. What has been the message within these reams of words? Montherlant's philosophy is not easily discernable, since he has not set it down within a rigid framework. The best way to see the inner man, besides reading the critiques of others, is to read his Carnets, written between 1930 and 1944, in which he discusses his synchrétisme and alternance.² Synchrétisme is defined by Montherlant as a philosophical or religious system which holds several different or conflicting doctrines; alternance is the process of succession of themes by turns, as the succeeding seasons of the year.

¹Henry de Montherlant, Théâtre, Bibliothèque de la Pléiade (Paris: Gallimard, 1958), "Index biographique" by Jacques de Laprade, p. xliii.

²Cited by Henri Perruchot, Montherlant, (Paris: Gallimard, 1959), p. 67.

Montherlant's interpretation of this system is seen as a search for unity and peace by reconciling and tolerating all differences, for he writes: "Tout est bien, tout est vrai, tout a de profondes raisons d'être. . . ."3 He seeks a general detachment from the issues of life; death is equal to life, everything has its turn: what is attained is then destroyed. He says "no" to life, personally, and in his works; yet his own personality, attested to by his personal acquaintances, is brisk and vivacious.

Although it may not be readily apparent to his readers, Montherlant has his own morals, which sometimes coincide with popular ones, and sometimes do not; but he has vowed not to become an echo of any tenet. He says of his own writings: "Mon oeuvre est la recherche de l'éternel humain, délivré de toute convention."⁴ The "éternel humain" can be defined as, (1) understanding all of man's actions; (2) after understanding them, having sympathy for one another; (3) seeing in oneself the three faculties necessary to man. These three faculties which Montherlant believes are vitally important to living are intelligence, generosity, and sensuality; or, the mind, the soul, and the senses. He scorns philosophies and religions, saying that their only purpose is to provide a reason where there is none.⁵ Contempt is a virtue when aimed at stupidity; in fact, it is a sin not to feel contempt in such a case.⁶

³Cited by Perruchot, Ibid., p. 85.

⁴Ibid., p. 97. ⁵Ibid., pp. 99-100.

⁶Peter Quennell (de.), Selected Essays by Montherlant (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1961), p. 288.

Sources of Philosophy. Many of Montherlant's ideas are derived from various elements in the philosophies of Aristotle, Marcus Aurelius, Goethe, Machiavelli, Nietzsche, and Pascal. Another important influence was Maurice Barrès (1862-1923), who believed that sensation and passion were their own justification. However, Montherlant later rejected Barrès, whose homme-cerveau, or rational idealism, would permit any idea to become whatever one wished it to become. Montherlant felt that Barrès was too much a thinker and not enough a doer.⁷

Montherlant studied Pascal for his baccalaureate at Sainte-Croix, deriving from him the idea that man's natural character is full of imperfections and vices. Montherlant also elected as one of his masters the Italian writer, Gabriele d'Annunzio (1863-1938), whose style was flowing and full of movement.⁸

From Goethe, especially, Montherlant conceived his scorn for mediocrity and his desire to see the return of the superhuman individual, or the man of the Renaissance. This superman would know how to live completely, being sensitive, independent of love or even of friendship. He would be generous as well, but possessing a one-sided generosity, one which does not wish to entail obligation. In his Lettre d'un père à son fils, Montherlant speaks of a lofty and remote kind of love which can be compared to one's taste for lemonade: one can like the drink, without the drink liking him in return.⁹

⁷Oreste F. Pucciani, The French Theater Since 1930 (New York: Ginn and Company, 1954), pp. 203-04.

⁸J.-N. Faure-Biguet, Les Enfances de Montherlant (Paris: Henri Lefebvre, 1948), pp. 94, 152.

⁹Pucciani, op. cit., pp. 205-06.

Montherlant believes that the greatest mark of respect a writer can achieve is that of being recognized as loyal to himself. Thus, he must know how to classify each thing, whether he will accept it, or reject it.¹⁰

Philosophy of Women. As far as women are concerned, Montherlant seems to have rejected their equality with men. He wrote in his novel, Les Jeunes Filles: "L'homme ne doit pas être gouverné par la femme. . . . L'homme et la femme ont besoin l'un de l'autre mais ne sont pas adaptés l'un à l'autre."¹¹ A favorite theme concerning women, seen in his novels, is that of the woman who tries to compete with man and fails. The closest she ever comes to a rivaling perfection is in sports, but in the end she is still inferior.¹² Another thought extracted from his writing is that woman can only destroy man and has nothing to give him. The mother is, above all, the greatest enemy: her possessiveness holds her son back from what he might accomplish.¹³ The lover is out to trap the man, intent upon her own happiness.

Montherlant says that love is not a natural emotion, that it was invented by women, and refuses to admit that there is complete and lasting love between a man and a woman. One explanation for this attitude is that he has refused to mix his soul and his passions, having loved only women

¹⁰Henri Peyre, ed., Contemporary French Literature: A Critical Anthology (New York: Harper and Row, Publishers Inc., 1964), p. 112.

¹¹Cited by Perruchot, op. cit., p. 119.

¹²Michel Mohrt, Montherlant, "homme libre" (Paris: Gallimard, 1943), p. 112.

¹³Simone de Beauvoir, Le Deuxième Sexe (Paris: Gallimard, 1949), pp. 312-13.

who were small, both physically and spiritually. Such a relationship then, could never result in the affectionate companionship which is the basis for a happy marriage.¹⁴

In his novels, Montherlant's idea of love was nearly always a question of conquest and enjoyment; yet, in his theater, some of his heroines, as well as his heroes, have expressed a pure and devoted love.¹⁵

Montherlant admits that each one of the characters he has created has been the mouthpiece for one of his numerous inner selves. He looks into men's souls and studies the universality of their faults. A play, according to him, is interesting only if the exterior action, when reduced to its greatest simplicity, is basically a study of the inner man. Many times this study, as well as an examination of actual life, reveals an individual entirely different from what the person thinks he is.¹⁶

Philosophy of the Theater. Following Montherlant's system of synchrétisme and alternance, there is a hatred-love relationship within his heroes; they want both to love and to kill the object of their passions. In his theater, this hatred-love is usually parental. In Le Maître de Santiago, Don Alvaro rejects his daughter's mediocrity, yet persuades her to become a mystic with him.¹⁷ In Fils de Personne and La Reine

¹⁴Jeanne Sandelion, Montherlant et les femmes (Paris: Plon, 1950), p. 162.

¹⁵Ibid., pp. 168-169.

¹⁶Gerald Morreale, "Alternance and Montherlant," The French Review, 37:632-33, May, 1964.

¹⁷Helmut Hatzfeld, Trends and Styles in Twentieth Century Literature, (Washington, D. C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 1957), pp. 39-40.

morte, the fathers reject their sons for mediocrity, although admitting that they love, or have loved, them. It will also be seen in two of the plays that the wives, although they love their husbands, unintentionally but indirectly cause their deaths (Brocéliande and Malatesta).

The protagonists of his Catholic plays (Port-Royal, Le Cardinal d'Espagne, and Le Maître de Santiago) have a highly personal form of religion; their normal instincts become perverted and they finally destroy themselves, figuratively speaking. In all of these characters, the Jansenist nuns in Port-Royal, Cisneros in Le Cardinal d'Espagne, and Don Alvaro in Le Maître de Santiago, there is either a sadistic streak or a destructive asceticism, or both.¹⁸

The heroes think that they are the embodiment of greatness, being perfectly lucid at all times; instead, they are really weak, undecided, and blind to the qualities of others. If they are controlled by unnatural passions, as Pasiphaé for the bull, they create their own justifications for indulging their passions. They show little difference between passion and ethics, considering themselves the embodiment of a moral value. By Montherlant's own admission, his heroes are of bad faith, their moral values being something merely to be reached as an end in themselves, rather than a code of conduct by which to live. They are solitary, and they have accepted their solitude; in fact, they have chosen it because of their contempt for others, since their whole system of values has been constructed to justify their egos. Each hero, then, before making his

¹⁸Turnell, "Adventurer Montherlant," Commonweal, 74:173, May 12, 1961.

choice, vacillates between society's values and the ones he has constructed for himself, often becoming grotesque or despicable as a result.

The essential quality of Montherlant's theater is that it is a reflection of life itself. He explains life by saying that it is a series of contradiction inside a character he has created that makes him interesting.¹⁹ If the hero were perfectly lucid, sane, and generous, he would be dull. But if he alternates lucidity with insanity, generosity with hatred and scorn, he becomes a living character with whom the persons in the audience can identify themselves.

Montherlant, himself, continually comments upon his own works. These comments are in the form of notes, some written at the time he wrote the play and some many years later, perhaps for a later production. In these notes he analyzes his characters and supports his arguments for their behavior, as well as usually telling under what circumstances he conceived his plots and wrote them into the play. As Jacques Guicharnaud says: "He is not a writer who cuts the umbilical cord once the work is submitted to the public."²⁰

Montherlant seems to refrain from judging his characters, calling himself primarily a moralist, one who studies passions. He believes that lucidity and objectivity are the main attributes of intelligence.²¹ One must remember that in his later years he has chosen the theater as his means of expression primarily because of the objectivity and detachment it offers a writer.

¹⁹Jacques Guicharnaud, Modern French Theater from Giraudoux to Beckett, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1961), pp. 100-06.

²⁰Ibid., p. 105. ²¹Perruchot, op. cit., pp. 115-16.

CHAPTER IV

PLAYS WITH A MODERN SETTING

L'Exil¹ was Montherlant's first play, written in 1914 when he was eighteen years old and following a personal episode in his life.² The principal characters are Philippe de Presles, an eighteen-year-old boy who wants to enlist in the war of 1914-18; his mother, Geneviève, who, although she is an ambulance driver for the wounded, does not want her son to go; and Bernard Sénac, Philippe's nineteen-year-old friend who has already enlisted. Geneviève refuses to give Philippe permission to enlist so he remains, loyally giving reasons other than her refusal as to why he does not go; but six months later he bitterly tells her he no longer has any confidence in her, and she then tells him to leave, since he wished only to follow his friend and not to serve his country. During these six months, Sénac has found a new life and new comrades; and when he comes back to visit, Philippe discovers that they no longer have anything in common. They argue; and, after Sénac leaves, Philippe leaves also, telling his mother he is going to war to become like his friends, to regain the lost comradeship.

¹Henry de Montherlant, Théâtre, (Paris: Gallimard, 1958), pp. 21-93. Each quotation taken from Montherlant's plays will be identified by name of play, act, scene, and page, following the quotation in the body of the thesis.

²cf. p. 13.

Montherlant has been careful to point out the differences between the play and the actual incident: Madame de Montherlant, in failing health, merely told him to wait to enlist until after she had died; Geneviève, on the other hand, who was healthy and in no danger of dying, entreated Philippe to stay as a proof of his love for her. Montherlant also points out that Philippe is the younger of the two boys, but in Henry's personal friendships at school, he was older than his close friends. He praises his own mother and grandmother for having accepted him and L'Exil and not asking him to change it, although they were afraid that publication of the play would give a false impression about the actual family episode.³

The tragedy of solitude is the theme of this play. One's happiness depends on others; or, as Montherlant wrote in the exergue of L'Exil, "Tout vient des êtres." Every aspect of the plot reveals the loneliness in the two principal characters, Philippe and Geneviève. Philippe's loneliness comes from his losing his boyhood friendship with Sénac, because they no longer have anything in common. He also feels exiled from other people because they are giving themselves in some form of service to their country, and he is useless at home. Even his mother has received a citation for her bravery in caring for the wounded.

Geneviève's solitude, however, surrounds her completely. Philippe, at least, has his mother's love, even though it is nearly smothering in its possessiveness. Geneviève is entirely alone, and she realizes it.

³Ibid., "Note de 1954," pp. 12-13.

She is alone as a woman, as her husband and other members of the family have died; and she is alone as a mother, since Philippe makes it obvious that he prefers the "male order" to her companionship. Montherlant frequently portrays friendship triumphing over mother-love. Philippe tells Geneviève, six months after he wanted to enlist: "Manquer cette occasion de vivre, . . . manquer, tout simplement, cette occasion de devenir pareil aux autres!" (L'Exil, act II, scene viii, p. 68) And he keeps a guilty silence when she reminds him of all the reproaches he has given her for not allowing him to leave, accusing him:

Tu voulais partir parce que Sénac partait. Tu ne veux plus partir parce que Sénac rentre. . . . Tu te refuses cet acte qui nous sauve, tu nous replonges dans cet enfer de six mois . . . mais non, c'est vrai, c'est l'enfer pour moi seule, pour toi maintenant c'est le paradis! (L'Exil, act III, scene viii, p. 72)

Geneviève's tragedy of solitude is a self-wrought tragedy, according to Montherlant's philosophy, because of her possessive love. She tells Philippe that he is free, then in the same breath she reminds him of all the worry and sacrifice she has endured in rearing him, telling him that if he leaves, it will kill her. For her, mother-love must be reciprocated. She has given much to him; she feels it is only right that he make a sacrifice in return, believing that she loves him enough to overcome the pain her possessiveness has caused him.

Geneviève is one of the more masculine women of Montherlant's plays, having had to assume the role of father to her son and having done a man's work in the war. She has little respect for Philippe.⁴

⁴Jacques de Laprade, Le Théâtre de Montherlant, (Paris: La Jeune Parque, 1950), pp. 175-76.

In forcing him to act as she wishes, she effaces his true personality and constrains it to a mold, instead of encouraging him to be and do his best. Philippe tells her, after she refuses to let him go: "Tout ce qu'il y avait de bon en moi, vous l'avez étouffé" (L'Écriteur, act II, scene vii, p. 67). And he tells Sénac: "Tout ce que j'aurais pu faire et être, elle l'a détruit par son amour" (act III, scene iv, p. 90). It is not surprising that Geneviève is an "exile" at the end of the play. Montherlant believes in one's need to love rather than the need to be loved. Geneviève violates this principle by her possessiveness, and she is punished.

La Ville dont le prince est un enfant,⁵ completed in 1951, is based upon a real episode, the expulsion of Montherlant from Sainte-Croix.⁶ It tells the story of a friendship between two boys in a Catholic school in Paris, where such special friendships are forbidden. The older boy in the friendship, André Sevrais, aged seventeen, represents the young Montherlant. The younger boy, Serge Soubrier, aged fourteen, seems to be a typically charming child, having no outstanding personality, and whom M. l'Abbé de Pradts, another important character in the play, finds quite appealing and in need of special help.

The Abbé has publicly forbidden the friendship, then permits it when Sevrais promises that he will suppress any degrading influence he might have on Soubrier and try to help him. Sevrais even confides to

⁵Henry de Montherlant, Théâtre, op. cit., pp. 853-936.

⁶cf. p. 10.

another classmate that he loves Soubrier more than he does his own mother. This happy situation for the two boys does not last, however, for Soubrier is discovered hiding in the supply room with Sevrais. Although Sevrais is innocent, he is blamed and sent away from school by the director, who was informed by the Abbé de Pradts. The Abbé then learns, to his startled dismay, that the director has also sent Soubrier away and that he, the Abbé, must never see the boy again. For, in the school, special friendships are forbidden between teacher and student, just as they are between student and student. Like Sevrais, the Abbé has been guilty of too strong an emotional attachment for one person, forgetting his duty first to God, then to the school. At the end of the play, he is praying to renounce human attachment and turn his soul again toward God.

There are no feminine roles in this play, but there is a conversation between Sevrais and his classmate about Sevrais' mother, Madame Sevrais. This short discussion is rich in details concerning the relationship of this mother with her adolescent son, and Montherlant admits that his own mother is depicted, to a certain extent, in this characterization.⁷

Sevrais speaks of his mother concerning his friendship with Soubrier. Madame Sevrais shows possessiveness and jealousy, realizing that her son is quite fond of Soubrier. Sevrais tells his classmate that she tried several methods to get Sevrais to tell her about Soubrier: first, declaiming in a manner to make him feel guilty that she knew

⁷Pierre Sipriot, Montherlant par lui-même, (Paris: Editions de Seuil, 1953), p. 178.

everything about the friendship, then futilely searching through Sevrais' school things, and finally speaking very gently about Soubrier. The last method works.

She begins calling Soubrier his little pal, but can not keep the jealousy from her voice. However, for fear of alienating what love Sevrais does have for her, she feigns a great interest in Soubrier, hoping thus to remain in her son's confidence. Sevrais explains:

Par lui (Soubrier), elle demeure dans ma vie. Par lui, elle me conserve. Et elle sacrifierait tout à cela. . . . Ma mère voudrait que Soubrier vienne goûter à la maison. Mais moi je ne veux pas: ne mêlons pas les ordres, comme dit de Pradts (La Ville, dont le prince est un enfant, act II, scene ii, pp. 886-87).

Not only has Sevrais refused to let his mother meet his friend, as he attests above, but as a final blow to her behind her back, he confesses that he does not tell her everything because, with parents, one should not always be completely frank.

One can see the similarity between Madame Sevrais and Madame de Montherlant when Montherlant tells of his own adolescence, especially concerning his friendships with others. He wrote:⁸

. . . j'étais, comme il convenait à mon âge, plongé dans les "amitiés particulières" . . . avec des camarades de collège plus jeunes que moi. Tantôt ma mère les foudroyait, me menaçait . . . tantôt elle . . . m'en parlait avec gentillesse, à la fois parce que . . . c'était la meilleure façon de capter et garder ma confiance . . .

Not only does Sevrais' mother behave as Madame de Montherlant did to keep her son's confidence, but Montherlant also admits that when he told his mother of his social adventures, he related them in such a way

⁸Ibid.

that they would correspond to the stories she had told him of her own youth. He said that, although his stories were not always true, they gave her a greater link with her own past, which had been so happy, and helped her to a vicarious enjoyment of life.⁹ One must admit that Montherlant's reason for untruthfulness was a thoughtful one.

In analyzing the tragedy of Madame Sevrais, one can see a similarity between her and Geneviève of L'Émil in these aspects: a possessive mother gropes for reassurances from her adolescent son that he still loves her; she competes with his friends for affection, and she loses. Instead of bringing the boy and his friends into a closer relationship with her, they pull away from her. If she realizes this, as did Geneviève, a mother's heart is broken. If she does not realize it, then there is the tragedy of the intervening lie.

Celles qu'on prend dans ses bras,¹⁰ a three-act play written in 1949, is set in Paris of the same year. It has three main characters: Ravier, a fifty-eight-year-old antique dealer; Mademoiselle Andriot, his sixty-year-old consultant for the past seven years; and Christine Villancy, a young girl who sells decorative designs. Ravier is affluent, powerful, and able to buy any object or the services of any mistress he pleases. However, he is tired of the world of trade; and, when he meets Christine, who comes from a small town to live with an uncle in Paris,

⁹Ibid., p. 179.

¹⁰Montherlant, Théâtre, op. cit., pp. 767-833.

he feels that her virtue, her pride, and her courage have opened the door upon a new life for him. He asks to become her friend, and she refuses.

Mademoiselle Andriot who, it is obvious, has never been, nor will ever be, loved by a man, loves Ravier. She tries, for his sake, to persuade Christine to like him, since his unrequited love has turned into a raging passion. Finally, angry and desperate, Ravier tells Christine that some day she will come to him, asking a favor. Christine ridicules this prediction, but it comes true. Five weeks later, she comes to him, weeping, telling him that her father has been the victim of a fraud and is in jail.

Mademoiselle Andriot, the first to learn she is in distress, ridicules her triumphantly, for now she knows that Christine will no longer have her pride and will become like the other women Ravier has known. Ravier, alone with Christine, immediately, by use of his influence, arranges for her father's release. He wants no thanks and admits that he has hated Mademoiselle Andriot for seven years. Christine, confessing that she came to Ravier for help because he loves her, offers herself to him in gratitude for what he did. Ravier knows that she does not love him, but he accepts her, for he wants to satisfy his sexual desire.

In the exergue of Celles qu'on prend dans ses bras is a sentence taken from Montherlant's novel, Pitié pour les femmes, which is reproduced in part here:

. . . il n'y a qu'une façon d'aimer les femmes, c'est d'amour. il n'y a qu'une façon de leur faire du bien, c'est de les prendre dans ses bras. Tout le resté, amitié, estime, sympathie intellectual, sans amour est un fantôme, et un fantôme cruel. . .

Montherlant illustrates this philosophy in this play, where desire dominates friendship and esteem. Montherlant appears to believe that any woman will prostitute herself, if the right prize is offered. The prize may be money; a gift; or, in Christine Villancy's case, a deed of kindness.

Christine has been portrayed quite unsympathetically. She has virtue, which is a sympathetic quality, but she is not virtuous in order to be good; she is virtuous because she is proud, and she disdains men. Her name itself is descriptive, for Ravier says: "Ce nom glacé et aigu comme une stalactite!" (Celles qu'on prend dans ses bras, act II, scene vi, p. 812). Mademoiselle Andriot tells her personally:

Mademoiselle, vous avez des principes, et je vous en félicite. Mais vous ne les rendez pas aimables. . . . Vous êtes une obsédée. . . . vous ne pensez qu'à votre vertu. C'est une obsession (Celles qu'on prend dans ses bras, act II, scene iii, p. 798).

It must also be noted that Christine's speeches are always short and clipped, coming from a mind crystallized in its opinions. She says:

Je vous affirme que je n'ai de sentiment pour personne. Pour personne. Il est probable que cela viendra un jour: je sais bien que je suis condamnée (Celles qu'on prend dans ses bras, act II, scene iv, p. 802).

However, despite her coldness, Montherlant redeems her somewhat when he gives her a typically feminine reaction to Mademoiselle Andriot's prediction that Ravier would tire of her in a short time. Christine replies: "Suis-je donc si laide? Et ne vaudrai-je plus d'être aimée dans six mois?" (Celles qu'on prend dans ses bras, act II, scene iv, p. 797) Christine could have been an admirable character, if she had remained consistent in her coldness. But she is false to herself. When she comes in shame to Ravier for help, he helps her without asking anything in return. All he has been wanting is a chance to show his love. In her pride,

however, Christine will not accept something for nothing. Since she cannot repay him in money, she repays him by giving herself. Ravier tells her he knows she does not love him:

Malheur aux femmes qui se sont données pour la première fois sans amour. . . . Rien n'est plus bas ni plus vulgaire que la façon que je t'accepte . . . Tu es fausse. Tes yeux mentent, ton corps ment. . . . tu ne me donnes rien, tout est faux dans ce que nous faisons en ce moment (Celles qu'on prend dans ses bras, act III, scene vi, pp. 831-33).

Christine, the girl who is loved and does not wish to be, has proved that, without love, there is cruelty. She is tragic in her unbending pride. There is tragedy for Ravier, who does not receive the love that he wants, and tragedy for Christine, who has not learned to love.

The opposite of Christine, who is loved against her wishes, is Mademoiselle Andriot, whose love is unrequited. She is tragic in this respect, for not only is it disappointing to be unloved, but it drives her to inconsistent and undesirable actions. She is deprived of all physical attributes that would make her one of "celles qu'on prend dans ses bras." Thus, she is neither wife, mother, nor lover; and therefore she assumes the role of a consultant for Ravier, believing herself indispensable to him. Ravier feels repugnance toward a love coming from one so old and unattractive. This is the same repugnance, no doubt, that Christine feels toward Ravier, who seems old and unattractive to her.¹¹

Mademoiselle Andriot has both good and bad characteristics. She is intelligent, sensitive, and cultivated. Ravier says of her to Christine:

¹¹Sandelion, op. cit., pp. 128-29.

Elle a une magnifique culture artistique, et une magnifique sensibilité de femme: ce sont deux vertus que vous devriez respecter, vous n'en êtes pas pourvue à l'excès. Avec Mademoiselle Andriot je parle toujours un ton au-dessus de moi-même. Avec vous, toujours un ton au-dessous (Celles qu'on prend dans ses bras, act II, scene v, p. 806).

Mademoiselle Andriot knows, however, that her situation with Ravier is hopeless; thus she behaves inconsistently. Loving him, she denies it, telling him:

Je ne vous aime pas, je vous le jure . . . Vous détestez que je vous aime. Si bien que j'en suis venue à détester de vous aimer (Celles qu'on prend dans ses bras, act II, scene i, p. 793).

Hiding her normal jealousy of Christine, she tries to win her for Ravier, knowing that true love is self-sacrificing, yet hoping to win more favor for herself if she succeeds. She professes to abhor things of the flesh, yet she constantly talks about sexuality. She says that she will never marry for fear of losing her liberty, but she invents a general who wants to marry her.

Despite these moments of contradictions, she conducts herself with some show of dignity, until Christine comes to Ravier for help. Then Mademoiselle Andriot realizes that Ravier will get Christine and that she is still left out. She becomes almost hysterical and flings at Christine all the horrible things she can think of to say: "Eh bien! vous allez être l'esclave . . . Avec un homme qui va vous répéter ce qu'il a répété à deux cents femmes . . ." (Celles qu'on prend dans ses bras, act III, scene iii, p. 822). At the end of the play, Ravier reveals that he hates Mademoiselle Andriot, telling Christine not to worry about her, that he will crush her when he is ready. One wonders why Ravier hates her, since he has confided all his heartaches to Mademoiselle

Andriot, as well as professing the greatest respect and friendship for her. Montherlant suggests that (1) he was not confiding in her, he was merely talking to himself; (2) that he knew she loved him and was indifferent to it; (3) that he enjoyed making her suffer.¹² Here again are ambivalent feelings, this time esteem against hatred. Hatred wins.

Mademoiselle Andriot's life has been one long tragedy. In her early years, she was ugly and unloved; now, she is old and ugly and unloved. Perhaps she sums it up best herself, when she says:

Je suis tellement habituée au désespoir que, s'il m'arrivait un bonheur, je crois que je n'en aurais pas de plaisir. . . . Si j'étais aimée de ce que j'aime le plus au monde, je serais encore une femme abandonnée (Celles qu'on prend dans ses bras, act II, scene i, p. 793).

Indeed, Mademoiselle Andriot is a "femme abandonnée." At the end of the play, she is forgotten by Ravier, by Christine, and consequently by the audience.¹³

Un Incompris. This little play, written in 1943, has only five scenes and is the first in a trilogy: Un Incompris,¹⁴ Fils de Personne, and Demain il fera jour. When Montherlant was seventeen years old, an incident similar to the one in Un Incompris occurred.¹⁵ The plot is very simple. A young man, Bruno, becomes disgusted with his girl friend, Rosette, who always arrives late for their dates. Despite her arguments

¹²Montherlant, Théâtre, op. cit., "Notes," p. 836.

¹³Laprade, op. cit., p. 207.

¹⁴Montherlant, Théâtre, op. cit., pp. 401-23.

¹⁵cf. p. 12.

and those of his friend, Pierre, Bruno decides to leave her for good, feeling that he owes it to his self-respect.

Montherlant suggests that Bruno and Rosette might represent the Georges Carrion and Marie Sandoval in Fils de Personne; the characterizations in the two plays are not parallel, but the actions in each are similar: Bruno leaves Rosette, though he loves her; and Georges urges the departure of his son Gillou, whom he loves; and both separations are for the sake of a principle.¹⁶

Rosette is portrayed as an average and likable young girl, no doubt pretty and a good companion. Her only fault seems to be that she is consistently late for every date with Bruno. He has chided and warned her many times, but she persists in this bad habit.

Her excuses, according to Bruno, are never very satisfying, but Pierre insists that she is like every other woman and that a punctual woman is "Un monstre sans sexe, bon à être pourchassé à coups de pierres, comme jadis, dans le monde antique, les hermaphrodites . . ." (Un Incompris, scene i, p. 401). It is not a question of love, for Bruno admits to both Pierre and Rosette that he loves her dearly. In fact, she is pleasing to him in every way, as he tells her:

Tes bras chauds en hiver et si frais en été; tu étais toujours ce qu'il faut . . . Tour à tour nos longues conversations sans fatigue, où nos coeurs se rapprochaient et se touchaient comme des mains . . . (Un Incompris, scene iii, p. 417).

¹⁶Montherlant, Théâtre, op. cit., préface to Un Incompris, p. 397.

And she loves him. Any man with less pride would have succumbed to her feminine logic and persuasion. Bruno almost is tempted to reconsider; but his pride prevails, as he says to her:

Je t'aime, mais il faut croire, je le reconnais, que je m'aime plus encore que je ne t'aime. . . . Je te perds, mais je préfère mon malheur tête haute à un bonheur toujours humilié (Un Incompris, scene iv, p. 420).

Rosette leaves, weeping, having reminded him that she, too, has her pride. It will be too late for him to reconsider, once she has gone, for she will not come back to him.

Although Montherlant calls Un Incompris a comedy, and the action is indeed funny in many places, the play finishes very sadly. Rosette has lost the man she loves, a loss she could have prevented had she heeded his warnings and learned to be punctual.

Fils de Personne,¹⁷ follows Un Incompris as the second play in Montherlant's only trilogy. One of his most popular plays, it was written in 1943 and has a wartime setting in France. The three characters in this four-act play are Georges Carrion, a lawyer who has escaped from occupied Paris to Cannes and is living there with a former mistress and their illegitimate son; Marie Sandoval, the former mistress, who dislikes Cannes intensely and longs to go to Le Havre where she can be with her lover, Roger, and her family; and Gillou, the fourteen-year-old son, who is an average, charming boy, but who is a disappointment to Georges.

¹⁷Montherlant, Théâtre, op. cit., pp. 275-346.

After having been separated from Marie and Gillou for twelve years, Georges comes upon them by accident and decides to arrange their living so that he can be a father to Gillou. He loves Gillou very much, but he can see nothing in the child that raises him above the crowd of ordinary people.

Marie, suffering from the climate at Cannes, wishes to go back north; but Georges, fearing for their safety from wartime bombardments, refuses to let them go. A month later, Marie receives a letter from Roger, her lover; and she convinces Gillou, who hitherto has been indifferent whether he lives in Cannes or Le Havre, that the latter would be a good place for him.

Georges becomes increasingly disappointed in Gillou's mediocrity; and, at last, admitting that his pride and scorn are stronger than his love for Gillou, sends him and Marie to Le Havre, sadly realizing that in so doing, he is rejecting his son. Since he is sacrificed to George's idea of what he should be and to Marie's desire to be with her lover, Gillou becomes the son of no one.

Montherlant has written that Georges is the most lucid character of this drama; thus he is speaker for the play. Since Georges is a father who scorns his son, a son whom most mothers would love, Montherlant has received a great deal of criticism about this play. It is interesting to note, however, that in mentioning this criticism, Montherlant says that most of it comes from men. Women seem to see in Georges a man as

sensitive as a woman, a man who suffers in his love for his child, "spectacle qui ravit toujours les femmes."¹⁸

Montherlant also remarks that a mother once told him that Georges' greatest wrongdoing was his having a fool for a mistress. Marie Sandoval indeed possesses some undesirable characteristics. Montherlant describes her as the one who never clearly sees what she is doing; that she is "monocorde et monotraits."¹⁹ No doubt, Marie is what Montherlant has elsewhere defined as a stryge, a woman who destroys the male by her attempts to maneuver him according to what she wants.²⁰

Marie continually complains about her situation. The climate is miserable; she has to depend upon Georges financially; she is left out of the conversation when Georges comes to see Gillou. She indeed tries to maneuver Georges into letting her go north, using Gillou to accomplish her purpose.

She is mediocre as a woman in her situation with Georges, and she is mediocre in her desires for Gillou. Georges is in despair about Gillou's indifference to anything except cheap movies and newspapers. He speaks of him, accusing Marie: ". . . c'est sa médiocrité que vous aimez en lui . . ." (Fils de Personne, act III, scene iii, p. 325).

Marie defends Gillou, retorting: "Mon fils n'a pas besoin d'être 'exceptionnel'" (Fils de Personne, act III, scene iii, p. 325). However, despite her mediocrity, Marie gives a glimpse of herself as she will be

¹⁸Ibid., "Note III," p. 357. ¹⁹Ibid., "Préface," p. 270.

²⁰Sandelion, op. cit., p. 244.

in Demain il fera jour, the sequel to Fils de Personne. She is already beginning to reveal herself as a mother whose first concern is her child. It is true that, in this play, she uses Gillou to attain her own wishes and she seems indifferent at the end whether he goes with her or remains with Georges. Yet, when she defends Gillou from Georges' attacks against his mediocrity, she reveals an understanding of Gillou's relative immaturity measured beside Georges' forty-three years. And, when speaking to Gillou, she is very tender, especially in these lines:

Que c'est bête, d'avoir envie de faire autre chose dans la vie, que t'embrasser! . . . Tu m'aimes? Moi, je t'aime chaque jour un peu plus. . . . Je crois que je ne t'ai jamais tant aimé qu'aujourd'hui (Fils de Personne, act II, scene ii, p. 298).

The tragedy of Marie Sandoval does not occur in this play, nor has her character been yet developed into the admirable qualities she displays in Demain il fera jour. Therefore, it is necessary to continue this discussion into the next play.

Demain il fera jour,²¹ written in 1949, completes the trilogy which includes the two preceding plays, Un Incompris and Fils de Personne. The characters are the same as in Fils de Personne, although they are three years older. Gillou, the son, is now seventeen. The setting is in German-occupied Paris in 1944. The Resistance movement is underway, and Gillou wishes to join it. Marie Sandoval, his mother, wants above all for him to be happy so, on his behalf, she asks Georges to let him go. Georges Carrion, having resumed his life with his former mistress and his

²¹Montherlant, Théâtre, op. cit., pp. 701-45.

son, still feels that Gillou is mediocre, and he has confided to Marie that he no longer loves the boy. Nevertheless, he refuses to let him join the Resistance, just as in Fils de Personne he refused them permission to go to Le Havre, because he fears for Gillou's safety.

Georges, a lawyer, has begun to plead some cases for the Germans, and he is beginning to fear some reprisal for his collaboration. Overnight, both parents reverse their respective positions concerning Gillou's desire to join the Resistance. Marie dreamed that she lost Gillou among a large crowd and feels certain that the dream is prophesying something dreadful for him. Georges, on the other hand, has received a letter concerning his collaboration with the Germans, and he is afraid. He decides that it will be good protection for him if he has a son in the Resistance. Since he no longer loves Gillou, he decides to sacrifice him, and he tells him he can go. Gillou, unaware of his father's true feelings and delighted at receiving his permission, leaves at once.

The next evening, Georges and Marie are awaiting Gillou's return. As the night deepens, Marie becomes increasingly anxious about him and guesses, from Georges' nervousness and observations about impending doom, the real reason for his allowing Gillou to join. At that moment, a messenger arrives with the news that Gillou is dead.

Demain il fera jour was so named because of a speech by Georges in Fils de Personne. He laments the fact that tomorrow, the day of liberation, will come because of others more heroic, more outstanding than Gillou. Georges, still lamenting Gillou's mediocrity, has made himself despicable in this play, having sacrificed his son to his own

fear. While Georges was admirable to the audience in Fils de Personne, he was despicable in this play.²²

There has been a reversal of personality traits from the preceding play to this. Georges goes from admirable to despicable, but Marie goes from foolish and mediocre to admirable in her mother love. No longer is she maneuvering persons to get her own way. She has renounced everything in order to live for Gillou. As she tells Georges: "Je vis de son bonheur. . . . à présent, ma seule raison d'être est qu'il soit heureux" (Demain il fera jour, act I, scene i, pp. 705-06). She is quite inconsistent in her attitude toward Gillou's joining the Resistance. Thinking of his happiness instead of her concern about losing him, or even his danger, she pleads his cause with Georges. One can remember here the action of Montherlant's grandmother, who helped him get into the actual fighting of World War I.²³ Marie, however, after she dreams of losing Gillou, sees the situation in a new perspective, and she is glad that Georges has refused, horrified at the thought that her dream might come true.

Throughout the entire play, Marie expresses her love for Gillou. When he refuses to return her hugs, she tells him, unselfishly:

Tu n'as pas à te croire obligé de m'embrasser quand je t'embrasse, . . . Tu peux même frémir un peu d'agacement . . . pour bien me rappeler que tu n'as plus l'âge d'être ma possession . . . je n'ai pas besoin de tes baisers (Demain il fera jour, act II, scene i, p. 722).

²²Ibid., "Postface," p. 747.

²³cf. p. 14.

During her discussions about him with Georges, who says that he does not love Gillou, she tells him:

Si cela était, je saurais bien l'aimer pour deux. . . . qu'il ne m'aime pas, peu m'importe! Je crois que je l'aimerais encore davantage s'il ne m'aimait pas, parce que je l'aimerais alors plus purement (Demain il fera jour, act I, scene i, pp. 709-10).

Montherlant seems to treat her mother love with great respect in this play,²⁴ comparing her with the other characters and saying: "Elle est la créature la plus valable des trois."²⁵ Montherlant has given her two unique differences from the other mothers in his theater: (1) she is the only mother who is not possessive of her adolescent son and (2) she loses her son by death. She is thus the best mother who experiences the worst tragedy. How much greater her grief must be when she remembers how she pleaded at first to let Gillou join the Resistance. Had she been against it in the beginning, Georges could not have so easily explained his change of mind.

Brocéliande. According to Montherlant, Brocéliande²⁶ is a sad play which is enveloped in a semi-gaiety. Brocéliande is the name of a forest which, in this play, becomes the symbol of ancestral lineage, or the family tree. There are three principal characters: M. Persilès, nearly sixty; Madame Persilès, his fifty-four-year old wife; and M. Bonnet de la Bonnetière, who traces genealogies.

²⁴Michel de Saint-Pierre, Montherlant, bourreau de soi-même (Paris: Gallimard, 1949), p. 152.

²⁵Montherlant, Théâtre, op. cit., "Postface," p. 747.

²⁶Henri de Montherlant, Brocéliande; trois actes; suivi de L'Art et la Vie (Paris: Gallimard, 1956), pp. 1-187.

The theme centers about a revelation of royal ancestry to M. Persilès, hitherto a timid man who has always said "no" to life. When La Bonnetière tells him that he is descended from Saint Louis, a great change comes about in Persilès; he becomes magnanimous toward outsiders, but he treats his wife like a housekeeper. He plans great projects, dresses more neatly, and begins to copy a history of his royal ancestor. The play is rampant in comedy as he constantly makes himself ridiculous in the eyes of all who see him, especially his wife.

However, the tragedy that Montherlant mentions become apparent when La Bonnetière asks Madame Persilès not to tell her husband that he is only one of thousands of descendants of Saint Louis. However, she tells him; and, having lost his only reason to maintain his self-respect, he commits suicide.

Madame Persilès, although she is sometimes comical in her exasperation with her husband, seems also to have a certain amount of common sense. The news that Persilès is a descendant of Saint Louis means little to her, except it has changed her relationship with him from the status of a wife he has depended upon to that of a housekeeper.

She tolerates his newly found greatness patiently at first; but, as she becomes more and more uncomfortable, she tells him:

Ce que vous a appris le sieur Bonnet . . . et tous les livres vous avez achetés, vous ont tourné la tête. . . . Vous donnez la comédie aux autres et à vous-même (Brocéliande, act II, scene vi, p. 94).

Apparently, their married life has been at least satisfactory, since she longs for things return as they were. For this reason, it seems, she asks to have her own genealogy traced so she can meet Persilès as

an equal, provided she has some noble ancestors. Although basically she is more admirable than her husband, who must be motivated by outside forces, she also exhibits some of the characteristics of the stryge.²⁷ She wants to maneuver Persilès into returning to his former self by (1) hoping to claim a noble ancestry for herself and (2) destroying his pride by telling him he is only one of twenty thousand descendants of Saint Louis. It means nothing to her that he has begun to say "yes" to life.

After Persilès has received the dreadful news, Madame Persilès, thinking he is all right, tells him:

Vous n'avez pas besoin de Saint Louis pour être un homme.
 . . . Maintenant il n'y a pas cet espace terrible entre vous et moi. Nons rentrons dans notre petite vie. . . . Je n'entendrai plus vos déclamations, cette voix d'un autre monde (Broceliande, act III, scene 2, pp. 143 and 145).

It is true that Madame Persilès has more admirable qualities than her husband, but she does not measure up to some of the other wives and lovers, notably those in Montherlant's historical plays. A truly admirable wife by Montherlant's standards would be content with her husband, no matter what he did. An example of this kind of woman is seen in Isotta (Malatesta), who is discussed in the next chapter. Compared to Isotta's unselfish and faithful love, Madame Persilès is common and selfish in hers. However, despite the differences in their kinds of love, both wives suffer the bereavement of their husbands. And Madame Persilès, in her grief, no doubt remembered that it was she who told her husband the news that made him kill himself.

²⁷cf. p. 42.

CHAPTER V

HISTORICAL AND LEGENDARY PLAYS

La Reine morte,¹ whose date is 1942, was the first of Montherlant's plays to be produced theatrically and is perhaps his best known. The source providing the plot for this play was an actual event which took place in 1355 and was the subject of two earlier plays, one by Vélez de Guevara (1570-1644), entitled Reinar después de morir, and the other by a Portuguese writer, Ferreira.²

The setting for La Reine morte is in the Portuguese royal palace in the town of Montemor-o-velho. There are three principal characters: Ferrante, the old king who wishes his son Pedro to marry the Spanish Infanta for political reasons; the Infanta, a proud young woman of seventeen years; and Inès de Castro, twenty-six, who has secretly married Pedro and is expecting their child.

The Infanta has arrived at the palace to marry Pedro, only to discover that Pedro will not marry her because of Inès, so the Infanta becomes almost sick with humiliation. Ferrante soon learns of their marriage, but does not know that they expect a child; he knows, however, that his disagreement with the church will prevent him from annulling the marriage. Frustrated, he decides to put Pedro in prison, "for mediocrity,"

¹Montherlant, Théâtre, Bibliothèque de la Pléiade (Paris: Gallimard, 1958), pp. 137-235.

²Oreste F. Pucciani, The French Theater Since 1930 (New York: Ginn and Company, 1954), p. 208.

but he does not know what to do with Inès. Egas Coelho, his prime minister, suggests that he kill her. Ferrante is horrified of this idea at first; but, as he grows weary of the situation, he thinks more and more of this solution. At last, after a series of interviews with Inès, in which he confides his weaknesses to her and learns of the expected child, he decides to have her killed.

The Infanta, having remained in Portugal to see if the marriage with Pedro can be arranged, has heard from a page at the palace of Inès' danger, and she tries to persuade Inès to accompany her back to Navarre. Inès, blinded by her love for Pedro, refuses. She is slain; and, as her body is returned to the palace, Ferrante dies, aged, ill, and weary. As the two bodies repose within the same room, the dead king's is alone, while Inès' receives the court's homage as their dead queen.

The Infanta is one of the most lucid characters of Montherlant's theater. Perhaps she is also one of the most flatteringly portrayed. She is seventeen, beautiful, and quite masculine, possessing all the traits necessary to a royal personage, especially pride. She is proud and fiercely aware of her royal status, and cannot bear any affront to what she represents. Montherlant describes her as being "malade d'orgueil"³ because he was so himself when he was young. The Infanta and the king Ferrante are very similar to each other in their pride, except that Ferrante is old and inconsistent, seeing life as an essential

³Montherlant, Théâtre, op. cit., "Comment fut écrite La Reine morte," p. 328.

contradiction and himself as a weary god whose duty it is to dispose of others' unreasonable lives.⁴

The Infanta, upon hearing that Pedro will not marry her, is intensely humiliated. She raves to Ferrante:

. . . on me fait venir, comme une servante pour me dire qu'on me dédaigne. . . . Ma bouche sèche quand j'y pense. . . . Si je n'étais jeune et vigoureuse, Seigneur, de l'affront que j'ai reçu du Prince, je serais morte. . . . Ce n'est pas la femme qui est insultée en moi, c'est l'Infante (La Reine morte, act I, scene ii, pp. 138-39).

In addition to her pride and her consciousness of nobility, she shows extraordinary courage, wisdom, and lucidity when she tells Inès to fear the king and to flee with her. She uses every argument she can think of to persuade Inès to see her danger, from the statement that a red mark on Inès' throat will be the place of her decapitation to revealing a touching admiration for Inès' gentleness. Having come in friendship, then finding her pride wounded by Inès' refusal, the Infanta, although crushed by her inability to convince Inès, maintains her haughty dignity. At first, she expresses disbelief that her arguments are useless:

Et moi, être l'Infante de Navarre, et échouer à convaincre! Et échouer à convaincre l'être auquel on veut tant de bien! (La Reine morte, act II, scene v, p. 200)

At last, however, when she realizes it is useless to argue further, she summons forth all her official dignity and haughtiness and flings them at Inès in these words:

Vous avez laissé passer le moment où je vous aimais. Maintenant, vous m'irritez. Pourquoi votre vie m'importerait-elle, alors qu'elle ne vous importe pas? (La Reine morte, act II, scene v, p. 201)

The Infanta leaves, but she is seen once more in one of the few supernatural scenes in Montherlant's theater. In the form of a shadow, she

⁴Pucciani, op. cit., p. 209.

appears to Inès during an interview with Ferrante, believing she has at last found a way to convince Inès to flee. However, she fails again and tells Inès that she, too, will fail, when it is her turn, no doubt meaning Inès' inability to stop her own murder.

The Infanta, in all her pride and glory, is also a tragic woman; strangely, her tragedy does not come from what she does, but from what she can not do. Believing herself all-powerful, the thought that she cannot convince Inès evokes her dolorous cry: "Ah, il est affreux de ne pas savoir convaincre" (La Reine morte, act III, scene vi, p. 221). She disappears then, without leaving any trace, other than the impression she leaves with the audience.⁵

Inès de Castro is without question the most admirable and the most tragic woman of Montherlant's theater. She possesses all the traits that are becoming to womanhood: complete love for her husband, an almost lyrical love for her unborn child, an implicit faith in human nature, and a natural gentleness. For her, Montherlant has written some of his most moving and poetic lines.

As a wife and lover, she tells Ferrante of her first meeting with Pedro, saying that it was like being reborn and that now, while other woman dream of what they do not have, she dreams of what she has in Pedro. The intensity of her love is apparent when she visits Pedro in prison, flinging herself into his arms and confessing:

⁵Jeanne Sandelion, Montherlant et les Femmes (Paris: Librairie Plon, 1950), p. 107.

. . . je suis restée une heure étendue sur mon lit, avant de venir, pour être maîtresse de moi quand tu apparaîtrais! . . . Quand je t'ai vu, mon coeur a éclaté. Ah! laisse-moi boire encore (La Reine morte, act II, scene iv, pp. 187-88).

Inès loves Pedro, not just idealistically, but with her whole physical being. She is always wanting to touch him, to have him physically close to her. And she has wanted to love in the security of marriage, telling Ferrante that she married Pedro to be even happier than she was as his mistress.

Inès is the ideal mother, perhaps because her child is still unborn. If she had been the mother of an adolescent child, Montherlant might not have been so kind in creating her. She intermingles her love for her husband with that for her child. Speaking of it to Pedro, she says:

Et ses petites mains sont plus chaudes que les tiennes. . . . Je te tiens, je te serre sur moi, et c'est lui. . . . Enfant adoré, grâce à qui je vais pouvoir aimer encore davantage (La Reine morte, act i, scene iv, p. 154).

She speaks of her child to Ferrante, wishing that she were able to give it eternal happiness. There is only one false thought that she expresses; she has such great hopes for this child that she tells him:

J'accepte de devoir mépriser l'univers entier, mais non mon fils. Je crois que je serais capable de le tuer, s'il ne répondait pas à ce que j'attends de lui (La Reine morte, act III, scene vi, p. 224).

Everything about Inès speaks of love and hope. Of love, she says that she knows how to do nothing else. Ferrante tells her that she, like himself, is sick, her illness being hope. Her implicit faith in human nature is evident by her refusal to believe that Ferrante will do evil to her. She tells Pedro that Ferrante had asked her if Pedro seemed sad

in prison, adding that she believes Ferrante must force himself to be stern, being naturally benevolent and generous. She tells Ferrante himself:

--je me disais: "Non, le père de l'homme que j'aime, et auquel je n'ai jamais voulu et fait que du bien, n'agira pas contre moi" (La Reine morte, act III, scene vi, p. 228).

But she is mistaken. For love, she has refused to leave Pedro, either by annulling their marriage or by going with the Infanta. Because she trusts Ferrante, she loses her life. It is true that she was doomed from the beginning; but who knows how the play would have ended if she had gone with the Infanta? Once again, Montherlant has had his heroine deliver the final decision on her own tragedy.

In Inès' case, the tragedy is all the more poignant, as one recalls her perfection as lover, mother, and complete woman contrasted with her untimely death.

Pasiphaé. "Si Montherlant n'avait écrit que Pasiphaé,⁶ ces quelques pages suffiraient pour que son nom demeure dans la littérature française . . ."⁷ Pasiphaé, of Greek Mythology, was the wife of Minos, the king of Crete. She became enamored of a young, white sacrificial bull which the sea-god Poseidon sent to Minos, who had refused to sacrifice the beautiful animal. The result of this attraction was the minotaur, a beast having the body of a man and the head of a bull.

⁶Henry de Montherlant, Théâtre, op. cit., pp. 109-22.

⁷Jeanne Sandelion, op. cit., p. 127, citing Edmond Jaloux, literary critic.

Montherlant, who as a child had written a story about unnatural passion,⁸ in 1928 wrote this myth into a short play, so short that it has neither acts nor scenes. The part that he portrays is the inner struggle of Pasiphaé as she fights to overcome her unnatural desire and the moral arguments that arise. As a basis for this approach, Montherlant used the Greek writer Euripides' version of Pasiphaé's self-justification to the king after the birth of the Minotaur.⁹ This ancient parchment characterizes the queen as a very human and conscience-stricken woman, trying to justify her act before the customs and morals of her society, and believing that others are to blame for her passion. Montherlant's Pasiphaé, in her final reasoning, decides it is not the act itself that is bad, but the opinion of it that it is bad. At the end, she gives in to her desire, believing herself innocent and above judgment, since she is queen.

Pasiphaé cannot be classified the same as the other women of Montherlant's theater, since she is in the position that is usually given to his heroes. There are no male protagonists in the play. Pasiphaé is the only character, with the exception of her nurse, to whom she gives her arguments; her small daughter, Phaedra, who has only a minor role; and the Greek chorus, which represents philosophy or intelligence, that judges her passion. It is thought that Montherlant speaks through the chorus.¹⁰

⁸cf. p. 9. ⁹Montherlant, Théâtre, op. cit., notes, p. 105.

¹⁰Sandelion, op. cit., p. 126. notes

Pasiphaé is a typical protagonist of Montherlant's theater, since she has a choice to make and feels that her situation is the fault of someone else. In addition, she feels that she is superior to others, since her father is the sun-god, Helios. She searches for a justification for her passion for the bull, being well aware of her society's morals, and she ends up a solitary figure, having chosen her own solitude.

The misery resulting from her interior conflict is evident in the description the nurse gives of Pasiphaé in her room, tense, restless, groaning, even ignoring the flies which alight on her. She feels that this unnatural passion is not her own fault, but that of her husband, Minos, for not sacrificing the bull as the sea-god, Poseidon, told him to do. In the Euripides version when Pasiphaé speaks to King Minos after the birth of the Minotaur, she says that she is an innocent victim of his disobedience and of Poseidon's curse, thus blaming everyone except herself.¹¹

She laments her passion, yet she does not feel that she is guilty in experiencing it, for she tells the nurse:

Pourquoi être différente des autres, sans l'avoir voulu, sans y rien pouvoir? . . . Au fond de moi je ne sens pas ce que je vais faire est mal; . . . C'est ton visage d'horreur, nourrice, et celui qu'auraient tous les autres, qui crée ce mal et me rend coupable (Pasiphaé, p. 117).

She continues her self-justification by arguing that a woman loving the lowest of criminals is blameless, even proud; but she, Pasiphaé, can

¹¹Montherlant, Théâtre, op. cit., notes, p. 123.

not be. The chorus, which judges her passion from an objective standpoint, vindicates her, saying:

Ce n'est pas sa passion qui est malsaine; ce qui est malsain, c'est sa croyance que sa passion est malsaine. . . . Si elle souffre du jugement qu'elle porte sur son acte, je la blâme (Pasiphaé, pp. 116-17).

Finally, Pasiphaé concludes her agony, having worked out her own moral code which will justify her act, believing that her twenty years of fidelity to her husband and her generosity to others will vindicate her. However, she knows that she will be alone; and she has accepted her solitude, telling the nurse:

Me voici seule avec mes actes. Je suis extraordinairement seule; . . . Que m'importe le mépris? . . . innocent ou coupable, je suis ce que je suis, et ne veux être rien d'autre (Pasiphaé, pp. 119 and 122).

The pathos of her situation, in addition to her solitude, is the fact that she realizes that the fulfillment of her desire will bring her no pleasure, only a feeling of accomplishment,¹² as she says:

Quand viendra cet instant auquel j'ai tout sacrifié, je n'aurai pas de plaisir, pas une étincelle de plaisir, je le sais (Pasiphaé, pp. 118-19).

Thus Pasiphaé, like Ravier in Celles qu'on prend dans ses bras, wishes only to satisfy her passion; but she is more tragic than Ravier, for she is all alone.

Malatesta,¹³ written in 1944, is one of Montherlant's most colorful plays, full of pomp and regal grandeur, and is based upon an actual

¹²Jacques de Laprade, Le Théâtre de Montherlant, (Paris: La Jeune Parque, 1960), p. 59.

¹³Montherlant, Théâtre, op. cit., pp. 435-36.

person of the fifteenth century whose history was recorded by Charles Yriarte,¹⁴ although Montherlant selected the details to fit his own purposes.

He can also claim some personal tie with Malatesta, for he tells of a girlhood friendship between his mother and a girl named Marie de La Fontaine Solare. They both married the same time, and each had a son at the same time. Since Madame de Montherlant was an invalid after the birth of Henry, she could not nurse him. Her friend, then, nursed both boys. Years later, after the première of Malatesta, Montherlant was informed that the family of La Fontaine Solare was descended from the Malatestan line. Montherlant thus feels that, since he was nourished by the milk of a descendant of Malatesta, he has some "gouttes de sang Malatestien" in his veins.¹⁵

Sigismond Malatesta, a condottiere or mercenary soldier, is a true man of the Renaissance, in control of Rimini, Italy. Although he is fifty-one years old, he is both sensual and mobile in character, being alternately weak and strong, frivolous and serious. He dreams of being immortal through a biography which Porcellio, a man of letters and his protégé, is writing for him, many details therein being exaggerated. When Malatesta receives word that the pope wants to offer him two other cities in exchange for Rimini, Malatesta is furious and decides to kill the pope.

¹⁴Ibid., "Présentation de Malatesta," p. 544.

¹⁵Ibid., "Lait des Malatesta," pp. 541-43.

Isotta, his wife, whom he highly respects and deeply loves, despite his having numerous mistresses, begs him to reconsider in the name of his own safety. However, he goes to Rome, and instead of killing the pope, his extreme mobility causes him instead to pledge the pope his services. Thus he remains in Rome, where the pope gives him a boring position that keeps him under surveillance, since the pope knew his original intention.

Malatesta's lively spirit begins to disintegrate, and Isotta begs the pope to let him return to Rimini. Upon being allowed to return, he makes the mistake of insulting Porcellio, his biographer, who poisons Malatesta; then before the dying man's eyes, Porcellio slowly burns, sheet by sheet, the biography that was to have made Malatesta immortally great.

Isotta, Malatesta's faithful wife of thirty years, is a most admirable woman, which is a departure from Montherlant's usual portrayal of the older woman. She is first of all the wife of Malatesta, and secondly the mother of his children. She knows that he has other loves, but she also knows that she is first in his heart, and her first concern is his comfort and safety.¹⁶ When Malatesta tells her he plans to kill the pope, she examines the idea coolly, from the standpoint of Malatesta's safety. Convinced that he will be killed, she begs him not to go:

Vous serez tué, et il ne s'agit pas d'être tué; il s'agit de vivre, pour pouvoir tuer sans risque. Tué, vous serez aussi vaincu que le Pape tué (Malatesta, act I, scene viii, p. 459).

¹⁶Sandelion, op. cit., pp. 123-24.

After Malatesta has gone to Rome and remained, growing more and more unhappy, Isotta boldly pleads with the pope to let him return to Rimini. Even the pope has heard of Isotta's wisdom and judgment, and he tells her in a speech that perfectly frames all her qualities:

Vous, madame Isotta, on vous publie pour une des femmes les plus doctes d'Italie; mais aussi pour prudente, avisée, virile. Votre renommée est grande, et vous êtes respectée de tous, vous que l'on appelle "la mère de Rimini" (Malatesta, act III, scene v, p. 497).

She is so eloquent in her defense of and praises for Malatesta as a husband, father, and soldier, that the pope finally grants her wish, exclaiming: "Comme vous l'aimez! . . . Plût au ciel que les prêtres aimassent Jesus-Christ autant qu'une femme peut aimer son époux!" (Malatesta, act III, scene v, pp. 506-07).

The next time one sees Isotta, it is with her children and Malatesta back at Rimini. She feels a rising anxiety for him, having heard of the arrest of Malatesta's confidant at Rome, then having seen on their stairway a strange inscription, embellished with ivy leaves, which said that a man's worst enemy is his government. Malatesta contradicts her, ironically, by saying that the worst enemy is one's fellow-countryman. Fearful, she begs him not to return to Rome; he asks her why she is always so afraid for him, and she replies that she loves him. Malatesta, becoming serious himself at last, tells her: "Aimez-moi un peu moins, Isotta. . . . il est bon de recevoir une certaine quantité d'amour, mais non pas trop. . . . Votre tremblement altère ma stabilité" (Malatesta, act IV, scene vii, p. 524).

The last that is seen of Isotta, she is trying to control her anxiety, having been reassured by Porcellio that the ivy leaves surrounding

the sinister inscription meant: "Qu'on nous préserve de lui!" (Malatesta, act IV, scene viii, p. 526). However, Isotta's intense anxiety has already implanted itself in Malatesta. Alone with Porcellio, his biographer, he admits that he is upset about her worries, since she is the only person who has ever loved him. He speaks of vulnerability, and Porcellio takes advantage of this moment to poison him. Dying, Malatesta calls for Isotta, then commits himself to his version of eternity, which includes such classical heroes as Caesar and Pompey, whom he has always admired.

Montherlant speaks of Malatesta as a play of blindness. Isotta's blindness is two-fold in unwittingly causing Malatesta's death: (1) adoring her husband, she pleads with the pope to let him return to Rimini, where Porcellio kills him; (2) she instills her own anxiety into Malatesta, putting him into a state of weakness, whereby perhaps the poison worked with more effect.

Thus, according to Montherlant, Isotta, the most flatteringly portrayed of his older women and one of his truly perfect images of total purity, in the completeness of her love causes her husband's death:¹⁷

. . . voilà un symbole de la façon dont les femmes corrompent, et finalement tournent contre vous, le plus merveilleux de ce qu'elles vous donnent. L'amour d'Isotta ou: Comment on tue les hommes.

How great must be her remorse! Her tragedy is not only in losing her husband, but in knowing that she is partly responsible.

¹⁷Montherlant, Théâtre, op. cit., "Malatestiana," p. 551.

Don Juan¹⁸ is Montherlant's version of the Don Juan story. The aged Don Juan has come to Seville to have a rendez-vous with a fifteen-year-old girl, Linda. He is accompanied by his constant companion and illegitimate son, Alcacer, who reminds him that he is in danger here, since a previous affair with the commander's daughter, Ana, has been discovered. The duke Antonio was blamed instead of Don Juan, but Alcacer is still fearful that the true identity of Ana's lover will be discovered.

However, the only purpose in Don Juan's life is making love to women, so he continues to wait, although Linda arrives late.

Later, he meets Ana's father, the commander, and reveals that he was Ana's lover. Ana has remained true to Don Juan, refusing to betray his identity and pining for his return. The commander is angry at first, but eventually calms himself; however, the commander's wife, upon later hearing that Don Juan is to blame, demands a duel; and the commander is killed. The commander's wife adds comedy to this scene as an outraged mother, but her role is very brief; therefore, her characterization will not be discussed.

After the death of the commander, Don Juan hides at home; and Alcacer begs him to flee or to hide with a friend. Don Juan concludes that he has no friends and is too proud to hide with a former mistress. He has resigned himself, almost nonchalantly, to his fate, when Ana comes to offer him money and to urge him to flee. Upon seeing her again and

¹⁸Henry de Montherlant, Don Juan, pièce en trois actes (Paris: Gallimard, 1958), pp. 1-202.

realizing that she really loves him, Don Juan changes completely. He promises Ana that he will leave and return in six months to marry her; he offers to believe in God, a promise that he has made and broken every time he has pursued a girl in the past.

After Ana leaves, however, Don Juan feels his old, unquenchable passion for conquest return, and he leaves for a rendez-vous.

He pulls a mask over his face to disguise himself; and, when Alcacer tries to remove it, it mingles with his flesh and takes on the aspect of a death mask. The audience knows that Don Juan will die, a victim of his obsession for carnal love.

It is evident from the beginning that Ana is just another conquest to Don Juan. He says of her, when Alcacer reminds him of his potential danger in returning to Seville:

Ana de Ulloa, c'est une page tournée. . . . Il y a cent mille
Ana de Ulloa; son visage même est sorti de ma mémoire . . .
L'homme est fait pour abandonner (Don Juan, act I, scene i, p. 15).

Ana was sixteen when Don Juan became her first love. Their relationship lasted four months before his belt was discovered in her room and the duke Antonio was mistakenly accused. At the time of the play itself, Ana is seventeen, a favorite age for Montherlant; but she is also on the threshold of eighteen, when a girl begins to decline, according to him. Here is what Montherlant has said in respect to his own ideas about age and marriage: "Je me marierai peut-être à soixante ans, avec une fille de seize. . . . Dix-huit ans! L'automne d'une femme!"¹⁹ Throughout the

¹⁹Sandelion, op. cit., p. 171.

year that has passed, Ana has faithfully maintained silence about her lover's identity. Her father tells Don Juan: "Elle vous aimait" (Don Juan, act II, scene iv, p. 90). And Don Juan, who is concerned about his advancing age, says, a little later: "Quant à mes soixante-cinq ans, elle avait les yeux fermés" (Don Juan, act II, scene iv, p. 91). Ana appears on the scene for the first and only time in the third act, fifth scene, the only scene she has in which to reveal her character to the audience and to show the intensity of her love for Don Juan. She reveals this intensity by coming to him, offering him money, and urging him to flee. She seems oblivious to the fact that Don Juan has killed her father. Of her father's death, she says simply:

Et puis, ne me parlez plus de mon père. C'est assez de penser à lui quand je ne suis pas avec vous. . . . Il y a vous. Mon deuil, mon malheur, mon père, mon avenir, tout cela, c'est le reste. Et, ici, ce reste est oublié. Mon père est-il mort, et par qui? Je ne sais rien de tout cela (Don Juan, act III, scene v, p. 159).

Montherlant explains that Ana's indifference to her father's death and the fact that his slayer was Don Juan is part of the tragic element in the play.²⁰ Her love for Don Juan, however, is unselfish and complete. She asks first for his safety, then promises to marry him when he returns in six months. She knows his passionate nature, and she generously tells him: "Partez; voyez d'autres femmes; aimez-moi en elles. Vivez fidèle et infidèle, mais vivez, mon ami très cher" (Don Juan, act III, scene v, p. 157). She is not concerned about his age; when he hides his face for fear that she will stop loving him because of being old, she

²⁰Montherlant, Don Juan, op. cit., notes, p. 180.

pulls his hands away and kisses him. She exhorts him above her father, saying it was he, Don Juan, who made her a woman, and that was more important to her than being fathered. Her last words, answering Don Juan's self-reproach for his past actions, vindicate him from any guilt in her eyes: "Vous avez vécu comme Dieu vous a fait" (Don Juan, act III, scene v, p. 160).

Then she leaves, unaware that she will never see him again. Or is she? In all her speeches, she urges his safety, declares her love, and avows innocence in all that he has ever done. Yet the only time she speaks of a future for herself is when she tells him that she is in mourning and cannot marry for six months, although she could become engaged. His last words to her are filled with pledges to return, despite all obstacles; but she says nothing and leaves.

Could this silence perhaps mean that her heart is breaking, that she knows he can never love only her? Or perhaps she sees his inevitable death, since she is so concerned that he flee immediately.

Ana de Ulloa is one of the most tragic women of Montherlant's theater. She has become a woman at sixteen and is bereaved of her lover at seventeen. She has loved a man who can not reciprocate her love, and she is forgotten at the end of the play.

Le Maître de Santiago,²¹ written in 1945, is set in Spain shortly after the discovery of America; the plot and characters are entirely

²¹Montherlant, Théâtre, op. cit., pp. 597-657.

fictitious, although Montherlant does acknowledge a counterpart to Don Alvaro in an uncle of Saint Theresa, who had a part in her conversion. There are three principal characters: Don Alvaro, the master of the Order of Santiago, of which the king is the titular head; Mariana, Don Alvaro's daughter; and another member of the Order, Don Bernal, who is also a friend and the father of Jacinto, a young man who wishes to marry Mariana.

Some of the members of the Order plan to go to the New World to conquer the Indians and gain new riches for Spain. They try to engage Don Alvaro to go also; but he refuses, confessing his thirst for retirement from a world that to him has lost its glory. Mariana and Don Bernal's son would like to get married, but there is no money for a dowry. Confronted with the idea of going to the New World to earn her a dowry, Don Alvaro still refuses. At last, Don Bernal and Mariana decide to deceive Don Alvaro into consenting to go by having a false representative of the king come to tell him that his Majesty wishes Don Alvaro to add his prestige to the project of evangelizing the Indians.

At this thought of recognition from the king, Don Alvaro is about to consent, when Mariana interrupts, saying it is a trick. She confesses because while she was at prayer before the statue of Christ, she seemed to see a likeness in Him to her father. Overwhelmed by her sacrifice of her own expectations, Don Alvaro wraps her in the mantle of the Order, symbol of purity, and they pledge themselves to a life of religious contemplation in a convent.

Before analyzing the character of Mariana, one must first recognize two general religious viewpoints: the argument for religious austerity and the argument for a laxness in religious discipline. Montherlant mentions in his notes²² that, in the Bible, Jesus repeatedly entreats the Christian to give up worldly goods and family attachments to follow him. This renouncement is the Nada, or the negative side of Christianity. There is also a Todo, or positive side, which emphasizes spreading the gospel instead of idle contemplation. In the eyes of some austere denominations, therefore, Don Alvaro's ideas are justified; and there is no tragedy, but triumph.

However, Montherlant admits that Don Alvaro is not a model Christian, for his love of God is really the love he has for his idea of himself.²³ One must then discard the idea of the triumph of religious austerity in this because it is false.

Mariana is a most tragic and pathetic child. Already she is eighteen, beyond the flowering of her womanhood. So far in her life, her mother being dead, she has known only her father, who has shut her away from a world which he believes is corrupt. He neglects her personal well-being, allowing her room, as well as her wardrobe, to fall into disrepair, meanwhile freely giving away his possessions to any beggar who knocks. Don Alvaro believes in charity, but not for his family. As far as a family relationship is concerned, he tells Don Bernal: "Il n'y a de famille que par l'élection et l'esprit; la famille par le sang est maudite" (Le Maître de Santiago, act II, scene I, p. 633).

²²Montherlant, Théâtre, op. cit., "Notes," pp. 676-77.

²³Ibid., p. 674.

Not only is Mariana neglected, she is also unloved. Although he says he loves her, Don Alvaro freely admits that she is an annoyance to him, and he rejects her because she does not measure up to his standards. Of this he tells Don Bernal:

Elle me lassait souvent, . . . Elle me dégradait aussi. . . . Les enfants dégradent. . . . Je ne lui parle pas de choses sérieuses parce qu'elle est incapable de les entendre (Le Maître de Santiago, act II, scene i, pp. 623, 624, and 625).

He says that her being his own daughter does not make him favor her over any other person. When Don Bernal asks him about going to the New World to get her a dowry, Don Alvaro remarks that if they wish to marry, they will have to be poor; for he will not give them the sin of wealth. He concludes by praising his own strength of character: " . . . je suis l'homme que tous devraient être" (Le Maître de Santiago, act II, scene i, p. 628).

Despite this neglect, Mariana feels only love and admiration for her father; however, perhaps it is only admiration and perhaps it is because he is the person she has known best. At least, she is true to his principles, having adopted them as her own. She speaks of a marriage with Don Bernal's son, Jacinto, only in the loftiest terms, saying that she will not get married in order to be happy, nor does she want an easy life. She will live only for her husband. Don Bernal tells her: "Chère Mariana, vous êtes votre père, en plus sage" (Le Maître de Santiago, act II, scene iii, p. 639).

In fact, Mariana is so completely molded in her father's image that she does not know the real meaning of love between a man and a woman. She professes a coldness for Jacinto, saying he is nothing to

her, believing that she cannot marry him anyway, without a dowry. But when Don Bernal tells her some of the impassioned things that his son has said of her, her pride immediately surges forth, like Don Alvaro's pride when he thinks the king has recognized him. And she is ready to plot against her father, still swearing that she does not wish to be happy.

Then, true to the tragic tradition of Montherlant's heroines, Mariana prevents her own happiness by telling her father of the plot. Her excuse is that her father and the Christ momentarily resembled each other, but more likely there is an instability in her resolution.

The scene of their dedication, so outwardly tender and full of religious devotion, is also touched with inner pride. Don Alvaro recognizes that he loves his daughter, because he at last realizes that she is worthy of being loved. Her reply, since he has kneeled to her, is in good faith, but it has a certain tone of superiority:

Relevez-vous, je vous en conjure. Je sens que je deviens folle quand je vous vois à genoux devant moi. . . Je n'aurais pu supporter de vous voir cesser d'être ce que vous êtes. Vous m'avez reproché l'autre jour de vous perdre. J'ai voulu vous sauver (Le Maître de Santiago, act III, scene v, p. 652).

Don Alvaro is deliriously happy to think that his own flesh estimates his ideas enough to embrace them. However, the audience knows that she has had a glimpse of what life could have been like, for when he speaks of leaving to live, she says they are leaving to die. He is so busy praising the future life they will have as religious recluses that he ignores, or perhaps he silently approves, the real reason why Mariana, isolated child who has known no other way of life, and who has no personality of

her own, will go with him. In her last speech, she acknowledges that only one thing is necessary, and that is whatever he, her father, says.

Port-Royal²⁴ is based upon a real incident which happened in a convent in Paris in 1664. In August of that year, the nuns of Port-Royal refused to sign a Papal edict which condemned five doctrines of their Jansenist faith. As a result, they were refused the sacraments of the Church, and the nuns were dispersed because they would not sign. The Jansenists were persecuted by the Jesuits, whose agent was M. de Beaumont de Péréfixe, the archbishop of Paris. It has been insinuated that the archbishop was an illegitimate son of Cardinal Richelieu.

Montherlant was personally acquainted with both the Jansenist and the Jesuit beliefs.²⁵ His maternal grandmother had some Jansenists in her family, and his father had gone to a Jesuit school. Also, for his baccalaureate examination at Sainte-Croix, Montherlant chose to study Blaise Pascal (1623-1662), who had accepted the Jansenist faith and lived as an ascetic at Port-Royal.

Montherlant wrote a first Port-Royal in 1940; he reworked it into its present form in 1953. As a documentary basis for his play, Montherlant used the Constitution of the convent, as well as Sainte-Beuve's book, Port-Royal.²⁶ Montherlant limited the action of his play to a single day at the convent; and he presents it without acts, scenes, or intermissions.

²⁴Montherlant, Théâtre, op. cit., pp. 969-1055.

²⁵cf. pp. 6, 9, and 22. that they

²⁶Montherlant, Théâtre, op. cit., "Notes," p. 1057.

The two principal characters, who will be discussed below, have been portrayed according to their actual counterparts at Port-Royal.

The play opens upon the nuns' crisis of having to decide whether or not to sign the pope's edict. There are many nuns who decide to sign because of outside pressure from their families and the surrounding communities. But there are also many, among them the twelve who are sent away, who are true to their faith and who wish to maintain their independence to believe as they please. Among the sisters at the convent are Soeur Marie-Françoise de l'Eucharistie and Soeur Angélique de Saint-Jean, who represent conflicting viewpoints about the papal edict and what it means to their personal faith.

Soeur Françoise, aged twenty-two, feels that her greatest need is to be alone with God. She feels that signing the edict will not bring about any noticeable changes in their daily practices, so she contemplates signing it in order to be left in peace. So far, she has refused to sign; but she admits that she is only echoing the decisions of the others. She questions some of the Jansenist doctrines. For example, she wonders why, if the Jansenists are willing to suffer, they complain about the persecution they are now receiving. All she wants is to be near God, her source of inspiration. In her conversation with Soeur Angélique, she explains:

Je ne suis faite que pour l'adoration. . . Il n'existe au monde que Dieu et moi. . . Notre Seigneur est séparé et seul. C'est ainsi que je veux être en lui (Port-Royal, pp. 995-96).

Soeur Angélique, aged thirty-nine, who has been selected as the future abbess of the convent, believes that they should not sign the pledge because they should have the right to believe as they please, no matter what

these beliefs are. She feels that the Church, in persecuting them, will reject them if they do not sign. Upon being rejected, the nuns will have a painful and false sense of guilt. Above all, she feels that the communal life of the convent must be preserved; and she tells Soeur Françoise, who likes to worship and meditate alone, that she might be better adjusted in another convent.

Although Soeur Angélique has spoken with the confidence of unshakable convictions about their right to independent belief, she expresses doubt about her personal beliefs and her fear of being sent away. In a conversation with the Mother Agnès, she adds that she likes the night, but fears the day and the August sunlight. Yet she tells of a dream in which the night was too black and stormy for her to find her way. Dreams are significant omens to the Jansenist nuns.

Thus, the contrast is evident between Soeur Françoise and Soeur Angélique. Soeur Françoise has a strong personal and almost mystical religion; she does not wish to be disturbed by man's petty details. Soeur Angélique has a strong sense of their right to believe as they please and a preference for communal living, yet she does not seem very certain of what she believes.

During the visit of the archbishop, who immediately initiates the Church's punishment, Soeur Françoise has prayed for and received her inspiration; and she has the courage to confront the archbishop. She tells him that the nuns were first condemned, and then the Church looked for some reasons to apply the condemnation. She adds:

Nous sommes différentes et c'est, en effet, le seul grief qu'on ait contre nous. Nous sommes différentes, mais le christianisme est différent. . . . C'est l'amour que nous portons à Dieu qui nous attire la haine du monde. Le monde nous hait comme il a haï Jésus-Christ (Port-Royal, pp. 1033-34). 268.

Soeur Angélique, however, remains mostly silent; but when Soeur Françoise asks her to support her arguments, Soeur Angélique is able only to uphold the principles upon which their faith is founded, showing great pride in the infallibility of the convent's creeds. She tells the archbishop:

Dieu nous a fait la grâce que nous fussions instruites et beaucoup plus fondées dans les véritables principes de la religion et de la piété que ne le sont une infinité de personnes religieuses (Port-Royal, p. 1034).

The archbishop is shocked at this reply, saying: "Voilà le plus grand orgueil de fille que j'aie jamais connu" (Port-Royal, p. 1034).

At the end of the play, Soeur Françoise is sure of her faith; and she returns to the convent, determined that she will continue to uphold the convent's beliefs. Soeur Angélique is taken away to a solitary cell where she must remain until she signs. She speaks of the "Portes des Ténèbres," (Port-Royal, p. 1054 et passim), the shadows that will cover her faith.

Montherlant mentions that one must recognize in Port-Royal a secret movement by which the nuns liked to be disliked, thus showing that they scorn the rest of the world.²⁷ Soeur Angélique is one of these nuns. She willingly exiles herself from the rest of the world, from the authority of the Church, because of her scorn for outsiders and her zeal for the "order," both popular themes with Montherlant. As a consequence of her scorn and her zeal, she is exiled from her community, as well as from God, since Montherlant indicates that the seclusion is going to be unbearable for her.²⁸

²⁷Ibid., note on "Port-Royal et la 'Grande Tentation,'" p. 1065.

²⁸Ibid., "Préface," p. 965.

Soeur Françoise, on the other hand, passes from the shadows of her uncertainty into the light of her belief. She has been searching for the truth, refusing to scorn others' ideas, and she becomes the single example of Montherlant's heroines whose fate is a positive and optimistic one.

Soeur Angélique, along with the other nuns who must leave, find their tragedy in their exile, which they could have prevented if they had signed the papal edict. If their convictions in their faith would not let them sign, then they triumphed in their resolution to be true to themselves. But if, like Soeur Angélique, they refused to sign because they could not admit that their convictions might be wrong, they find another tragedy in refusing to admit this false pride.

Le Cardinal d'Espagne,²⁹ written during 1957-58, is Montherlant's last play to date. He wrote this play during the same time that he wrote Don Juan, which are both laid in Spain. Montherlant admits that Le Cardinal d'Espagne is not a historical play; he took many personalities from that period of Spain's history, but he rearranged the facts and characters to his own satisfaction.³⁰

The play is based upon a historical character, the cardinal Jimenez de Cisneros (1436-1517), who had been a vicar general to the

²⁹Henry de Montherlant, Le Cardinal d'Espagne, pièce en 3 actes (Paris: Gallimard, 1960), pp. 1-265.

³⁰Ibid., "Postface," p. 211.

bishop of Següenza; a Franciscan friar; Queen Isabella's confessor; regent for two Spanish monarchs, Juana and Charles I; a cardinal; and grand inquisitor for Castile.

Another historical character who appears in this play is Queen Juana, la reine Jeanne (1479-1555), who was the daughter of Ferdinand and Isabella of Spain. Queen Jeanne married Philip le Bel of Austria, suffered deeply because of his infidelities, and became insane at his death in 1506. She briefly ruled as queen between 1504 and 1506 and until her father, Ferdinand, returned from Naples. Charles, son of Queen Jeanne and later emperor of the Holy Roman Empire, did not rule until 1517. Cisneros was again regent from the death of Ferdinand in 1516 until the arrival of Charles to Spain in 1517.

The principal theme of this play is action against inaction, a man's decision whether his deeds have any meaning.³¹ Another theme also present is paternal rejection of filial mediocrity; in this case the cardinal Cisneros rejects his mediocre grand-nephew, Cardona, captain of the Cardinal's guards. There is also the theme of false pride, or a false reason for actions, evident in the character of the cardinal.

The action of the play takes place during the last three days of the cardinal's life in November, 1517, at Madrid. The old cardinal, aged eighty-two, is very powerful, but is greatly hated by nearly every one who knows him. The only person who does not seem eager for his death is his grand-nephew, Cardona. Nevertheless, Cardona is treacherous and

³¹Ibid., pp. 212-13.

cowardly, and justly deserves the cardinal's scorn, which is frequently evident. Cardona admits that he is both brave and cowardly, that, as a commander, he is brave; but, as a man, having to meet his equals in society, he is afraid.

The cardinal is portrayed at first as a great but humble man. He wears the cardinal's hat, but he goes barefoot, according to the custom of the Franciscan friars. He believes that God is in him, that he is God's servant; thus, whatever he does must be right. He knows that he is hated, but he admits that hatred only strengthens him. As he tells Cardona: "Je gouverne; . . . Sachez que je fais ce qu'il faut pour qu'on me haïsse. . . . J'aime leur mépris (Le Cardinal d'Espagne, act I, scene vii, pp. 58, 59, and 69).

When the play opens, the court is awaiting the return of the young king Charles, the future Emperor Charles V, who will take the throne from his mother, Jeanne la folle. The queen, aged thirty-eight, has been insane since her husband, Philip, died; she rules in name only, as the cardinal has actual charge of the government. Jeanne lives completely isolated from the court, with only a few ladies-in-waiting and several cats for companions. She dresses in black, drinks water from an earthen bowl, often refuses to eat, and complains of bats flying around her head. She is completely oblivious to reality, but at times is perfectly lucid and able to converse intelligently with occasional visitors. However, she emphatically exclaims that she does not like strange faces.

Cardinal Cisneros must visit the queen to see if she will publicly greet her son, the new king, when he arrives. Cisneros tells her that it is necessary for her to be seen by her people occasionally. During their

conversation, the queen lucidly explains her reasons for isolating herself:

Les ténèbres me plaisent; . . . On me demande pourquoi je vis entourée de chats. . . . Parce que les chats ne s'occupent ni des idées ni des Empires. Cela fait un lien entre eux et moi. . . . (Le Cardinal d'Espagne, act III, scene iii, pp. 113 and 117).

The queen also tells the cardinal that he is dust, just like everyone else. Not only that, but he should have discovered years ago the vanity of things. She then accuses him of liking his political power, and that he is not a truly humble man because he lives among the proud nobles, passing his life like a pagan.

Cisneros is astounded at her effrontery, as she continues to say if he were truly humble, he would have refused to be Queen Isabella's confessor and remained in the cloister. She explains her concept of God:

Vous sursautez si je dis que Dieu est le rien. Le rien n'est pas Dieu, mais il en est l'approche, il en est le commencement. . . . il y a deux mondes, le monde de la passion, et le monde du rien. . . . je suis du monde du rien. Je n'aime rien, je ne veux rien, je ne résiste à rien. . . . et c'est ce rien qui me rend bonne chrétienne . . . chaque acte que je ne fais pas est compté sur un livre par les anges (Le Cardinal d'Espagne, act II, scene iii, pp. 131-32).

After the cardinal leaves, he meditates on what the queen has said, realizing that she has already faced reality, seen the mediocrity of action, and rejected the world. Suddenly, he sees his own futile struggle, the hatred of other men, his advancing old age, and he longs to retire to contemplate and worship God. Having reached this point in his thinking, he collapses, nearly dying. When his nephew Cardona calls for help to the dying man, the surrounding nobles, whom only Cisneros has been able to keep under control, kneel to pray for his speedy death. Hearing their scorn, he revives, intent on living until he meets the king to advise him

about the government. Just before Cisneros dies, he seems to be destroying all his previous deeds of goodness by punishing his enemies, using the name of God and the state to destroy whatever resisted the royal power.

Then he receives a letter from the young king, relieving him of his rule so that he can retire in his old age. Upon hearing that he no longer has any power and feeling that he has been betrayed, he dies, amidst the barking of dogs and the ringing of the angelus.

Queen Jeanne, already tragic because she is mad, also causes the tragedy of the cardinal. Cisneros believed that he was God's servant, and that his reasons for his actions justified his means of attainment. He sustained himself by this false pride. By his conversation with the queen, he came face to face with the truth. Like the nuns of Port-Royal, he liked to be disliked, because he scorned the rest of the world. He avowed his devotion to God and his thirst to retire in solitude to worship; yet, when he lost his political power, he collapses, unable to live without the feeling of importance that this power gave him.

One could say that Queen Jeanne is happy; certainly, she has no worries. She lives in a negative emptiness; she has retired. Perhaps, to Montherlant, who himself has lived in retirement since the 1940's, the queen's philosophy is justified. Montherlant, in his Service inutile, wrote:³²

³²Henri Perruchot, Montherlant. (Paris: Gallimard, 1959), p. 232, citing Montherlant.

Il n'y a pas beaucoup de prise sur un homme dont l'idéal est la mort dans la vie--du moins la mort au monde, car cette mort est, en réalité, la véritable vie. . . . C'est la vie obscure qui est le grand soleil.

With the cardinal, one returns to false pride; and Montherlant believes that egotism is responsible for the greatest sorrow in men.³³ Thus, perhaps the queen is not tragic, by Montherlant's standards. Accordingly, the cardinal is the tragic person; but he did not realize his tragedy until he spoke with the queen.

³³Peter Quennell, ed., Selected Essays by Montherlant (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1961), p. 278.

CONCLUSIONS

The tragedy of the women in Montherlant's theater varies from woman to woman. One dies; some are bereaved of their husbands or son; most are left in solitude. Of the sixteen women who have been discussed, only one seems not to have been tragic. She is Soeur Françoise of Port-Royal, who sought truth and the Divine will and found inspiration for her faith.

As for the remaining women, some are innocent of their tragedy; but many cause it, although their connection seems to be an indirect one. It seems that the male characters possess in greater abundance the qualities which lead to the deaths or solitude, although many times it has been the women who have provided the final stimulus which results in the tragedy.

Several tragic themes are frequently expressed in Montherlant's plays. These themes are pride, passion, maternal possessiveness, lack of contact with reality, and solitude.

Those women whose pride makes them tragic are Christine Villancy of Celles qu'on prend dans ses bras, the Infanta of La Reine morte, and the nuns of Port-Royal, principally Soeur Angélique. Christine sacrifices her virtue to her unbending pride, for she can not accept Ravier's help without giving something in return. The Infanta, so intensely proud of her royal status, can not bear to believe that she is incapable of persuading Inès de Castro to flee. The nuns holding strong convictions

about their beliefs are isolated from their "order," and Soeur Angélique suffers this injustice at the cost of her own faith.

Pasiphaé's tragedy results from her uncontrollable passion. Her pride, too, in her uniqueness as queen and in her descent from the sun-god is a tragic factor in her life.

Three women are guilty of maternal possessiveness. Geneviève de Presles of L'Exil is the most tragic of the three, for she smothers her son's personality, causing him to turn against her. Madame Sevrals of La Ville dont le prince est un enfant, who is modeled after Montherlant's mother, is more sympathetically portrayed than Geneviève; but she, too, loses in her rivalry with her son's friends. Marie Sandoval in Fils de Personne, although generally an admirable mother, seems to encourage Gillou's mediocrity as well as to place him in wartime danger because of her desire to be with her lover.

The women whose lack of contact with reality contribute to their tragedy are the most admirably portrayed. In Un Incompris, Rosette's blindness to her habitual lateness leads to Bruno's rejection of her. Marie Sandoval of Demain il fera jour, unselfishly loving Gillou, wants his happiness, although it leads to his death. Ana de Ulloa, Don Juan's faithful little mistress, perhaps does not recognize his inability to be true to one woman. In the end, she loses both her father and her lover. Isotta, so eager to protect her beloved Malatesta, blindly brings him before his murderer. Inès de Castro, of La Reine morte, so sweet and loving, is blind to Ferrante's inconsistencies, and he orders her killed. In Le Maître de Santiago, Mariana rejects her only chance to develop her own personality, as she blindly follows her father into religious seclusion.

Solitude, already the fate of most of the women mentioned above, is also the fate of the remaining ones. Queen Jeanne of Le Cardinal d'Espagne chooses her solitude. She is the only feminine character who is happy in her solitude, perhaps because she is the only one who is mentally disturbed. It must also be mentioned that she opens the cardinal's eyes to his inner confusion and vanity, thus making him more susceptible to death. In Celles qu'on prend dans ses bras, Mademoiselle Andriot is deprived of all physical and emotional associations. It is her realization of this solitude which makes her behave so inconsistently.

It is difficult to conclude why Montherlant has made the women in his theater so tragic, or why he has sometimes made them the stimulus which "triggers" the tragedy, for he has overwhelmingly placed these women above his heroes. Personally, he admires women, yet he can not give them equality with men. He has been drawn toward them sexually, having had many mistresses, as well as two unfortunage engagements, but he has refused to marry. He has professed a gentleness toward women, according to his essays, but he treated the heroines in his novels very ungently, as well as giving the women in his theater much innocent guilt.

Comments by others about Montherlant reveal two very evident facts: (1) those who do not know him personally believe he speaks through his male characters and thus is within each of the proud, egotistical, solitary men who stride across the stage; (2) those who have known him personally attest to his great personal warmth and friendship and his concern for others.

Thus, there are contradictory opinions about him as a man, and there are contradictory qualities in the women of his theater. In accordance with his desire to portray the inconsistencies of life, there is no consistency in his characterizations. The women of his theater have been generally admirable, but each of these same women is tragic because she has also a quality of destructiveness in her basic make-up. These contradictions, considering Montherlant's philosophy of syncrétisme and alternance, are not surprising.

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