"LENORMAND ET SES FANTOMES"
"LENORMAND ET SES FANTOMES":
A STUDY OF THE PLAYWRIGHT'S WORK,
1914 TO 1942

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SCOPE AND CONTENTS: The purpose of this paper will be to analyse some of the forces that motivate the characters in Henry-René Lenormand's drama between 1914 and 1942 and to discuss their dramatic merit; subsequently an attempt will be made to relate our findings to the author's thought and personality and to account for the relative lack of attention that his work has undergone in recent years.
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INTRODUCTION

An examination of the theatrical work of Henry-René Lenormand needs no further justification than the misunderstandings that have plagued his drama and which have resulted in part in the eclipse of the author's name in recent years. Important aspects of his plays have too often been neglected in the attempt by critics to unearth the influence of Freud and other scientific and philosophic thinkers on his works. Consequently Lenormand's ideas have rarely been studied in their own right even though they constitute a concept of man that is particular to the author himself. Psychological drives, environmental influences and the occult which are salient elements of the author's theatre and which give rise to the "phantoms" that haunt his characters, form a relationship that has not been extensively examined. It is the aim of this dissertation to bring together the diverse aspects of Lenormand's view of man whom he considered the victim of inner and exterior forces, and to attempt to give an appraisal of the dramatic value of the author's efforts to present this notion upon the stage. It is also intended to clarify the misconceptions that have shrouded the author's works, and to give an insight into the personality of Lenormand himself who was very much a part of his dramatic creations.

Excluded from this study are the plays which Lenormand himself disowned except in cases where they help to clarify
the author's ideas in his other works, and also three plays that he included in his Théâtre complet. The first of these, L'Innocente, is the shortest of Lenormand's plays and it bears little upon this study. The other two, Crépuscule du Théâtre and La Folle du Ciel, represent departures from the usual considerations in the author's drama as one pleads the case of the playwright who was dismayed about the decline of the theatre, while the other is the author's only attempt to create a fairy-tale.

The study of such a wide range of Lenormand's drama was dictated by the desire to give an analysis that would encompass a large number of the many facets of the author's thought. Paul Blanchart's Le Théâtre de H.-R. Lenormand, Apocalypse d'une société is the only published criticism that deals extensively with the author's Théâtre complet. Blanchart's work, however, examines Lenormand's drama in the chronological order of their publication in order to study the individual merits of each of the author's plays. The purpose of this dissertation makes such a method of study impractical. In the hope of presenting Lenormand's thought intelligibly and of dealing intensively with the ideas under consideration in each chapter, it has been necessary to disregard the chronology of the author's work except in cases where his ideas have developed with the passage of time. It should also be noted in this respect that there often exist long intervals between Lenormand's creation of a play and its actual publication such that the
The author's Théâtre complet cannot in all cases be viewed as a progression in his thought. Many of Lenormand's plays, moreover, were conceived at times that cannot be determined accurately.

A word should be said about the division of the chapters in this paper. The theatre of Lenormand deals with the pressures that affect human behaviour, which can most satisfactorily be included under the headings of inner forces -- those which have their roots in man's subconscious mind; and of exterior forces -- those which exert their influence upon man from without. The first chapter aims at describing the psychological forces, while the second attempts to show the interaction of these forces and the forces of the environment and of the occult. The comparative lack of excellent critical material on Lenormand's theatre accounts for the confusion that exists toward the relationship of these two realms and which this dissertation has attempted to clarify. In order to concentrate on this aspect of the author's work, a consideration of the influence of Freud and Bergson has not been dealt with in any depth as these approaches have received a disproportionate amount of attention from other critics. The third chapter attempts, in the light of the dramatic aims of the author, to evaluate the artistic quality of his work and to appraise the main criticisms that have been directed against the author in this respect. Finally it is also the intention of this paper to examine the personality of Lenormand himself who reflects
the mentality of a generation faced with the moral malaise of the post First World War period, a generation which, after abandoning the relics of traditional beliefs, becomes the prey of the "phantoms" that the author portrayed in his plays.
CHAPTER I
THE INNER FORCES

From 1900 to 1920 Paris was plagued by a new wave of commercialism in the Boulevard theatres. Directed primarily towards profit, these enterprises preferred plays that offered audience appeal rather than dramatic excellence. The good playwright, therefore, was overlooked in the attempt to find plays with interest for men of bourgeois taste and values. The reopening of these theatres after the First World War, however, was met by ardent opponents. Sensing strongly the decay of the stage, Henry-René Lenormand was among those who most vehemently denounced the Boulevard:

A Paris, où disparaissait lentement le théâtre pour permissionnaires que toute guerre intronisait dans les capitales, le Boulevard renouait la série de ses triomphes. Le replâtrage des salles accompagnait celui des vedettes. Malgré la somptuosité des combinaisons, l'enjouement des communiqués et l'empressement du public, l'art dramatique mourait.¹

Lenormand must, therefore, primarily be viewed as one of the innovators who attempted to make basic changes in the traditional French theatre. The author himself fully realized that in order to accomplish this task, his dramatic creativity implied an act of destruction, for he opposed a concept of

drama that still bore the mark of seventeenth century classicism. This attempt at renewal which touched upon almost every aspect of Lenormand's work, carried with it a contradiction in thought and form with the general current that drama had previously followed in France. "Son oeuvre est d'exception," comments Alphonse Séché; "elle ne se rattache en rien aux grandes traditions, aux lois nationales, pourrait-on dire, de la scène française."\(^2\)

Lenormand's drama was not turned simply against dramatic technique. Rather it expressed a reaction against a concept in the author's culture which historically had permeated French thought and upon which drama was based. This notion was rationalism which, as early as his school days, Lenormand had found an extremely unsatisfactory means of comprehending man. He believed that there were domains which could not be explored or even admitted within a rationalist framework but which were important considerations of human experience. This attitude towards traditional French thought was an integral part of his view of drama which he formulated succinctly in the preface of his autobiography:

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\text{J'ai voulu en finir avec l'homme des périodes classiques, l'archétype de la dramaturgie nationale. Je l'ai livré, ce héros cartésien totalement analysable, aux puissances dissolvantes qui émanent de son inconscient.}^3
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\(^3\) Lenormand, \textit{Confessions}, I, 12.
Lenormand saw in man a realm that existed beyond that which could be analysed and that contained phantoms unknown to the possessor:

Alors que les manuels scolaires et les commentaires de nos maîtres mettaient l'accent sur ce qui, des personnages de notre théâtre, était entièrement défini, sur la somme psychologique analysable qui totalisait les passions, les vertus et les vices de l'homme classique, une revendication confuse surgissait en moi d'autres régions de l'âme.  

Consequently he banished from his stage the lucid hero who was well aware of the problems that beset him and was capable of self reflection. In his place Lenormand presented characters motivated and obsessed by forces that lay beyond their comprehension and which gave rise to catastrophic dénouements. He attempted to recreate a tragedy of fate, similar to that of Greek drama, but in a way that would be more readily acceptable intellectually to a twentieth century audience. Control over man's destiny was thus transferred from the will of the gods to the depths of his unconscious mind:

... nos actions prennent racine dans une région de nous-mêmes qui nous demeure, le plus souvent, inconnue.

It is precisely this unknown region which the author attempts to deal with in his plays. Lenormand's theatre, therefore, is a theatre that claims nothing less than to make a study of human behaviour and the hidden forces that motivate it.

Almost all of Lenormand's principal characters possess

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4 Ibid., p. 77.
5 Ibid., p. 127.
a trait which Daniel-Rops considers a psychological characteristic of the whole period in which the author first began to write. They suffer from a feeling of anxiety whose source lies in their inability to understand themselves. Characters like Nico, Jeannine, and Lui reach pathological states of agitation that result in suicide. Victims of an inner struggle that takes place between the conscious and subconscious levels of their being, they strive to come to grips with a truth about their own nature, which they know exists but which lies buried within the unknown areas of their mind. Lenormand's heroes are possessed by a need to find peace by discovering the secret of their being, and at the same time it is impossible for them to attain any tranquillity. They are at odds with themselves and for this reason they are incoherent and disturbed. L'Homme searches desperately after women but does not know why, and Monique, who suffers the worse degradation to protect her daughter, leaves her in potentially dangerous situations.

This disunity in the make-up of Lenormand's characters stems from the author's manner of consistently visualizing man as an ambivalent creature. Man strives for a stability, a reconciliation of the diverse forces within him, of which he is incapable because of his lack of self understanding. His true motives remain hidden and consequently so does the source of his psychological problems. Unable to tolerate this state
of anguish, the central characters of Lenormand's plays attempt to alleviate their suffering by seeking a clearer understanding of their motives which leads to the creation of temporary illusions or a heightened state of neurosis. Béatrice hides her love from herself by believing that she is possessed, and Nico's uncertainties build up his anxieties until he can no longer tolerate life with them.

These preoccupations with problems of mental imbalance and emotional instability in Lenormand's drama have automatically associated it with the thought of Freud. John Palmer remarks:

You will find nothing in the plays of M. Lenormand which you have not found already in the works of Mier and Freud and their successors.6

Ever since the production of his plays, there has been a general acceptance of this view. Subsequently many critics have devoted their energies to arguing the validity of Lenormand's supposed attempt to give dramatic expression to the findings of psychoanalysis. The author's concepts of subconscious motivation, the ambivalence of human emotions, and the actual presence on stage of a psychiatrist seem to bear this point out. Lenormand was, indeed, impressed with the work done by Freud, and his comments in his earlier days suggest that he found in it the

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inspiration for his dramatic work. In an interview with André Lang, he affirmed:

Le subconscient est un domaine à peu près encore inexploré, que la science est en train d'éclairer. Les dramaturges, à mon avis, pour renouveler la matière dramatique, se doivent de le parcourir.  

This enthusiasm, however, soon diminished when Lenormand saw himself accused of writing pièces à thèse based on Freudian thought, and he went to great pains in disclaiming that this was, in reality, the subject matter of his work.

In his Confessions he repeated a statement that, in one form or other, he had made on numerous occasions before:

Je n'ai que défiance et mépris pour un artiste que je vois se muer en disciple ou en contradicteur d'un homme de science. Telle explication de l'amé peut embraser son esprit. Mais c'est un bien triste démon que celui qui le pousse à la vérifier ou à l'infirmer dans ses ouvrages.  

His claim was that the work which he produced was not the application of theories of psychoanalysis but rather was the expression of his own experiences and problems. Much as Freud drew his conclusions from the cases that he treated, Lenormand based his creations primarily upon his own observations from life. The concept of artistic creation that he outlined in his Confessions should be noted in this respect:

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8 Lenormand, Confessions, I, 270.
Les velléités destructrices de l'artiste, refoulées dans la vie, se réalisent dans le drame ou le poème compensateurs. Il dresse l'image de l'être qu'il n'a pas osé, pas voulu, pas pu devenir. Il exorcise ses démons en les dépeignant.⁹

Lenormand's autobiography does indeed furnish the reader with proof that his plays are closely linked with events and situations that he had actually encountered. This is particularly evident in the case of *Le Mangeur de Rêves*, the play that is most consistently singled out to show the influence of Freud on Lenormand. The author insisted that the play should by no means be interpreted as a defence of Freud's theories and that, in fact, one aspect of the work is an attack on the practices of psychoanalysts:

Les esquisses du Mangeur, telles que mes carnets de notes me les remémorent, sont pourtant d'assez pauvres choses. Mais, pas plus que la version définitive de la pièce, elles ne témoignent d'une servile soumission aux doctrines de Freud. Bien au contraire, ces premières approches de mon sujet sont hérissées de points tournées contre les psychanalystes.¹⁰

The play is, therefore, probably best approached by a look at Lenormand's first personal encounter with the practice of psychiatry. It was through his mistress, Rose Vallerest, that Lenormand came into contact with the clinical application of Freudian theory. Rose was an extremely unstable woman who was being treated in Switzerland. In order to stabilize a personal conflict, her doctors recommended that she abstain

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⁹ Ibid., p. 10.
¹⁰ Ibid., pp. 269-270.
from sexual activity, a restriction that irritated Lenormand. In his autobiography he states that the psychoanalysts were in love with Rose and that this, rather than medical considerations, was what prompted them to impose such measures. When a patient, who was under the care of the same institution, committed suicide, Lenormand seized the opportunity to confirm his unfavourable impression of Rose Vallerest's doctors. He quickly jumped at the chance to accuse them by drawing his own conclusions of the incident:

La victime n'avait pu supporter la mise au jour de ses complexes, cette fouille insensée de l'inconscient.\[11\]

The play was conceived, in large part, as the dramatic recreation of this experience rather than as an attempt to demonstrate the scientific theory of psychoanalysis.

Le Mangeur de Rêves deals with the emotional anxieties of Jeanine and the attempt by a psychiatrist, Luc de Bronte, to find the causes of her unstable behaviour thus freeing her from her mental troubles. The crux of her difficulties centers on an incident of her childhood in Africa, in which, as far as she can remember, her mother was killed during an ambush by pillagers. After Luc's failure to cure her, Jeaninne finally finds out the truth of what had really happened. She and her mother were hidden in a cave when the attack began and she had given away their location to the pillagers resulting in her mother's capture. When this is finally known, Jeaninne cannot

\[11\] Ibid., p. 268.
bear the burden of what she considers a crime and commits suicide.

This play, when analysed carefully, shows the true relationship between Freud's thought and that of the author. Lenormand, himself, only admitted of two influences: (1) He believed, like Freud, that dreams were a method by which the subconscious could hint at what it contained; (2) he thought that the incidents of a person's childhood could have repercussions on his adult life.

These two elements are found in *Le Mangeur de Rêves*. In her dreams, Jeannine sees her mother lying in a coffin and these dreams, as her anxiety, are caused by a forgotten act in her childhood which put her mother in the hands of the pillagers. It is here that the similarity with Freudian theories ends. The psychoanalyst diagnoses her troubles wrongly, thus giving her temporary relief which is followed by even more acute anxiety. His belief that Jeannine is the victim of an Oedipus complex not only proves to be mistaken but actually precipitates her final despair. Her dreams become worse as she sees herself as her mother's murderer in them.

The reason that this happens is found in the third scene. Jeannine is, at first, hesitant to talk to Luc about her anxieties:

Mais il me semble que si je vous les dévoilais, au lieu de les alléger, vous les aggraveriez...
This is precisely what happens. Luc de Bronte's explanations are not only erroneous but his psychoanalytic method is also mistaken. Jeannine was not obsessed by jealousy for her mother but was haunted by the fact that she had actually caused her mother to be captured. Furthermore, when the truth is revealed, it does not bring the deliverance that Luc believed would occur but, in fact, becomes too unbearable for her. The psychiatrist had, in reality, made a "fouille insensée de l'inconscient." Jeannine had told him:

C'est ton instinct de fouilleur de berceaux qui a fait lever en moi ces fantômes.\(^{12}\)

By this emphasis on the Oedipus complex, Jeannine was led to forget the innocence of a child's act and to interpret it as a criminal decision to kill her mother who stood in the way of her desire for her father.

It would, however, be too narrow a view to believe that this criticism of analysis was wholly the result of Lenormand's anger and groundless charges against Rose Vallerest's doctors. The revelation by a character of another's subconscious motives and the ensuing disaster is a situation that is found in a good deal of Lenormand's drama. The character in


\(^{13}\) Ibid., p. 248.
these plays cannot understand himself usually because the phantoms that inhabit his subconscious, when revealed, prove to be monstrous.

In the case of Jeannine, it is Luc de Bronte who convinces her that a child's actions are not free from criminal intention. She would have found it disturbing therefore to learn the true reason for her anxiety before she met Luc and subsequently it has been effaced from her memory. When the psychiatrist injects into her act connotations of incestuous desire and murder, she can no longer bear to live with herself once she discovers it.

There is another aspect of this play that deserves attention because it shows a psychological trait which almost all of Lenormand's "pathological" characters share. Jeannine can be regarded as a victim of an inner fatality, although this may not be as apparent as it is in many of the other plays. Up to the time that Luc proposes the idea of the Oedipus complex, she is scarcely interested in finding out the truth. Only after this does her increased anxiety cause her to decide to go to the place where supposedly her mother was killed, in order to

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14 Ibid., p. 256.

15 To view the truth as destructive in itself would lead to the question that Serge Radine poses about Jeannine's suicide; "Pourquoi en effet, les choses se sont-elles passées ainsi? Car, après tout, une femme comme Jeannine pouvait-elle, devait-elle se sentir à jamais marquée par le crime si peu consciemment voulu autrefois par une toute petite fille?" Serge Radine, Anouilh, Lenormand, Salacrou: trois dramaturges à
learn the source of her troubles. In other words, this occurs at the moment that her act, when discovered, will be shaded by such repulsive motives that she will be destroyed.

In Lenormand's plays it is because the subconscious has nothing to offer but a destructive revelation that the character can come to no understanding of himself. The mind refuses to bring to light truths that will crush him. However, the existence of these unknown truths gives birth to the hero's anxiety which in turn results in an obsession. He is overcome by a desire to find an explanation but at the same time he is prevented from self-knowledge.

This is particularly the case with Lui in the play, Les Ratés. His attempt to find some certainty in the universe has its motivations in his inability to understand himself. The play, like many others by Lenormand takes the form of a search as Lui and Elle go from failure to failure in their careers. However they are sustained by the belief that there exists something that will set everything right. "Il y a un mot," Lui affirms, "une vérité qui nous échappe, qu'il faut trouver."  

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16 Lenormand, Théâtre Complet, II, 249.

17 Ibid., I, 29.
The lack of success with his play, financial difficulties, Elle's prostitution and the increasing impossibility of his life are paralleled by his acceptance of successive "truths": such as that artistic creation is a world of its own which cannot be affected by the pressures of reality, and that true art springs from a vilification of what is most sacred to the artist including his art itself. The most important of these beliefs, in as far as it offers some relief from his anguish, is his faith in the power of love. In the midst of their difficulties there is a momentary suspension of the relentless degradation that they suffer. There is a reprieve in which Lui says:

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Il n'y avait pas de mot, pas de vérité, mais seulement cette façon de nous aimer qui est la nôtre.18
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When his happiness proves to be temporary and Lui's anxiety returns, he resorts to drink. All of his beliefs are, in reality, illusions that he has fabricated to save himself from despair. These illusions served to hide from him precisely the thing that he was looking for; an understanding of himself. Unlike Elle, however, he cannot be satisfied with them because he knows that they are not the truth that he desires so obsessively. Finally, he becomes aware of his basic illusion upon which the others have been built. Towards the end of the

18 Ibid., p. 29.
play he expresses this in an exclamation:

On ne veut pas que la fange où l'on roule soit de la fange ordinaire! On demande qu'elle sente bon! On veut y être heureux! On crie partout qu'on l'est! Et il faut absolument le croire, pour ne pas défaillir d'écoeurément.19

His attempt to find some certainty or meaning that would bring him peace does not exist. It was, in reality, a means of justifying his life in order to avoid the truth about himself, the realization that he is an utter failure. His illusions, however were a necessity for him to be able to carry on through distressing circumstances that his mediocrity as a playwright and that of Elle as an actress, had brought upon them. When he is faced with the truth, there is nothing to stop him from plunging into despair and death.

At the end of Les Ratés, after Lui kills Elle, he remarks:

Votre amour vous tue, ou vous tuez votre amour... On ne peut sortir de là.20

This is followed by his suicide, the result of his desire to understand and to live free from anxiety. This ending, consequently, is brought about by ideals that are consciously directed to far different goals than those that they produced; that is, love and the wish to survive in a crushing atmosphere. Lenormand, as has been mentioned earlier, saw man as a dichotomy which corresponded to his conscious and unconscious activities,

19 Ibid., p. 89.
20 Ibid., p. 137.
and his characters, because of their inability to understand themselves, strive in their anxiety towards ends that are in contradiction to those which they express.

These are the most important considerations that should be dealt with when approaching the character of Nico in Le Temps est un songe. However, the play has too often been regarded as a "philosophic" play in which Lenormand has attempted to explain determinism through Nico's notion of time. It is a basic misconception to think that the author's primary preoccupation in writing Le Temps est un songe was to demonstrate the theories of Einstein or Bergson. Lenormand himself notes in his autobiography:

Un artiste n'a pas à prendre position sur le problème du temps, mais à connaître l'individu pour qui le passé, le présent et l'avenir coexistent, à décider si le refus du mode habituel de penser correspond à un approfondissement ou à une déchéance de l'esprit.  

Nico suffers from a spiritual bankruptcy of which his thoughts on time are a manifestation. Lenormand's real interests lie with his character's psychological motivations that lead him to suicide and the role that his concept of fate plays in them. Nico, like Lui, seeks certainty, something that can be known for sure but his inability to understand himself makes impossible his attempts to find any truth. What he cannot bear is doubt. Thus he has to believe that there exists an immutable reality or else life would appear to him as only an illusion. He wants

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21 Lenormand, Confessions, I, 205.
to live a life that is real and this is the cause of his concern about fate. In his search, however, he can only draw one conclusion:

Nous ne pouvons jamais rien connaître de ce que voient nos yeux, de ce qu'entendent nos oreilles, de ce qui traverse nos cerveaux.22

As in Calderon's La Vida es Sueño, the hero finds life to be nothing more than a dream. It is not, however, totally a philosophic deduction that brings him to his decision to commit suicide. His ignorance of any truth about the universe is, as Serge Radine has concluded, a result of a subconscious element. He allows himself to be defeated from the beginning and his intellectual considerations only give him the means of bringing to the fore his tendencies to self destruction. Nico's doubts and his unanswerable metaphysical questions are not the direct cause of his death. His thoughts have their roots in the nature of his character. It is his extreme sensitivity that prevents him from enjoying any happiness and subsequently leads to his indifference to life which his thinking reflects. He never suspects that his notion of fate may be mistaken and the end is not so much a revelation but rather a heightening of his anxiety until he can no longer bear it. Like almost all of Lenormand's characters, Nico is ambivalent; he is possessed by two contradictory elements. He wishes to lead a truer life and

22Lenormand, Théâtre Complet, I, 214.
at the same time suffers from an emotional instability that results in his inability to cope with reality.

The lack of clarity that is common to these characters that have just been dealt with, reveals the aspect of Lenormand's theatre that the author considered radically different from the classical tradition.23 Whether the play be Corneille's Polyeucte, de Vigny's Chatterton, or Becque's Les Corbeaux, French drama presented the main characters as persons who were fully aware of the forces they confronted. In contrast, despite the many differences that exist among the plays of Lenormand, the element of mystery pervades the whole of his work. He considered this mystery as one of the main contributions that he wanted to make to the stage and he made the remark: "J'ai montré les ravages qu'exerce le poison de l'analyse."24 Because of the conflict within most of Lenormand's characters, the probing of their subconscious drives them to despair. This is not to suggest, however, as critics have charged, that the plays end in an analytic study of the character's troubles which finally disperses the mystery.25 Although analysis plays an important role, the secret motivations of the subconscious


24Lenormand, Confessions, I, ll.

are seldom fully explained but rather are only hinted at. The analyses, though they may focus on the problem, rarely seize it completely. In the case of Jeannine, Luc's psychoanalytic interpretation distorts the truth disastrously. Nico never goes beyond his metaphysical considerations which are only the manifestation of his inner drives. As for Lui, the explanation that he arrives at is simply an expression of his disillusionment that does not point out directly his ambivalence.

Mystery shrouds the plays even in the end, and the audience is left to infer the truth about the characters. This truth, however, may in some cases remain so ambiguous that the conclusions of the analysis are taken as the explanation of the real motivations of the characters. In reality, this is rarely the author's intention. The psychological conflict in Lenormand's plays is expressed more often not in a formulated explanation but rather through actions. The hero's will which suppresses the truth momentarily loses its control and the subconscious reveals an indication of its secrets. It is this aspect of the psychology of Lenormand's characters that has lead Paul Surer to add it as a third influence of Freud upon Lenormand's thought, other than the two which the author himself admitted. Whether he actually did draw this from the theories of psychoanalysis or not, it served to give prominence to the role of mystery in which the unknown is grasped by a type of intuition that is offered by involuntary gestures, words or acts.
Le Simoun, one of the playwright's most successful plays, is the best example of this. Laurency, a merchant in the Algerian Sahara, manifests the anxiety that is typical of Lenormand's characters. He tells Aïescha, his half-breed mistress:

Je suis fatigué, tu comprends... J'ai besoin de paix que tu ne pourrais pas me donner, même si tu étais moins violente... La paix que donne la vie de famille, l'affection paternelle.26

He hopes with the arrival of his daughter, Clotilde, whom he has not seen since she was a child, to put an end to his troubles. Her resemblance to his deceased wife, however, momentarily unsettles him in such a way that the audience is given a glimpse of the birth of an inner struggle:

Le premier regard que lui jette Laurency révèle une épouvante et une stupeur subites. Il recule, pose la main sur les yeux, s'adosse à la table et la contemple sans pouvoir parler.27

His anguish increases as the deep passion that he had felt for his unfaithful wife is rekindled and directed towards his daughter. From this first encounter to the twelfth tableau, the only indications of Laurency's incestuous desires are two incidents. When the l'Agha des Laarba proposes a marriage between his son and Clotilde, Laurency's refusal is accompanied by a disproportionate display of anger. On another occasion he unwittingly calls his daughter by his wife's name. These uncontrolled gestures lead him to an understanding of the true nature

26 Lenormand, Théâtre Complet, II, 12.
27 Ibid., p. 36.
of his feelings for Clotilde which he attempts vainly to contain.

The lucid awareness that he has of his situation which he confesses fully to the Vérificateur, would seem to indicate that Lenormand has dispensed with the usual role of mystery in Le Simoun. Although at first driven by a force that is unknown, the protagonist seems at last to find the causes of his anxiety and for the rest of the play apparently becomes a "cartesian" hero. However, after the death of Clotilde, an unexpected reaction by Laurency reveals that this is not the case:

Laurency contemple toujours le cadavre, mais peu à peu, son expression change. Elle reflète maintenant une espèce de soulagement animal, la détente physique de la bête poursuivie qui se sent hors d'atteinte. Et cela se traduit par trois larges aspirations involontaires, qui soulevent profondément tout son buste. 28

He is, in reality, the prey of an ambivalence that lies deeper than the one between paternal and incestuous love. The emotion that Clotilde arouses in Laurency is the devastating passion by which his wife had all but destroyed him and it inflicts upon him a suffering that is unbearable:

Ah, j'ai cru connaître par elle l'extrême de la misère et du désir inapaisable... Je me trompais cependant... car depuis quinze jours... je souffre encore plus durement. 29

28 Ibid., p. 165.
His anxiety is not primarily the result of a conflict caused by a criminal desire as one finds in Phèdre. The three long breaths indicate rather that it is a conflict of a tormenting love and the desire on the part of Laurency to rid himself of the source of his anguish.

It is worthwhile, at this point, to compare Le Simoun to Le Réveil de l'Instinct, the first version of the play, published twelve years earlier, which Lenormand discounted as part of his juvenile attempts at writing plays. The action of this work takes place between incestuous desire and moral condemnation, entirely on the conscious plane: it is precisely for this reason that the author was dissatisfied with it. Lenormand, himself, came to look upon the play as the depiction of an unreal situation in which the characters spoke out in the name of certain values and principles. What it lacked was the mysterious element, the inability of man to find or to confront the truth about himself. The essential role in his later drama was consequently given to this undefined area, this enigma that the character cannot resolve.

L'Amour magicien, one of Lenormand's mature works, shows the importance of this refusal of analysis in his drama. The play centers on the possession of Béatrice's body by the deceased wife of her employer, Albert. On the first occasions

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30 Lenormand, Confessions, I, 115-116.
that this occurs the voice of the wife, speaking through
Béatrice's mouth, consoles him but afterwards she gives him
reason to suspect her fidelity and admits that the cause of
her death was suicide. The girl inhabited by this spirit,
in the meantime, becomes obsessed with it and comes to the
belief that it wants to kill her. Albert, however, insists
that she continue these séances until eventually he begins to
doubt their authenticity and points out to Béatrice the real
source of her hallucinations:

Là où il cesse de se connaître, le plus pur d'entre
nous devient un monstre... Mais un monstre mené par
l'amour, par une telle fureur d'exister, par une
telle soif de bonheur, qu'il crée des mondes pour
résister à la mort, qu'il nargue les morts eux-mêmes
ou les appelle à la rescousse pour assurer sa joie.
Oui, l'amour en nous, se sert de toutes les armes.
Il peut ressusciter les cadavres par magie et les
renvoyer au tombeau chargés de fautes.31

Her love for Albert made her unconsciously fabricate
a means of consoling him, but when she saw him happy to be in
the presence of his wife again, jealousy caused her to de-
preciate the character of the woman that Albert loved. Unable
to face the true nature of her possession, she dies as if
strangled by the phantom she created.

The little success that this play received was a
disappointment for Lenormand. Later however he realised its
weak point:

31Lenormand, Théâtre Complet, VI, 101.
Je suis venu à penser que les tentatives d'explication rationaliste du cas de "possession", qui interviennent au cours de la pièce, loin de lui donner du poids et de la vraisemblance, lui enlèvent un pouvoir de convaincre.³²

The mystery that the Self presents to the character is one that has also to be maintained with the audience. In Lenormand's more technically accomplished drama, there is no privileged observer who is given an analytic explanation of the basic psychological forces that are at play. These are hidden in a recess of the mind and are alluded to, but they can only be arrived at by one's own insight. Both character and audience perceive the truth through these allusions as a sort of intuition.

There is another dimension to the role of mystery, for not only does it exist in man's relationship to his true Self but also in his relationship to other people. In Le Simoun, when the question is asked why Laurency remains with Aiescha, the Vérificateur answers:

Parce qu'il y a, dans l'âme de cette femme, des régions qui lui seront toujours fermées... Il ne la comprendra jamais tout à fait. Voilà le secret de son attachement.³³

Similarly Albert confesses to his sister the reason that he cannot prevent himself from being interested in Béatrice's hallucinations:

³²Lenormand, Confessions, II, 139.
³³Lenormand, Théâtre Complet, II, 131.
Je ne peux pourtant pas me séparer de Béatrice, avant d'avoir éclairci le mystère qu'elle représente pour moi. 34

The attraction of two people rarely takes the conventional forms of love in the plays of Lenormand. That which attracts one character to another is the mystery which is contained in that person. It is a desire to know, to understand this mystery, that draws together the greater part of the couples in Lenormand's works.

The bond between Jeannine and the psychiatrist in Le Mangeur de Rêves presents the reader with one of the many illustrations of this theme. Luc de Bronte believes himself to be a man of science devoted solely to liberating his patients from the phantoms of their subconscious:

Luc: Je ressemble au Bakou, ce démon japonais dont la fonction spéciale est de dévorer les mauvais songes.

Jeannine: De dévorer les mauvais songes?

Luc: Oui. Et en les dévorant, d'en délivrer le dormeur. Il change la terreur en joie. C'est un démon bienfaisant. 35

Both his love for Jeannine and his psychiatric treatment of her, however, are directed to one end, which has nothing to do with either affection or the curing of her anxieties. When she sees that his treatment of her has failed, Jeannine gives an insight into Luc's true motivations:

34 Ibid., VI, 80.

Jeannine: J'ai réfléchi depuis un mois. Je t'ai regardé... J'ai vu l'affreuse passion de connaître, la curiosité, froide et brillante comme un couteau bien aiguisé.

Luc, tremblant. Ne dis pas que je ne t'ai pas aimée.

Jeannine: Tu aimes l'énigme irritante qui se cache dans le dernier repli des consciences.  

She also realises that when Luc understands her completely, when he is in possession of all of her secrets, his love for her will disappear. When Luc finds out about the circumstances of her death, his sorrow gives way to joy under the mistaken impression that his analysis was correct; "Enfin, je tiens son secret!"  

He had no real desire to cure her by drawing up the truth about herself. He was driven by a passion to learn for himself these truths and this was the reason that he was attracted to her. He could not rest content until he clarified the mystery that confronted him in his patients.

If this role of mystery is kept in mind in the consideration of L'Homme et ses fantômes, then much of the confusion surrounding the play can be dispelled. The play is a modern recreation of the Don Juan theme in which the phantoms of L'Homme's former mistresses take the place of the commander's ghost. It is this final scene that has misled critics, most notably Serge Radine, to conclude that the psychological  

36 Ibid., p. 251.
37 Ibid., p. 293.
"phantom" involved is homosexuality.38 One of the mistresses explains the reason that he was angry with L'Ami who had made love to her: "Tu étais jaloux! Pas de lui, non, mais de moi!"39

This conclusion about the play, however, only serves to impoverish it by denying the complexities that it contains. Lenormand, himself, made no mention of a homosexual element in his characterization of L'Homme. Indeed, the subject is broader than a study of a particular form of sexual behaviour.

When L'Homme speaks to L'Ami of his affair with Laure, the reader begins to understand the motivations of his sexual desires:

Au plus profond de la volupté, quelque chose, en elle, se refuse, me repousse, regarde ailleurs.40

It is this that attracts him to her. However, he does not remain attached to her and soon ends their relationship, going off in search of other women. He is not blind to the fact that he is prey to some force and on one occasion he questions himself on the reasons that he is so obsessed with women. He realises that it is something other than love or pleasure or even cruelty:

Qu'est-ce qui me pousse d'une effigie à l'autre, comme un collectionneur de timbres?... Soudain, j'eus l'impression que ces corps, si abandonnés en apparence, que ces coeurs, qui semblent tout ouverts au souffle de la passion, étaient autant de cassettes, sournoisement fermées sur un secret, un secret qui me concernait

38 Radine, Anouilh, Lenormand, Salacrou, p. 90.
39 Ibid., IV, 120.
40 Ibid., p. 24.
seul, mais que les femmes, obstinément, m'avaient caché. Et je compris que ce que j'avais demandé sans le savoir à chacune d'elles, c'était ce secret-là! Mon secret, à moi, pas le leur.41

The physical possession of these women is an attempt to attain another type of possession. L'Homme, like Luc, strives to understand women but what he wants to learn from them is the key to the mystery of his own being. The attraction of the mysterious in others thus comes back to the character's inability to understand himself, as do the attempts by Lui and Nico to understand the mystery of the universe and of fate.

For this reason love is foreign to L'Homme. In his obsession to come to grips with himself through women, he is trying desperately to put an end to his anxiety:

Pas une vierge, pas une matronne, pas une prude, pas une fille ne m'a dit le mot qui rendrait mon ciel clair et mes jours paisibles.42

Therefore when he becomes unable to pursue his sexual activity, he turns to mysticism in order to clarify the mystery that he is for himself. This secret is not his supposed homosexuality. The naming of his main character as quite simply L'Homme suggests that Lenormand is presenting here a predicament that is common to all men as also does the ending of the play:

L'Homme, s'agitant. Je veux savoir...

Le Fantôme de la Mère:-- Ne te tourmente pas...

41 Ibid., pp. 44-45.
42 Ibid., p. 45.
This play does not limit itself to a study of the Don Juan figure but rather presents a dilemma of man; his impossible desire to know the Self. Like L'Homme, man tries to shed some light upon the mystery he is for himself but can come to no understanding of his true motivations. L'Homme et ses fantômes, viewed in this way, reveals itself to be a demonstration of the concept of human existence that placed the author at odds with the clarity of the analytic, "cartesian" theatre.

While writing about L'Homme et ses fantômes, Lenormand stated that it contained a theme that is prevalent in many of his works and which he classified as; "la rêverie toujours interrompue, toujours reprise, dans laquelle l'homme s'efforce de se connaître et de se juger." This quest for self knowledge not only fails but ends in disaster as death offers the final escape from a truth that is consciously searched and unconsciously avoided. There are few playwrights in whose works are found so many cases of suicide as in those of Lenormand. It is because self-destruction is such an integral part of the psychology of his characters that Mixture is an enigma in the author's drama.

43 Ibid., p. 122.
44 Lenormand, Confessions, I, 69.
In one sense the play is a typical example of Lenormand's theatre in that it contains almost all of the essential elements of his other plays. The title itself suggests the similarity with a theme that is found in most of Lenormand's dramatic work. Monique, the principal character in the play, is one of the author's best illustrations of the concept of emotional ambivalence which Lenormand explains through Fcear:  

By Jove, dans ma jeunesse, une voleuse était une voleuse et un clergymen, un clergymen. A présent, l'un a des morceaux de l'autre. Il y a de la peau d'évêque autour des tripes des meurtriers et des pensées de puritains dans les cervelles des faux-monnayeurs. Dites-moi ce qui n'est pas mélangé dans le coeur de l'homme?  

The play presents the story of a mother's attempts to provide for her daughter at any personal cost that it may involve. Monique undertakes crime, prostitution, and murder so that Poucette will not have to suffer any of the deprivations that otherwise would result from their situation:  

Je vous jure que si je n'avais pas ma fille à élever, je copierais des adresses, je serais ouvrière, j'accepterais n'importe quel travail qui m'empêcherait de mourir de faim. Mais je veux gagner assez d'argent pour que ma petite soit ce que j'étais à dix-huit ans. Je ne veux pas qu'elle connaisse la misère, le linge sale et les taudis.  

Certain incidents occur, however, which seem, at first, to be unwise negligences on the part of Monique but which are,  

46 Ibid., p. 69.
in reality, the result of subconscious motivation. She allows her daughter to come into contact with the thief, Fearon, who would like to see Poucette take up the profession. Two similar situations arise in which Monique seems to lack foresight in leaving her daughter in the company, first, of a young girl who tempts Poucette with salacious stories and, secondly, of a "fence" who tries to seduce her. As in Le Simoun, these unconscious acts prove to be dictated by a desire that is hidden from the mother. In the final act of the play, when she tries to marry Poucette to a much older man, the exact nature of this desire becomes known. The maternal love that Monique has for her daughter is mingled with an unconscious attempt at vengeance. She wanted to make Poucette suffer the same humiliations and engage in the same crimes that had been imposed upon her.

When this is made known by Monique's daughter, the revelation of secret desires loses its uniquely destructive role. Although, at first, Monique is in physical pain and the usual dénouement is expected, she eventually is able to adapt herself to this self knowledge unlike the characters of Lenormand's other plays. This acceptance of the truth occurs again when a more basic aspect of her nature comes to light. Monique realises that she was never completely repulsed by her life of crime. She possessed "un mystérieux besoin du vice, du danger, de la peur et peut-être du crime."\(^{47}\) Subsequently

\(^{47}\)Ibid., p. 179.
her love for her daughter not only incorporated a wish to venge herself on Poucette but also served as a pretext to engage in activities that both horrified her and corresponded to her true Self.

It is difficult to account for the exception that *Mixture* is in the work of Lenormand. The author himself for reasons that he failed to elaborate, stated that the production of the play was for him, "un plaisir équivoque." 48 Serge Radine has claimed that the ending of *Mixture* escaped from the author's will and thus contradicted his tendency to pessimism. Although it is impossible to say for sure the exact reasons that caused him to write the play, it is conceivable that Lenormand was attempting to reply to critics' attacks on his works, that were based on this same charge of pessimism.

In any case, the ending was not the aspect of the play that the author seems to have considered the most important in his autobiography. He was more concerned with the character who was prey to contradictory desires and with the reaction of a bourgeois mentality to this depiction of maternal love. 49 Indeed, *Mixture* scandalised the audience as did a large number of Lenormand's plays, several of which were banned in Europe. Because of the author's concept of man and the themes that issue from it in his drama, as incest in *Le Simoun* and moral

degeneracy in *La Maison des Remparts*, censors, especially in England, charged his plays with immoralism. Lenormand never hid his distaste for moral convention and in his plays, it acts as a regressive force in man's attempt to be happy.

It is particularly in his plays dealing with the artist that his hostility to social values becomes most acute. In three of his mature plays, *Une Vie secrète*, *Les Trois Chambres*, and *Le Lâche*, Lenormand deals with the psychology of those devoted to artistic creation. The concepts of ambivalence, mystery and possession are found again in these works applied this time to the artist who, for Lenormand, was a man of a different breed. The man who creates great art has to be an outsider for he has to respond to the forces of his creativity which know nothing of the demands of conventional morality and which could actually be stifled by them.

Although the world of art is given primacy over all other considerations, the plays in which the artist is represented give a greater understanding of the psychology that Lenormand employs in most of his drama. It is worthwhile in this respect to begin by looking at aspects of the theme of artistic creation as they are found in an earlier play by Lenormand, *Les Possédés*, another of his pre-war drama that the author disowned. Marcel, a musician, is possessed by a genuine, creative instinct but is, at first, unwilling to subjugate other values to it. Generosity towards a parasitic cousin and devotion to his wife eventually lead him to financial
distress and his work suffers for it. Marcel's father, a brilliant scientist, advises him to blackmail a rich uncle but he will not further his art at the expense of his honour. The father replies with a central idea in Lenormand's concept of the artist:

Crois-moi, le seul déshonneur qui puisse exister pour nous autres, c'est de faillir à notre devoir d'artiste ou de savant!50

Artistic creativity is amoral; it can contradict the demands of society but it is the artist's duty so that he may bear the fruit of his genius and express new truths, to free himself from these moral imperatives. Marcel finally learns this lesson. He blackmails the uncle, separates from his wife and causes the death of Jean, his cousin. He has come to the realisation of what must be done to serve his exceptional talents:

Je ne me connaissais pas. Ah, je le sais trop maintenant, je ne suis plus un homme comme les autres; au-dessus des passions, des instincts et des sentiments humains, je porte en moi cet effrayant instinct de créer qui commande à tout le reste, qui le méconnait, qui l'écrase.51

Artistic creation is an inner drive similar to Laurency's incestuous love or L'Homme's desire to know. In order for it to survive, all else has to become a function of it. The cruelty and destruction that the artist may cause, cannot be


51 Ibid., p. 109.
a reproach against him, for he is in a sense a revolutionary who has to dismember old systems in order to create new ones:

Mais on ne peut pas créer sans détruire d'abord!  
La vérité, ça ne pousse que sur les ruines.  

This destructive-creative ambivalence is presented in a more detailed manner in the later work, Une Vie secrète. Sarterre, like Marcel, is also a musician, but he is an artist who has given himself over completely to his creative instincts. His music, however, upsets his wife, Thérèse, because it seems to lack any human quality. For the artist, on the other hand, this is the source of his genius:

Je suis une force aussi aveugle, aussi méchante, aussi involontaire que les nuages.  

He claims for himself the innocence of a panther; his actions are uncondemnable for, as an artist, his creativity lies beyond commonly accepted notions of good and evil.

One of Lenormand's avowed aims in writing Une Vie secrète was to show "l'identité du désir sexuel et de l'instinct de la création artistique." Sarterre finds his inspiration in the physical possession of women:

Ce n'est pas dans la froideur du rêve ou du recueillement, que les idées me viennent: c'est pendant les heures amères de l'attente ou de la poursuite. Oui, quand la nuit, je bats les trottoirs, aux places que fréquentent les filles,

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52 _Ibid._, p. 25.
53 _Lenormand, Théâtre Complet_, III, 201.
54 _Lenormand, Confessions_, I, 289.
passant et repassant dans les ruelles chaudes,
c'est alors que l'idée tombe sur moi! Elle se
mêle à mon désir... Elle devient, elle est mon désir. 55

This desire demands that everyone serve its purpose.
Sarterre becomes exasperated when Thérèse rebels against her
husband's ideas and Vera is led by him back to a life of vice
so that he can satisfy his wants for the creation of his art.
Sarterre is unmoved by the destruction he causes: "On ne peut
pas créer sans détruire. C'est avec la mort qu'on fait de la
vie." 56

He has substituted his conscience with an âme d'artiste
and it is this that has brought about his amorality. However,
Thérèse is able to awaken in him feelings of guilt that he
thought he had successfully stifled. He subsequently abandons
his debauchery and in doing so, loses his ability to create.
He had written his music under the sway of a hidden force; his
inspiration was rooted in mystery, in the lack of understanding
that existed toward his own life but which ended when his wife
examined and condemned his actions:

Mon art ne dépendait peut-être de ma vie, mais du
secret de ma vie. Et ce secret tu me l'as arraché
nous l'avons disséqué ensemble. Nous l'avons
assassiné de paroles, d'explications et d'aveux. 57

55 Lenormand, Théâtre Complet, III, 237.
56 Ibid., p. 214.
57 Ibid., pp. 271-272. This echos a conviction expressed
by Lenormand in his Confessions: "Comprendre, analyser, c'est,
pour l'artiste détruire et se détruire." I, 159.
In order to create his music, he needed to respond to the true nature of man freed from the artificial rules of behaviour that prevented the expression of his instincts. Once Sarterre's motivation has been not only understood by himself but also judged by his reborn conscience, then his genius is destroyed. The play ends with the suicide of Vera whose moral degeneration was unleashed by Sarterre. This destruction returns the artist to his creative instincts.

The role of analysis in *Une Vie secrète*, as in the other plays, is again superseded by the role of mystery. Mystery, the food of artistic creation, brings into being a desire to grasp it but art, itself, issues not from the clarification of this unknown but rather from the pursuit towards it; from the desire to possess it, not its actual possession. This takes the form of a drive for sexual possession in *Une Vie secrète*, as it does in *L'Homme et ses fantômes* in which the pursuit of secrets is applied to man in general. The artist, therefore, is not very different from the other characters of Lenormand's plays. He simply has the ability to express this search in art, his desire becoming his inspiration.

This point is seen more clearly in *Les Trois Chambres* in which the author gives a more complete illustration of desire in his concept of the artist. The plot of this play bears a striking resemblance to Lenormand's autobiographical account of his affair with Rose Vallerest. The character who corresponds to Rose is actually given her name; Florence is
undoubtedly Marie Kalff Lenormand; and Pierre, a playwright, is a Don Juan figure much in Lenormand's own style. The story itself is uncomplicated. It simply relates Pierre's love for Rose and the suicide of Florence who allowed her husband to have affairs with other women as long as he reserved his true affection for herself. After this Pierre and Rose marry and the play ends in a scene that is, in essence, a repetition of the first as Pierre becomes interested in another woman.

The most important aspect of this drama is the nature of the artist's attachment to Rose. Pierre's desire for her and his attempts to seduce her are prompted by a mysterious air about her: "Tu portes l'angoisse de l'insaisissable, tu le sais et tu en joues."58 The more that Rose escapes him, the more his passion grows. She fully realises, however, that his deep affection for her is a search for a secret that will give him rest.59

This secret that the artist looks for in women results in Pierre's "manie de la vérité."60 His art, nevertheless, is inspired not by any knowledge that is acquired through this quest for truth but rather by his attempts to penetrate the mystery that Rose poses before him:

58 Ibid., VIII, 63.
59 Ibid., p. 70.
60 Ibid., p. 72.
Tu ne t'aperçois pas qu'elle revient dans toutes mes pièces? Chacune de mes femmes porte un de ses visages, car elle est inépuisable et toujours nouvelle, comme l'eau d'une source.61

Because Pierre cannot possess her secret, because he cannot know her definitively, Rose remains an inexhaustible source for his inspiration. This accounts for his surprising reaction to his wife's death which explains to a further extent the nature of his thirst for knowledge: "Elle a emporté je ne sais quoi de moi-même, le plus important, ce qui fait la personne."62 Florence is now outside of his grasp and it is at this inappropriate moment that Pierre desires Rose most. His search for Rose's secret is a desire for self knowledge, but the ultimate discovery of this truth is never accomplished. When Pierre marries Rose and possess her completely, he turns to another woman to whom he relates the predicament not only of himself but of almost all of Lenormand's characters:

Oui, voilà mon mal et ma faute: je me suis donné à toutes les îles, à toutes les montagnes, à toutes les créatures. J'ai désiré jusqu'au delà des étoiles.63

The parallel between the artist and the personage of the other plays becomes more clearly defined in Les Trois Chambres. Pierre's love for Rose, as almost all cases of love in Lenormand's theatre, is a rationalization on the conscious

61 Ibid., p. 78.
62 Ibid., p. 93.
63 Ibid., p. 106.
level of the deeper but unattainable desire to arrive, through another, at the mystery of his own nature.

If the theme of mystery and desire and its relationship to artistic creativity is treated extensively in this play, the role of conscience that is important in Une Vie secrète is all but neglected. Sartrerre regarded conscience as the cholera of modern man but not out of a love of immoralism as his wife had suspected. Thérèse's distinctions between good and evil were foreign to him and he acted according to his instincts which alone had value for him. Thus by responding to what was man's true nature, his music was, in reality, extremely human:

Fanères et toi, vous accusiez mon oeuvre de manquer d'humanité? Elle n'était que le plus humain des cris, le cri de l'ivresse terrestre! ... Tu me reprochais de vivre dans la débauche? Je sais maintenant qu'une tendresse immense féconda chacune de mes étreintes... Pour vous deux, j'étais un monstre, ivre de bassesse et de féroce? Je sais, moi, que je crevais d'amour pour la vie!

The life he lived was one that was freed from the shackles of imposed sentiments and conduct; that is freed from conscience, for man's real Self is amoral. The author's explanation of this view is nowhere more explicit than in his earlier work, Le Réveil de l'Instinct:

Willem:— Va, si c'est dans les permissions et les défenses édictées par tes semblables que...
tu cherches une loi absolue, tu ne trouveras qu'incertitude et contradiction!

Berend: -- Alors, où la chercher, cette loi?

Willem: -- En toi-même, en toi seul! N'interroge pas ta conscience, impersonnelle et vacillante, mais interroge ton instinct, et sans hésiter, il te dira sa loi, la seule loi que tu doives suivre!66

In Le Lâche Lenormand again focuses on the question of conscience and the artist. The play begins in 1915 as Jacques arrives in Switzerland in his flight from the bloodshed of the First World War. His world is one of life and thus opposed to the senseless massacre that is taking place in Europe. He has, however, to face the condemnation that is exerted both by society and especially by his conscience that has internalised its values. Under these pressures Jacques comes to doubt his true motivations; he no longer knows whether his beliefs are sincere or whether he is, in fact, simply a coward. This conflict brings the artist to the realization that he cannot hold out alone against the disapproval of others:

Il a vu juste, l'interné de cette nuit. "L'homme n'est pas assez fort pour avoir raison." J'ai agi raisonnablement; je suis resté à l'écart de la folie commune... et cette folie se venge. La sagesse était de se laisser couler vers le monstrueux et l'injustifiable... Quand on résiste, on tombe dans quelque chose de pire.67

Jacques' guilt is subsequently exploited by the French secret service; he begins to work as a spy, and this results in his death.

67Lenormand, Théâtre Complet, V, 145.
The example of Sarterre proves that Jacques' inability to break away from the dictates of his conscience is not considered by Lenormand as universal. Yet Sarterre is the only character in any of Lenormand's works who does it successfully and Une Vie secrète ends in a more optimistic manner than in most of his other plays. Even though, in Mixture, Monique takes an opposite course of action and uses her will to suppress her nature, she appears more resigned than content. Both the artist and the other characters can only find happiness in the following of their instincts if they are able to rid themselves of the guilt in their conscience. It is for this reason that Fearon, the thief, who appears in three of Lenormand's plays, seems the most psychologically balanced character in all of the author's drama. She has been able to accord her activities with her true nature and has such a hatred for Western culture that it cannot impose its edicts upon her. This whole concept has a striking resemblance to Gide's Les Nourritures Terrestres in which Nathanael is advised to respond to his desires: "Il y a profit aux désirs, et au

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68 Le Mangeur de Rêves, Mixture and Terre de Satan give a graphic picture of the character of Fearon which was patterned after one of Lenormand's acquaintances. In Le Mangeur de Rêves, she is presented as one of Luc's former patients who, by becoming a thief, has learnt to harmonize her actions with her character. Mixture shows her as a character who lacks the anxiety and ambivalence of Monique; and with Terre de Satan she aligns herself with an African rebellion against the repressiveness of her native culture.
rassasiement des désirs." Moreover, the means of doing this is by ignoring socially conceived notions of morality: "Agir sans juger si l'action est bonne ou mauvaise."70

Fearon is exceptional. The majority of Lenormand's characters lack her ability to divorce themselves from the value judgements of others; they live an ambivalent life in which the demands of their instincts and those of acceptable behaviour come into conflict. They are driven by an inner fatality as they search for a hidden truth that they cannot face and at moments of crisis, when it is ready to reveal itself, they are destroyed. This tragic ending, however, does not at first appear to be just the work of subconscious impulses. Lenormand creates an atmosphere in his plays that suggests the presence of other forces standing outside the psychological conflicts and acting upon the character in order to bring about his destruction.

70 Ibid., p. 156.
CHAPTER II
EXTERIOR FORCES

The theatre of Lenormand contains a certain ambiguity that often produces confusion in attempts to understand his work. Although his drama can be studied and comprehended on the basis of the inner struggle of the characters, interpretations also appear to be valid on other levels, such that two or possibly three different explanations may be given for the outcome of the same play. This aspect of the author's theatre is a result of the presentation on stage of exterior forces that weigh upon the characters and seem to direct their thoughts and actions. The impression is given, especially in plays like Le Simoun and Le Temps est un songe, that, despite his subconscious instincts, the hero is being motivated primarily by a determinism that acts upon him from without.

The most prevalent of these forces in Lenormand's works is the atmosphere in which he places his characters. Only in a very few plays has the author neglected to present a well defined environment in which the hero becomes "le jouet des forces naturelles."¹ This has led Daniel-Rops to speak of "animism" in Lenormand's drama, claiming that geographic and

¹Lenormand, Confessions, I, 12.
climatic factors take on the force of "personnages abstraits."\(^2\)
The author's reply only clouds the issue by contradicting his earlier assertion that he has made his characters, "the plaything of natural forces":

La critique a tellement insisté sur le rôle joué par les éléments dans mes drames, que j'ai quelque peine à retrouver l'innocence poétique du temps où je les composais. J'éprouve, en cherchant à définir l'action des forces naturelles sur mes personnages, une gêne étouffante.\(^3\)

Lenormand admitted that he could no longer account for the role that these elements played in his theatre. An author, Gide remarks, places much in his work of which he is unaware; this certainly is the case with Lenormand\(^4\) and the exact nature of the influence of environment can only be assessed through a careful study of his dramatic work.

*Les Ratés*, one of the first of his mature plays, presents the atmosphere of natural forces as a parallel apparently unlinked to the action of the play. Each tableau gives a picture of squalor and darkness that becomes increasingly sombre and overpowering. There is, however, no expressed relationship between the oppressive atmosphere and Lui's desperate attempt to maintain his illusions which eventually fails. To suggest that, despite the fact that the


\(^3\)Lenormand, *Confessions*, I, 159.

\(^4\)Gide, *Romans, Récits et Soties*, p. 89.
influence of the environment on the hero is questionable, pressure is in fact exerted on Lui from without, would raise a difficult problem. Why is Lui affected by the sordid conditions in which he has to live while Elle retains her convictions to the end? The question is not answered by looking upon atmosphere as a determining factor, and yet in the total drama of Lenormand, it would be difficult to consider atmosphere as simply a poetic device.

The influence of environment becomes slightly more pronounced in *Le Mangeur de Rêves* but still remains in the background. Jeannine's mental state and its changes correspond to certain geographic and climatic phenomena. Her moral stagnation in the first scenes of the play is, on one occasion, attributed to the presence of the mountains that overlook the hotel:

Nous subissons l'influence de ce lieu encaissé, de ces forêts qui tombent dans la vallée, de toutes ces lignes descendantes. Ici, notre âme roule au bas de sa pente... et elle finit par s'y trouver bien. Elle n'essaye plus de remonter. ⁵

Similarly Jeannine's trip to Africa is accompanied by environmental features that are related to the action of the play. She approaches the truth that will destroy her in a land that has been desolated by the hot Algerian sun. The actual effect that the atmosphere exerts on Jeannine, however, remains dubious.

and its possible influence on only one of the characters presents the same problem that is found in _Les Ratés._

In _Le Temps est un songe,_ the issue is posed in a more clear-cut manner and a close examination of the play offers an indication of the relationship of climatic forces to the psychological motivations of Lenormand's characters. The mists and stagnant ponds of Holland are not just symbols of Nico's search for certitude and his moral malaise but rather are active forces that work upon him:

> Je ne suis pas bien... Je suis certainement moins bien qu'à mon arrivée... C'est inexact ce que je disais tout à l'heure au sujet de l'eau... Ce n'est pas par l'immobilité qu'on se met à lui ressembler... C'est par la croissance d'innombrables végétations. Tu sais ce que je veux dire? Ce pullulement de mousses, de lichens, qui finit par la couvrir d'un bout à l'autre des canaux. Eh bien, je me sens positivement rongé, envahi, étouffé par une lèpre de pensées, de tourments, de doutes.  

These ponds that are, in some way, the cause of his anxiety begin to attract Nico. He thinks that they are the possessors of the secret that he is searching for:

> À présent, je me demande si la vérité n'est pas au fond de l'eau... tout au fond... sous la vase.  

Thus when his doubts lead him to an unbearable state of anxiety he drowns himself in one of the marshes.

The influence of the environment is undeniable in this play. Nico had contemplated the same problems that beset him

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6 Ibid., I, 194-195.

7 Ibid., pp. 215-216.
in Holland, but was able to survive peacefully with them in Java. In the sombre atmosphere created by the fog and the slime covered waters these questions become the source of tensions and mental imbalance that cause his suicide. Despite this, the conclusion that the climatic factors are the forces that determine Nico's actions, is an unsatisfactory explanation. His tragedy is not directly the result of his doubts which have been provoked, in turn, by the mists and ponds, but rather his death is a result of his sense of fatality that is part of his character. The environment of Holland thus served to give vent to his deeply rooted instinct rather than actually give birth to it.

The existence of interior and exterior forces in the plays of Lenormand may lead to the misconception that they are an incorporation of two distinct interpretations. This suggests that the author introduces two possible explanations of fate, of which the audience is free to choose either one. Such a division which has been applied especially in respect to Le Simoun⁸ is both unwarranted and mistaken. Laurency would be considered the victim either of a psychological machinery, that is, his overpowering incestuous desires, or of a moral corrosion caused by the ravaging hot desert wind. Both forces are given equal importance and the choice of one

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involves the exclusion of the other. The conclusion of this approach is the suggestion that Lenormand has purposely attempted to make his play ambiguous.

In reality there is no such dichotomy between exterior and psychological forces in Le Simoun. Both of them work inter-dependently upon Laurency to produce the tragic final scene. The passion that he feels for his daughter is not itself the result of his environment but rather has its roots in the love he had for his wife:

Ce n'est pas l'Afrique qui m'a démoli, c'est cette femme... Quand j'ai appris sa mort... j'ai senti que quelque chose devenait malade dans ma poitrine... tombait, se détruisait... Oui, il y a des passions pires que la lèpre.\(^9\)

He attempts to restrain his incestuous desire but when the simoon begins to storm, he gradually loses control over it and takes his daughter into his arms. Similarly, it is precisely when the winds calm down that the expression on his face and the long breaths betray his unconscious wish. He was not driven primarily by the climate but by his desires; and the fierce winds served to destroy his will, releasing his instincts.

The presentation on stage of the pressures of environment and subconscious desires is, therefore, not merely a juxtaposition of two forces in the theatre of Lenormand. Consequently Edmond Sée's classification of Le Simoun as a "tragédie

\(^9\)Lenormand, Théâtre Complet, II, 137.
climatérique" can be misleading as climate is secondary and dependent upon the impulses of Laurency's psychological desires.

Lenormand's integration of man into nature is one of the most persistent aspects of his dramatic work and it is a theme that had developed from the effect of climate upon an individual as in Le Temps est un songe to its effect on a social group. La Maison des Remparts is significant in this respect. One of the author's last plays, it marks a radical break with his drama that preceded it. The play tells the story of a middle class family in a swamp covered, desolate Norman setting that offers a picture of a dilapidated country house and a dingy bordello. The drama is a depiction of the boredom of provincial life and the moral degeneracy of the Malfilâtre.

The play differs from Le Simoun in that instead of presenting an environmental force that enters onto the stage and destroys the character's defences, Lenormand shows a family whose will has already been worn down by the environment and which, from the outset, has abandoned itself to its instincts. The central character, André, however, suddenly attempts to escape from this dismal atmosphere. He arranges to steal from his father and to leave with Julie, a prostitute, whom he loves. The father, who is also in love with Julie, prevents this by murdering her. The play ends with André speaking to another prostitute, Lolita, a mystic through whom he hopes to attain
some salvation from the climatic pressures and social conditions in which he will have to continue to live.

The judge in the play reveals that it is not the environment that has shaped the Malfilâtre but rather that their instincts are those of mankind. His interest in marionettes is a rejection of humanity which his experiences as a soldier and as a judge have taught him to abhor. It is for this reason that he collects twisted roots:

Mme. Lerouesnier:— Vous collectionnez vraiment ces racines à formes humaines?... Mais pourquoi?

Le Juge: Vous l'avez dit. Parce qu'elles évoquent la forme humaine dans ce qu'elle a de plus tourmenté. Ce sont, pour moi, des images d'une humanité torturée par le désir, ou la souffrance, ou l'espoir. Des images ressemblantes, parce qu'elles sont hideuses, presque effrayantes.10

The vices of André and his father are not caused by the climatic and social situation in which they are forced to live. Rather these instincts are part of their human nature and have come to the fore under the pressure of exterior forces. Thus André's love for Julie and his subsequent interest in the mysticism of Lolita are his attempts to develop a will in the face of an eroding environment.

Although La Maison des Remparts contains the heaviest

10 Ibid., X, 55-56.
atmosphere that is found in any of Lenormand's plays, with the possible exception of Les Ratés, and for this reason deserves attention, the author's preoccupation with the new theme of moral regeneration makes it a less typical example of his theatre. Even at the end of the play André persists in his attempts to overcome his instincts instead of being overwhelmed by them, a situation which is the essence of Lenormand's tragedies. An earlier play, La Dent rouge, on the other hand, is more representative of the relationship that exists between climate and the psychology of a social group in the author's drama.

The play transposes upon the stage Lenormand's own emotions when he first visited the Alps:

J'ai sous la menace des chutes de pierre et à l'écoute des bruits que font les entrailles des monstres alpestes, rêvé de transposer en conflits humains l'horreur qui me venait de personnes de trois mille mètres et de cent millions de tonnes.\textsuperscript{11}

In no other play has the author so personified the environment as he has in this play with the Dent Rouge, an unconquered mountain that towers over a small Swiss village. In a closely knit society surviving in a fierce climate and separated from civilization, the villagers are steeped in superstition and strong feelings of xenophobia. The central character, Pierre, is a chamois hunter whose montagnard instincts have instilled in him, as in his brother, Amé, an overpowering determination to

\textsuperscript{11}Lenormand, Les Confessions, I, 89.
scale the mountain:

Je ne sais qu'une chose: y faut aller en haut. Voilà... Je peux pas t'expliquer ça moi. Je sais pas causer. Mais je suis sûr qu'il faut y aller... Et Pierre aussi, en est sûr. La nuit, quand je vois les cimes qui me regardent par la fenêtre, eh bien, il me semblent qu'elles me font des signes... Vère, je les entends qui m'appellent. Et faut que je leur obéisse... Faut que j'y aille... Je peux pas faire autrement!

Pierre, however, is diverted from his desire to climb the Dent Rouge by his love for Claire, the daughter of a villager who had returned after making his fortune in the Americas. Becoming his wife, she attempts to better Pierre by teaching him to read and makes him promise to abandon his plans to scale the mountain. Claire in turn hopes to become part of the community, but the long sunless winter and the primitiveness of the life she has to lead makes her realise the impossibility of changing her instincts: "Personne ne change et on ne change personne, voilà la vérité." Pierre also has not been able to surmount his desire to conquer the Dent Rouge. His frustration causes him to reject the learning that Claire has given him and which has only brought him unhappiness. He subsequently falls back upon the superstitions of his village and beats Claire whom he believes is possessed. Free now to fulfil his wish, he climbs the mountain but during the descent he falls to his death. Talking to the village priest Claire

12 Lenormand, Théâtre Complet, III, 22.
13 Ibid., p. 116.
assumes the guilt for this accident:

Qui a nourri son âme d'inquiétude et son corps de plaisir? Qui a rendu son esprit agité? Ses membres parressieux? Qui a détruit son instinct de montagnard? Et qui l'a renvoyé à la Dent rouge, doutant, diminué? Sans moi, monsieur le curé, Pierre n'aurait pas glissé.14

Unlike La Maison des Remparts, this play shows unhappiness to be the refusal of the demands of instincts. Pierre and Claire attempt to become other than what they are, but the social and climatic environment thwarts their will to do this. Subsequently the tragedy of La Dent rouge is created by the damage that has been done by this divergence from Pierre's true nature.

La Dent rouge with its social environment may seem to present the psychological desires in a different manner than is found in plays like Le Temps est un songe. It would appear that even if the climate conflicts with the will in order to release the instincts of the Self on one level, this Self has itself been dictated by the environment. Although this idea has been challenged in the study of La Maison des Remparts15 in which the desires of the Malfilâtre family were shown not to be conditioned by their particular social and climatic condition but were, rather, a response of man's nature, the case of La Dent rouge is more difficult to treat in this way. Pierre's montagnard instincts appear to be the result of the

14 Ibid., p. 147.
15 Cf. p. 54.
fact that he lives in a society under a given geographical situation which would forge this type of mentality. However, the desire to climb the mountain is not just a question of honour or of a test of virility but rather is related to the search that is found in other plays. The conquering of the Dent Rouge is analogous to the possession of women in L'Homme et ses fantômes, Les Trois Chambres and Une Vie secrète. In fact the mountain is given the attributes of a woman and the climbing of it is spoken of in sexual imagery. 16 Pierre would, therefore, seem to be motivated by the same psychological process at work in L'Homme and the artist, and his instincts would be a more organic part of his make-up rather than being the product of his environment.

On the other hand, in Lenormand's plays that deal with a tropical culture, man's instincts possess certain affinities with nature. These plays present the main characters in an element that is completely different from their European upbringing but is not foreign to the inmost part of their being. Lenormand's persistent use of Africa and Asia as a setting for his plays did not issue from a simply interest in exoticism for its own sake:

Le seul exotisme que je reconnaisse pour valable, c'est le retentissement intime d'une expérience de dépaysement et de transplantation. 17

16 Lenormand, Théâtre Complet, III, 57.
17 Lenormand, Confessions, II, 65.
In Le Simoun, Laurency, from the beginning of the play, is presented as a person who bears the effects of life in a tropical country: "Ses manières hésitantes, sa voix sans timbre, révèlent une volonté brisée." His anxiety and inability to achieve a sense of peace are a result of living in an atmosphere that is alien to his former way of life in France and is causing a moral degeneration. With the arrival of Clotilde, however, he begins to change:

Si le mot n'était pas si pompeux appliqué à un prosaïque négociant, je dirais qu'elle m'a régénéré... Qu'elle m'a rendu mon âme d'Européen.

Laurency is not in fact perverted by the climate of Africa; even when his incestuous love overtakes him, he is not being injected with evil from the environment around him. This is more clearly seen in Lenormand's earlier version of the play. In Le Réveil de l'Instinct, Willem indicates the exact nature of the change that takes place in a tropical country:

C'est que nous sommes devenus des sauvages, tous les deux. Quand on a vécu près de vingt ans dans la jungle, on perd les goûts et les habitudes des civilisés.

The primitive countries do not give birth to the incestuous desires of Berend and Laurency but rather wear away the crust of habits and sanctions that prevent man's true nature from coming to the surface. Berend's contact with the unbridled forces of

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18 Lenormand, Théâtre Complet, II, 8.
19 Ibid., p. 74.
the jungle causes him to free himself gradually from restraints:

Ces branches qui s'écrasent, se violentent... et la démence qui projette ces millions de vies furieuses vers la lumière... Non, tu ne peux pas te figurer!... C'est le triomphe implacable et sans frein des instincts végétaux... L'homme ne doit pas aller là!... car dans cette ombre étouffante, dans cette humidité saturée de germes... il se sent livré, lui aussi, à ses instincts. 21

The atmosphere does not alter the nature of Berend nor of Laurency but only serves to rid the one of his conscience and the other of his will so that they may obey the dictates of their instincts. They return to that part of them which, like the untamed environment of tropical countries, knows nothing of artificial restrictions. In a similar manner Sarterre in Une Vie secrète had lost his conscience in the forests of Indochina and thus his music corresponded to the true nature of man.

Berend is more deeply affected by the atmosphere than is Laurency because at times he cannot find himself guilty of any crime in desiring his daughter. He has almost completely abandoned himself to the amorality of his primordial Self:

Le plus étrange, Willem, et ce qui m'a fait douter de ma raison, c'est que de telles pensées ne me saturent pas d'horreur... Non... je n'ai pas conscience de mon ignominie! Je ne peux pas voir en moi un être monstrueux et contre nature!... Il y a des moments où j'aime avec toutes les

21 Ibid., p. 49.
His misfortune, according to his friend, Willem, is that he has not been able to make a total dissociation from his conscience which is not a genuine part of him but rather is a force that has been introduced from without. Despite this Berend comes close to attaining the freedom of nature that Sartrerre had characterized as the innocence of a panther, while Laurency does not because of the sudden return of what he calls his "Âme d'Européen."

The tropical countries, because they are untouched by the order of civilization, correspond to the authentic pattern of the world. The environment as well as its inhabitants, thus reflects a state that defies the fabricated concepts and judgments of the European mentality. Furthermore, since Africa and Asia represent a true arrangement of things, they triumph over civilized man by resuscitating that part of him which, buried under his restrictions and sanctions, possess the same lawlessness of the tropical countries.

A l'Ombre du Mal offers one of the best illustrations of this theme. Rougé, one of the main characters of this play set in French Equatorial Africa, presents himself as an enigmatic figure. A colonial administrator, he misuses his authority by not taking proper measures against the crimes of L'Almany, a village chieftain. The action of the play centers upon the trial of two natives, L'Almany and Maëlik, one of whom is guilty

22 Ibid., p. 55.
for the disappearance of two slaves. Maélik whose innocence is evident, is cruelly punished by Rougé for the crime. Préfailles, another colonial administrator, who is passing through the village, and has witnessed the trial, questions Rougé's judgement. In this scene, the audience learns that his infliction of injustice is the result of injustices that were brought to bear upon him when he first arrived in Africa. It was Préfailles who, for no apparent reason, used his position in the colonial administration purposely to obstruct Rougé's work and to make life all but impossible for him. He confesses his guilt and explains that his actions seemed to be motivated by the environment:

Ou alors, l'Afrique, peut-être. Il y en a que ce pays attaque dès les premières semaines. Cette coulée de jours vides, nécessairement pareils, embrasés d'une même flamme... Voilà ce qui nous perd... Au milieu de ce désert, un vent de rage vous tord brusquement... Faire souffrir. Il faut faire souffrir! On ne raisonne plus, on ne pense plus.23

Préfailles, once a man of integrity, had his will crushed by the tropical climate of Africa; and Rougé abandoned himself to his instincts after his will was worn down by Préfailles' indiscriminate actions. His injustices were not done from a desire for vengeance but rather they were the impulses of his true nature:

C'était quelque chose de plus fort que la vengeance... A chaque punition que j'infligeais, c'était comme une

23 Lenormand, Théâtre Complet, IV, 224.
détente furieuse, une décharge de tout mon être...
Eh bien, j'ai vécu pour ces spasmes de l'âme. Je me suis nourri de ces réserves de force mauvaise. j'y ai trouvé les délices les plus sombres, les seules délices de mon existence.24

Africa taught Rougé that his evil is not unnatural but is the true nature of mankind. Justice is a creation of man which he has to maintain by the imposition of his will over his instincts. In Africa, however, in which natural forces are supreme, this concept has no meaning. It is for this reason that Rougé and Préfailles have survived in the colony:

Si nous sommes encore debout, après vingt ans
d'Afrique, vingt ans de massacres, d'épidémies,
de trahisons, c'est que nous avons vécu, tous les deux, à l'ombre du mal.25

The play ends with a demonstration of this idea, the murder of Mme Le Cormier by Maélik. The civilized concept of justice that she had tried to bring to Africa was in contradiction to man's true instincts and to nature's laws.

This idea of the incompatibility of European values and man's authentic being which thrives in tropical countries gave Lenormand the intellectual basis for his life-long dislike for religion. He found that Christianity weighed heavily upon man by creating conscience and yet could not express any human reality. In his final play, Terre de Satan, he attempted to show the inability of religion to deal with the real forces of nature:

24 Ibid., p. 223.
25 Ibid., pp. 230-231.
Free from Christian conscience and responding to natural forces, Africa does not lend itself to the artificial sanctions of Christian morality; the missionary's task is not only doomed to failure but also runs the risk of provoking disaster.

This is precisely what happens in Terre de Satan.

Taking up the theme of evil expressed in A l'Ombre du Mal, the plays deals with a native rebellion against the missionary community:

Ce ne serait pas la première fois que sur cette terre d' Afrique l' abnégation et l' amour font lever la sauvagerie.  

The instigators of the unrest in the village are hommes-panthères, recalling Sartherre's innocence of a panther and, in fact, one of them who is captured seems to believe that he is actually an animal; he has completely abandoned himself to the law of the jungle.

The central issue of the trouble is the demand by the rebellious natives that the missionary church be transformed into a place of worship for the tribal god, Goré-Goré, which is the embodiment of African savagery. Although the priest and the nuns protest, Le Cormier, the French administrator, seeing

\[26\] Ibid., p. 267.

\[27\] Lenormand, Théâtre Complet, X, 200.
that a refusal of this demand would lead to war, allows them
to carry out their plan. He also realises with this rebellion
that Europeans have not achieved very much the the natives:

Dites-moi si l'oeuvre que nous accomplissons a
jamais échappé à l'incohérence et à l'injustice?
Dites-moi si, pour les trois quarts de la population,
Goré-Goré n'est pas un idéal religieux plus convenable
que le Christ?28

When the fetish is placed in the church, a Christian
native sets it on fire and provokes a retaliatory massacre.
This action proves that the Christian virtues that the priest
wished to propagate in Africa, lead only to tragedy because he
was trying to impose them upon man's instincts. Subsequently
the play ends with the victory of nature.

The main character in Terre de Satan, Le Cormier, who
also appeared in A l'Ombre du Mal, is one of the few persons
in Lenormand's drama who is able to resist the influence of a
tropical climate. In both plays he retains his European values
and shows an ability to deal with situations, despite the
opposite reaction that the atmosphere causes on other adminis-
trators as Préfailles and Rougé. Although the reason for this
is not given, it may be deduced in Le Simoun through the
characterization of the Vérificateur who possesses qualities
similar to those of Le Cormier. His resistance comes from a
continual excercise of his will that consists of the mechanical
memorization of formulae that advise the restraining of his

28 Ibid., p. 267.
desires. The reason that Le Cormier has survived colonial life would, therefore, be the result of a sustained control over his will which would prevent his instincts from mastering him. Fearon, on the other hand, rids herself of all such restraints in order to respond to the impulses that are part of her authentic being:

Il y a quelque chose, en moi, qui ne peut se sentir vivant et satisfait que quand leur Goré-Goré est déchaîné.²⁹

For this reason, she takes part in and encourages the rebellion against the attempt by the missionary to enforce among the natives modes of behaviour that are not the expression of true human desires.

The pressures of environment, therefore, are closely connected to the forces of the mysterious region of man's mind in the theatre of Lenormand. They serve to liberate the control of will and conscience upon the desires that originate in man's true Self. In its purest state as is found in the untamed tropical countries from which man emerged, the environment resembles the disorder of the psychological forces hidden below the laws and restrictions that civilisation has imposed upon man. In severe climates, this primordial part of the character is reawakened and surges out of the subconscious creating a conflict in the individual that usually leads to his ruin.

²⁹Ibid., p. 242.
Besides environmental influences there exists a second exterior force in the theatre of Lenormand which many critics have overlooked, although it plays a large role in his drama and represents a central concern in the author's own life. A large number of his plays contain active elements that stand above the conflict of subconscious and climatic forces, and that can readily be identified as belonging to the realm of occultism.

In some of the author's most significant plays such as A l'Ombre du Mal and Asie, there are indications that the characters may be confronting supernatural forces. The most apparent explanation for this aspect of Lenormand's theatre is his interest in the Elizabethan drama of horror which he preferred to any French or even Shakespearean tragedy. Interesting in this respect is the autobiographical account of his first trip to England which reveals the macabre delight he took in visiting London, for him a city predestined to collective misfortune. 30

In a similar manner he was fascinated with the stories of Edgar Poe whose works he devoured in his school days and whose influence upon him he never denied. The continuation of these interests into Lenormand's adult life and the incorporation of them in his works is not surprising for now not only the subconscious but also the occult offered him the opportunity to

30 Lenormand, Confessions, I, 95.
expand his predominant theme of mystery. For this reason he approved of the dramatic aims of Gaston Baty's Compagnons de la Chimère:

Cette notion du drame, intégrant au domaine du théâtre les forces naturelles et supra-naturelles, me séduisait. Elle justifiait après coup les instances obscures auxquelles j'avais obéi en composant le Simoun, le Temps est un Songe et l'Homme et ses Fantômes.31

Lenormand's use of occultism in his plays may also be traced to the fact that he viewed himself as a witness of his times who wished to give a picture of the spiritual malaise of twentieth century man.32 He attempted, therefore, to show the widespread interest of his generation in spiritualism:

Notre temps m'apparaissait comme celui du déclin des grandes religions et de l'épanouissement des "religiosités secondes".33

According to the author, the tensions of the pre-war and post-war periods had led to a collective neurosis. Subsequently, there surged up among the people in an era of social troubles, the need for hope and consolation that the church was incapable of giving. They turned to new, obscure forms of belief that were offered through the mystical powers of mediums. Lenormand's creation of L'Homme et ses fantômes aspired, in part, to depict an age in which Christianity had been replaced by this type of

31 Ibid., II, 63.
32 Ibid., I, 9-11.
33 Ibid., II, 133.
superstition, and, in fact, the scene in which l'Homme attends a séance was based on Lenormand's observations of such practices that grew to be popular during the interwar years. As Georg Kaiser showed in his play, _Gas_, that man is incapable of conquering his illusions and irrationality, Lenormand thought it important to point out that the modern machine age had not freed man from being the victim of his religious phantoms.

The presence of occultism in the playwright's works was, however, the result not just of literary influence nor of his attempt to give testimony of his times, but rather it was an important aspect of his own spiritual life:

> J'ai laissé dire, écrire et penser tout ce qu'on a voulu sur mon attitude personelle devant les "problèmes" de l'occultisme. Je n'ai pas ralenti le zèle de ceux qui me félicitaient d'être un zélateur de leur foi; je n'ai pas répondu aux sarcasmes de ceux qui me croyaient un questionneur de tables tournantes. La bataille théâtrale ne s'accommode pas de vérités nuancées. Dans l'histoire, comme dans la vie d'un homme, celles-ci ne trouvent place qu'après l'événement. Quant à la certitude, il est probable que je mourrai sans l'avoir rencontrée. J'ai oscillé, quarante années durant, entre le besoin et l'impossibilité de croire.35

Sections of Lenormand's _Confessions_ reveal an inner conflict in which the author saw throughout his existence manifestations of a supernatural order but could not believe in what his mind was unable to grasp. His life appeared to him to be filled with

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34 _Ibid._ , p. 133.

signs from the external world, that corresponded amazingly to the future events of his life.³⁶ At times he thought himself guided by a destiny and, subsequently, the temptation was always present for him to give credence to the claims of mediums and spiritualists. His work reflected this tendency on his part to wonder about the reality of occult forces. From the earliest of his mature plays, *Les Ratés*, to one of his last plays, *La Maison des Remparts*, the endings often put the unanswered question whether another world actually exists or not. In some works, there is an ambiguity about the real force that has ordered the events of the tragedy and the audience is confronted with the possibility of a second interpretation in terms of the occult. This does not always testify to a calculated procedure by Lenormand but rather to the odd mixture of lucidity and mystical inspiration that accompanied the writing of such plays as *L'Homme et ses fantômes* and *L'Amour magicien*.

The only explanation that can be consistently applied to the action of the occult is that it lends support to the aura of fate which the author wanted the audience to feel in the presentation of his drama. Its most successful use occurs in those plays in which it is integrated into the conflict of psychological and climatic forces that are at work upon the

³⁶Ibid., I, 100; II, 114.
characters on another level. Even in these instances, however, the actual influence of the occult varies from the cases in which it can be dismissed as inconsequential, to those in which its power seems overwhelming.

L'Amour magicien serves as a good example of the method in which Lenormand has interwoven the occult into the themes of subconscious motivation and environmental influences. The play grew out of his reading of La Surveillance de l'âme et son évolution après la mort, written by Cornillier, a fervent believer in occultism. The book relates the writer's association with a young woman who, during the period of almost two years, made a mystical voyage. Lenormand consulted psychoanalytic testimony of such experiences before writing the play and incorporated it into the drama, but he admitted that the creation of L'Amour magicien was not done in a cold analytic manner:

"Peu de pièces ont pris racine en moi dans un état plus proche de l'hallucination médiumique."\(^{37}\)

Although the play can be interpreted totally within the context of psychological forces, it is possible that the possession of Béatrice may be genuine. The eerie atmosphere of the foggy Breton setting gives the impression that the occult hangs over the action of the play. The figure of La Femme Quémé, moreover, introduces inexplicable elements into the drama. If her claim to have seen Berthe's phantom

\(^{37}\)Ibid., II, 139.
lends but scant authority in support of an occult explanation of the events, the vision that she asks from the supernatural powers reveals a truth which she confides to Béatrice:

Je demandais aux Puissants de me montrer la femme à qui pense monsieur Carolles... et c'est votre figure qu'est venue dans le miroir.\(^\text{38}\)

Her intuitive insight into Albert's love for Béatrice appears to substantiate her claim that she possesses mystical powers.

The balancing of Albert between belief and disbelief in the authenticity of Béatrice's possession can be paralleled to Lenormand's own reactions toward the whole question of obscure forces. On the one hand, Albert wants to believe and on the other, he realises that it is becoming increasingly more difficult to do so. The reason that he cannot however discard the possibility of mystic experiences, is that he has intangible proof that they are authentic:

\begin{quote}
Edouard: Alors, je me demande sur quoi vous pouvez baser votre conviction.
\end{quote}

\begin{quote}
Albert: Sur le sentiment d'une présence. Oui, sentir avec force et de manière permanente qu'à travers cette forme assoupie, un être se manifest, identique à ce que je l'ai connu, nettement différent de ce corps emprunté... la personne de Berthe, enfin, reconnaissable et continue dans son désir de m'atteindre. Je l'ai éprouvé déjà, ce sentiment de la présence.\(^\text{39}\)
\end{quote}

The confession by Berthe's spirit that she was unhappy and the hint of her infidelity seem to be substantiated by

\[^{38}\text{Lenormand, Théâtre Complet, VI, 92.}\]

\[^{39}\text{Ibid., p. 53.}\]
parts of her correspondance in which Albert finds letters giving his wife encouragement and consolation. When he finally ceases to believe, it appears to be not so much the result of his intellectual lucidity as a refusal to accept the upsetting secrets that he is learning through Béatrice. Furthermore, to add to the ambiguity of the issue, there is the mysterious death of Béatrice and Albert's reaction to it:

Albert, penché sur elle, en sanglots. Béatrice!

(Il regarde autour de lui. Il rencontre les yeux de la femme Quéméry qui le fixe intensément. Se détournant, il semble chercher une présence autour de lui, et, à une invisible oreille qui écouterait, il murmure:) Berthe? 40

The occult in L'Amour magicien remains, therefore, an ambiguity. It can be considered, as it has been shown in the preceding chapter, 41 as a subconscious ploy to mask Béatrice's love which she feels to be betrayal of Berthe's affection for her, or, on the other hand, it may be the actual power that is causing her hallucinations. In any case, the inconclusiveness of the ending reveals not only Lenormand's method of dealing with this possible exterior force but also reflects his intellectual conflict concerning the validity of occultism.

Less successful was Lenormand's attempt to inject an occult explanation into La Dent rouge. The superstitions that

40 Ibid., p. 113.
are invoked recurrently in the play give little sign that they are more than primitive social beliefs. Thus the idea that Pierre has been bewitched and destroyed by the mountain itself tends to be swept aside by the psychological interpretation. The most important mysterious element occurs with Claire's wish, after she has been beaten, that Pierre return to the mountain and slip while climbing it. At the end of the play she not only blames herself for causing his death by ruining his montagnard instincts but also suggest that her wish had the power to cause the tragedy:

Et je suis peut-être plus capable encore que je ne l'avoue. Car j'ai voulu sa perte: et qui sait ce que peut le désir? Je l'ai vu tomber: et qui connaît la force d'une pensée? Dites, monsieur le curé, si je lui ai communiqué cette vision? En dévalant follement, sans corde, sur la pente de glace, il m'obéissait! Il courait à la mort que j'ai revée pour lui! Ils disent la vérité: j'ai tué mon mari!42

This indication of the work of obscure forces, however, is not given a convincing demonstration as it is in L'Amour magicien. The removal of this part of Claire's speech would not affect the understanding of the play, while in L'Amour magicien, the possibility of occult forces would account for events which otherwise would remain mysterious. Moreover, the case of possession is a more integral part of the play than is the unexpected and casual insertion of the reference to fate in La Dent rouge.

42Lenormand, Théâtre Complet, III, 147.
In contrast, L'Homme et ses fantômes contains incidents that leave no doubt that the forces of the occult are at play. Alberte, one of L'Homme's abandoned mistresses, is intent upon avenging herself in a manner that transcends human means:

On tue un homme, quand on veut sa mort et qu'on ne tient plus à la vie qu'il vous a fait. Mais sa mort ne me suffit pas: c'est son âme que je veux punir. 43

After her death, L'Homme attends a séance in which a spirit reveals itself to be Alberte who is still in search of vengeance. Suddenly the lights go out and L'Homme feels himself pressed by a hand. This is the first of several contacts that he has with his former mistress and which Luc de Bronte attributes to psychological troubles:

Vous êtes, comme tous les sceptiques vieillissants, comme tous les négateurs fatigués un postulant au mysticisme... Vous me demandiez, l'autre soir, ce qui vous remplacerait les femmes? Mais les femmes encore! Les fantômes accusateurs ou miséricordeux qui se lèvent de votre inconscient. 44

As for the apparitions in the final scene which Lenormand confessed was written by him in a state of terror, 45 they can be regarded as an hallucination. The author has prepared the audience for it by L'Homme's complaints of dizzy spells during which his sight becomes hazy and he loses focus of the relationship between objects. Lenormand's attempts to relay a personal

43 Ibid., IV, 32.
44 Ibid., p. 98.
45 Lenormand, Confessions, II, 132.
disquieting impression when he attended séances, however, results in an emphasis on the possible influence of mystical powers. The psychoanalytic explanation of L'Homme's belief that he has encountered the spirit of Albérite, does not account for the events of the séance which were witnessed by a group of people. Subsequently, the only satisfactory interpretation that the play offers is that occult forces are actually present.

The transposition of Lenormand's experiences into his drama is nowhere more apparent than in his use of the theme of occultism. Both L'Amour magicien and L'Homme et ses fantômes were drawn from the author's contact with the field of mysticism. The same is true of one of his earlier plays, Le Temps est un songe. The play represents the most successful integration of psychological, climatic and occult forces that the playwright accomplished in any of his drama. The notion of fate that Nico expounds, as noted above, is not a concept that Lenormand drew from any scientific or philosophic theory. Rather, it was based on his contact with Mme. Ballacey, a mystic whom the author visited on several occasions and whose claims to foresee the future Lenormand thought valid:

Peu à peu se constituait le tableau de la vie psychique d'un être pour qui le film des événements se déroule à rebours et qui descend à son gré dans l'avenir, comme nous remontons dans le passé. Je ne pensais pas qu'il pût s'agir d'autre chose que d'intuition, de connaissance

46 Cf., p. 19.
Le Temps est un songe can be viewed in terms of an unravelling of a supernatural fate, the explanation of which is contained in Nico's theory of time. At the beginning of the play, Romée has a vision in which she sees Nico drowning in what appears to be the pond in front of the house, although there are slight discrepancies in the landscape from the one that actually exists. The play progresses with Nico making changes on his property such that it begins to resemble the setting of Romée's hallucination. In an attempt to ward off disaster, she tries, by means of a false letter from his father, to have Nico return to Java but an unexpected incident returns him to the house where he decides to commit suicide.

On one level, his decision can be the result of an inadvertent remark by Romée that would have suggested to him the means that he employed to take his life. On another level, Romée's vision and Nico's death may be attributed to the working out of an occult principle based upon the true nature of time. The idea of a progression in time, as Nico explains, is a misconception and that in reality time is static:

L'homme se promène dans le temps comme dans un jardin... Quelqu'un marche derrière lui, portant une toile et il ne peut voir les fleurs du passé. Quelqu'un marche devant lui, portant une autre toile et il ne peut pas encore voir les fleurs de l'avenir. Mais toutes ces fleurs coexistent der-

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47Lenormand, Confessions, II, 114.
rièr les deux toiles et les yeux de l'initié ne cessent de les contempler.\textsuperscript{48}

Not only are man's actions predetermined but also because there are no divisions of time, the future is accessible to him. Romée's experience would, therefore, not be the result of an hallucination caused by the misty climate but rather would be the work of occult forces. The ending of the play would remain ambiguous if it were not for the fact that other incidents could not be dealt with without ressorting solely to an explanation in terms of mysticism. Romée saw Nico in her vision before she met him for the first time, and the changes that Nico makes on his property were not suggested to him by her. Whether Lenormand was aware of these discrepancies or not is uncertain. It would seem that by the care he had taken to insure that Nico's decision to drown himself be plausible, he had actually overlooked the fact that the occult interpretation was logically the only valid one. This point is especially evident in his autobiography in which he says that it was the aim of the play to show the character of a person who believed that the present, the past and the future coexisted.\textsuperscript{49}

The psychological and the occult elements in \textit{Le Temps est un songe}, as in the other plays that have just been reviewed here, are not really separated on Lenormand's stage.

\textsuperscript{48}Lenormand, \textit{Théâtre Complet}, I, 186.

\textsuperscript{49}Lenormand, \textit{Confessions}, I, 204-205.
Mysticism, superstition and the belief in a supernatural order, if not overtly active forces, play a role in the workings of the character's subconscious drives.

In the plays placed in tropical settings, on the other hand, the occult is associated with the forces of environment and their influence upon the psychological conflict. In *A l'Ombre du Mal* and *Terre de Satan*, the lawless nature of Africa is incorporated into the figure of Goré-Goré. In the first of these plays, Rougé's rough treatment of a witchdoctor causes him to utter a curse upon the white community; in the last scene he reappears to affirm that Mme Le Cormier's death has been the work of the tribal god. This insertion of occultism remains more isolated from the action of the main characters than is found in *L'Amour magicien* in which the belief in a supernatural power not only may serve to explain the outcome of the play but is an integral part of Béatrice's struggle between her love and her fear of it. The conflict between will and instinct that besets Rougé, however, is devoid of any contact with the occult. Goré-Goré appears to be the embodiment of the law in Africa; that is, the metaphorical expression of both the ungoverned impulses of nature and the unrestrained instincts of man. Similarly in *Terre de Satan*, the victory of Goré-Goré over Christ is the triumph of natural forces over the restrictive code of European behaviour. Therefore, the occult in these plays serves simply as a parallel to the action of climatic factors, which may be taken as an alternative
interpretation of the drama.

*L'Asie* provides the best example of this relationship of occultism and environment in the theatre of Lenormand. The play is an avowed attempt by the author to make a modern recreation of the ancient tragedy, *Medea*, and, in fact, the plot of Lenormand's drama differs very little from the original. The author was probably attracted to this classic by the ambivalence of the heroine's emotions, the coexistence within her of maternal love and hatred for Jason. The characterization of the princess is taken directly from *Medea*. Subsequently she is a less typical example of Lenormand's characters because the usual subconscious conflict is totally discarded. The aspect of the play that remains proper to Lenormand however is the manner in which he has embodied within the heroine forces that are similar to those of her native land. Like the jungle from which she came, the princess acts according to the impulse of her nature which is for her the dictates of supernatural forces:

> Parfois, quelqu'un de terriblement fort et audacieux me conduit. Je ne connais pas son nom. Est-ce un ancien dieu qui s'est réveillé? Est-ce l'esprit d'un mort cruel? Ou d'un animal? Je ne sais pas. Il est là. Ce ne sont pas ces mains de femme qui feront la chose. C'est lui. Le moment venu, il me rendra sourde et aveugle.⁵⁰

The occult does not hide the princess' motivating instincts, as Béatrice's belief that she is possessed hides from her the

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love she feels for Albert. The princess is fully aware that she is going to kill her children in order to avenge herself on De Mezzana, and in doing so she willingly allows her actions to be guided by her true Self which she believes to be a product of supernatural powers. She thus corresponds to the nature of the land from which she came, "L'Asie... c'est une éponge qui absorbe tous les poisons." The statement is coloured by the value judgement of a European who has learnt to condemn his true desires, but it describes the lack of moral discernment that is part not only of the princess' mentality but also of the nature of Asia.

In creating an ancient Greek tragedy in which he substituted Medea's invocation to the gods with his own theme of the occult, Lenormand reveals one of the reasons that he depicts a supernatural atmosphere in his plays. He intended to reinforce the impression of fate that is given by the presence of the other forces in his drama. In the tropical plays, occultism lends a more powerful sense of fatality to the work of environmental forces, but it is in the other plays that this theme becomes more developed.

The occult, although it may serve to give a second interpretation to the non-tropical plays, also bears a close relationship to the psychological conflict of the characters. As the mind both seeks and at the same time avoids the realization of the true motivations of man's actions, the

\[51\textit{Ibid.}, 9.\]
belief in mysticism offers a momentary escape from this contradiction. It becomes a psychological compromise disguised as the truth that is so obsessively desired. Béatrice believes that her possession is true; as does Nico, his idea of time; and Pierre, his village superstitions. In each case the character's true impulses thus remain hidden from him. Béatrice will consequently not realize her love; Pierre, his desire to climb the mountain; Nico, his inability to deal with life. With L'Homme, mysticism may also be considered an illusion of truth. In it he hopes to learn the secrets that he cannot know. For this reason, the use of the occult in La Maison des Remparts seems to mark a break in Lenormand's earlier concepts. Kenneth S. White regards the ending of the play, in which André embraces the mystical religion of Lolita, as an expression of Lenormand's belief in moral salvation that is supposed to be part, especially, of his later life.\(^5\) A comparison can be made between this final scene and the final scene of Les Ratés which differs in that it is not affirmative; Lui simply poses the question of a possible higher reality as he stands over the body of Elle:

\[
\text{Si l'espoir n'était pas aussi absurde que je l'ai toujours cru?... S'il était possible que tout ne fût pas encore fini?... Revois-tu nos souffrances? Les comprends-tu? Et l'infini, que nous avons cherché dans la misère, dans la boue... t'est-il enfin révélé?}
\]

Ou bien n'as-tu plus de souvenirs?... plus de conscience?... es-tu seulement sur une rive ou autre chose commence?... au premier jour d'une autre vie?53

Yet the events of the play make this seem like the last of his attempts to escape the truth about himself. The importance of Les Ratés for Lenormand is the search for an end to the character's anxiety and not the beliefs that he arrives at. The affirmation of Lui's doubts in La Maison des Remparts appears to be a similar case for the question of whether or not André's conversion is the acceptance of an illusion is no more resolved than in Les Ratés. In the context of the whole of the author's drama the play would present itself as another expression of Lenormand's hesitations about the issue, but in this instance he displayed his hope that there existed a higher reality.

External forces, therefore, in Lenormand's drama play a varied and, at times, ambiguous role. Their function, if one discards the occult explanation, is that they are secondary factors to the forces of the subconscious. The instincts which motivate man are concealed or combatted, but under the corrosive effect of the environment they are gradually forced into the light. This revelation does not go unchallenged, but it is resisted often by means of illusions that take the form of belief in a supernatural order. This explanation may show the relationship of the occult and the mental anguish of the

characters in many of Lenormand's plays, but no view can be all encompassing. Despite the variants that exist within the author's range of plays, however, it is man's inner conflict that is the writer's primary concern, and other elements serve not to direct him but to add their weight upon or offer an escape to the hero haunted by the phantoms of his mind.
A great deal of Lenormand's theatrical work, especially plays like *Les Ratés*, *Le Temps est un songe* and *Le Simoun*, was greeted with considerable enthusiasm when it was first produced and, in fact, this last play was incorporated into the repertory of the Comédie Française. Since then, however, there has been some apprehension about the dramatic value of his theatre and the tendency in recent years has been to dismiss his works rather summarily, and often for fallacious reasons. The major charge laid against Lenormand's drama is that it is excessively pessimistic. This argument has been put forth most notably by Serge Radine:

> Si cet auteur s'est penché, plus qu'aucun autre dramaturge français de son temps, sur les forces inconscientes de l'Ame et sur les conflits qu'elle suscitent, à leur insu, dans l'existence de ses héros, il s'agit toujours, chez lui, de forces qui nous poussent en bas, vers les abîmes et les ténèbres, et jamais de celles qui, par une bienfaisante insatisfaction, incitaient l'homme mécontent de lui-même à vouloir se dépasser.¹

The diseased minds of Lenormand's characters that in most cases result in suicide, and the author's study of depravity and crime are indeed morbid subjects, and his theatre, subsequently, leaves itself open to such criticism. The playwright himself did not deny his inclination towards pessimism:

¹Radiné, Anouilh, Lenormand, Salacrou, p. 94.
Il est pourtant vrai que la déchéance, le vice et la bestialité s'associent naturellement en moi au plaisir que m'apportent le spectacle du monde. Ce n'est là ni un paradoxe ni une attitude baudelairienne, mais, hélas, une façon d'être probablement inguérissable, une tare.²

The moral position that Radine takes towards Lenormand's drama, however, can be answered in the same way that Stendhal disowned all blame for the truths which his novels revealed about the world around him. The plays of Lenormand can also be considered as the reflection of the social reality of his times. That this was one of the author's intentions in his work is substantiated by his remarks in the preface to his autobiography. In the troubled era of his generation with the great carnage of the First World War and the moral bankruptcy of the modern industrial society, Lenormand refused to become "un facile marchand d'espoir, d'idéal, et d'héroïsme."³

To instil in literature anything that did not exist in the real world, especially for the purpose of hiding the diseases of society, horrified him. If therefore his plays can be interpreted as pessimistic then the events of his age gave him a good basis for it.

Moreover, much of the insistence by critics on this aspect of his drama has failed to recognize another of the author's aims in creating his theatrical works. The presentation

²Lenormand, Confessions, II, 369.

³Ibid., I, 12.
of pathological cases was not intended simply to give ex-
pression to Lenormand's sombre views of mankind, but rather
they offered him the means of realizing a renovated concept
of tragedy. Critics have so often overlooked the playwright's
intentions in this respect\textsuperscript{4} that it is necessary to return to
Lenormand's autobiography in order to show the extent to which
it is a part of his approach to the theatre.

The author admits in his \textit{Confessions} to an overpowering
desire to follow the production of his plays in foreign countries.
He could never be indifferent to the interpretations that his
drama was given in other parts of the world and, subsequently,
he spent a good deal of his life between 1920 and 1936 in
travelling outside France for the sole purpose of viewing the
method in which his plays were presented. Such experiences
often left him indignant, but during his trip to Greece in
1930, he felt that the audiences of Athens had by their applause
pointed out an essential aspect of his work as a dramatist:

\begin{quote}
J'ignorais la ductilité de ce public et la
faculté, qu'il puise dans la fréquentation de ses
classiques, de percevoir, en des ouvrages modernes,
la plus faible intention de tragédie, le voeu
secret, non exprimé par prudence, de les rattacher
aux origines du théâtre. Mieux qu'aucun auditoire
d'Europe, il devait dans \textit{Les Ratés} et \textit{Le Simoun},
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{4}Besides Serge Radine, Robert E. Jones in his study,
\textit{The Alienated Hero in Modern French Drama}, takes up the criti-
cism that Lenormand's plays are pessimistic. He refuses to
appreciate the author's attempt to renovate tragedy because
it does not follow the classical mould.
décéler, si profondément incarnée qu'elle puisse être, la veine tragique. Le public m'a fortifié dans mes ambitions, confirmé dans l'espoir que j'étais peut-être, après tout, ce que je me sentais être: un auteur tragique refusant le pastiche. 5

The dismal settings, the unresolved conflicts and the disastrous endings that are all part of Lenormand's drama cannot be fully understood by attributing them to the author's interest in morbid subjects. Rather he attempted to restore upon the stage a type of tragedy that had the dramatic qualities of the ancient classics but was revised by a consideration of the complexities of the subconscious mind. Jeannine's suicide, for example, is not the result of a pessimistic hypothesis by Lenormand that aims at demonstrating the sordidness of man's desires, but rather she is, like Oedipus, the victim of a tragic chain of events. The difference that exists between the play by Sophocles and Le Mangeur de Rêves is that while, in one, fate is decided by the prophesy of the oracle, Jeannine's catastrophe is determined by her psychological attitude, implanted by Luc de Bronte, towards the truth of her childhood experience.

Lenormand, in renovating tragedy with psychological studies, introduced a subject matter upon the stage, which by its nature demanded a revision of the arrangement that was historically part of French drama. The most significant change in the structure of the author's plays was the absence of the

5 Ibid., II, 249.
classical division of drama into five acts of more or less equal length. In its place, Lenormand adopted a more appropriate means of presenting the work of psychological and climatic forces upon his characters.

The first of his mature plays, Les Ratés, contains the author's own division of dramatic action on the stage, a method that he retained in many of his later theatrical works. Instead of carrying the play through the successive stages of an exposition, the development of a nœud and the ensuing dénouement, Les Ratés is divided into tableaux of varying lengths. In each of them the main characters are presented in different stages of their conflict against circumstances as they are dragged into a moral decline. The tableaux are carefully drawn pictures of Lui and Elle in their struggle against the increasingly oppressive conditions in which they are forced to live and against the gradual undermining of their illusions. Placed in dingy hotels and dilapidated provincial theatres, the setting is reduced to a minimum of accessories and the atmosphere of each of the scenes is rendered by the use of light. The tableaux appear at first to be a collection of unrelated incidents but the effect is by no means incoherent. Corresponding to the bleak situation of Lui and Elle, each tableau is arranged in order to focus upon a single mood from a variety of different angles. The décor of the first scene begins to set the tone that characterizes the whole play. The setting is bare and gloomy, as Lui watches the chaotic attempts
to rehearse his play. The table in this first scene which is the most prominent piece of furniture on the stage is scattered with roles and manuscripts. A similarly disorganized table re-appears in the second scene and reflects the disorder that Lui's life has fallen into with his inability to show any talent in writing. In the subsequent tableaux the author begins to use light to underline the couple's growing despair. The third scene is played in the late morning but the following tableaux become increasingly darker. In the seventh tableau the moral distress of Lui and Elle is captured in a décor that consists of three chairs and a dim ray of light which falls upon the stage "comme au fond d'un puits". It is in this dismal setting that Lui confesses to Elle that he had slept with another woman out of "un obscur désir de m'abaisser, de me souiller, pour être plus près de toi". The scene ends in almost complete obscurity. Most of the scenes, that follow up to the murder of Elle and Lui's subsequent suicide, are played in the frail light that is shed by lamps and the final scene takes place in the early morning.

Except for the final scene, the tableaux do not contain any action that advances the plot of the play. They are poetic creations that describe a state of mind or an emotional reaction after an event that has occurred prior to the beginning

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6 Lenormand, Théâtre Complet, I, 73.
7 Ibid., p. 80.
of the tableau. The author's intention is to give a detailed exposition of fixed moments in the character's progression toward the tragic dénouement. The sixth tableau begins after Elle has told Lui of her prostitution; the scene simply but with a heightened poignant effect depicts Lui's emotional numbness by his listless reaction to this confession. Similarly, later in the play, his anguish and jealousy is indicated in an extremely short tableau in which he returns home drunk and Elle, helping him to undress, breaks out in tears. The psychological conflict which is the playwright's chief concern, is thus sketched when the action is suspended as the author gives dramatic expression to the inner struggle of the characters.

Lenormand's ability to depict artistically the elements that he presents on his stage accounts for Daniel-Rops' statement that the most lasting memory which the author's plays produce in the audience's mind is the setting. From this it only takes a few short sentences to draw the character. In fact, Lenormand has so integrated man into the décor in his drama that all the elements of his theatre are presented as a harmonious unity. In La Dent rouge, the villagers with their primitive beliefs, the dark, cold setting on the slope of a hill, and Pierre's conflict against his montagnard instincts and superstitious nature all form an interrelated whole. Similarly the actions of the unjust administrator, Rougé, in

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8Daniel-Rops, Sur le Théâtre de H.-R. Lenormand, p. 78.
A l'Ombre du Mal take place against a background that represents the force of Africa:

A peu de distance en arrière, et sur toute la largeur de la scène se dresse, menaçant, obscur, impénétrable, le mur de la forêt. C'est une vague végétale de fûts colossaux et de lianes géantes.⁹

The light is obscured by the density of the jungle and as the play progresses so it decreases. In addition the sound of the tam-tam of native drums is heard periodically through the play making the interplay of atmosphere and character felt upon the audience. Even in the play, Une Vie secrète, which is situated in Europe, the uncontrolled instincts of Sartrerre's creativity correspond to the surroundings which the author has set visually upon the stage. On the walls of the musician's study hang exotic tapestries that evoke, with their bright colours, the wildness of the tropical forest which is depicted as a chaotic tangle of liana and palm-branches. Later in the play, when Lenormand describes the artist's debauchery, the scene is set in an old apartment in a remote district of Paris. In the same vein, the recovery of Sartrerre's conscience and the ensuing sterility of his talent is placed in an almost bare living-room and the light which in the other two acts was bright and colourful, becomes in the final act the twilight of a late autumn day.

⁹Lenormand, Théâtre Complet, IV, 125-126.
Although this drama is one which does not follow the tableau technique and possesses characteristics of the traditional French stage in its development, it still retains the essential aspect of Lenormand's other plays. The greater part of the action is not exposed on stage in order to concentrate on the psychological attitude of the main character. The first act comes after the success of Sarterre's concert, the second, after he has allowed his instincts to draw him into debauchery, and the third, two years after his acquiescence to his wife's moral scruples. The reason for discarding the tableau form may be attributed to the fact that the author intended to present a study of creativity and the long acts provided him the space in which he could elaborate the working out of the artist's relationship with others and with nature. A similar case occurs in *La Maison des Remparts* in which the author wanted to study moral degeneration. Each of the three acts in this play deals extensively with the aimlessness and the vice of René and André, his son. As a result a more penetrating account is given of the social and environmental pressures upon the Malifilâtre family and of their spiritual void than is shown in *Les Ratés.*

It is Lenormand's earlier plays that contain the best uses of the tableaux. In these dramatic works, the characters are captured within frames that successively trace the progressive approach of the tragic ending. Nico's attitude towards life is presented in an increasingly agitated manner as
he exposes his concept of time. At first he talks about it with an almost philosophic indifference but the following tableaux show him more involved in the question as the climate of Holland works upon him. He begins to express himself in a voice filled with anxiety:

Ah! Saidyah, rêver n'est rien. L'affreux, c'est de savoir que l'on rêve... C'est de marcher et de savoir qu'il n'y a pas de sol sous nos pas... C'est d'étendre les bras et de savoir qu'ils ne peuvent rien étreindre... car tout est fantômes et reflets de fantômes.  

In this manner Lenormand skilfully builds up towards the final tableau of the play in which Nico's thoughts are spoken in a state of extreme mental imbalance. Although the décor of this play remains much the same in each of the tableaux, the growing influence of the environment is conveyed through Nico's own reflections which reveal that the mists and stagnant ponds have, from scene to scene, taken on greater importance in the direction of his thoughts. Instead of changing the setting appreciably to correspond to the development of the character's psychological conflict, the same effect is achieved through Nico's description of the atmosphere which is becoming more and more stifling.

The tableau represents the greatest single artistic achievement in Lenormand's theatre and for this he still deserves the recognition that has regrettably been refused

\[^{10}\text{Ibid.}, I, 214.\]
him since his brilliant success between the World Wars. His drama has a poetic quality that imprints upon the memory images as the one of Laurency, during the simoon, being devastated by his incestuous passion. Similarly *Le Mangeur de Rêves* rather than evoking clinically the behaviour of a mentally disturbed woman calls to mind pictures of a human being in anguish. The plays of Lenormand instead of giving the impression of continued action present a loosely connected series of descriptions from which both character and décor emerge in such a way as to give the effect of a sketch.

Lenormand's study of the subconscious also lends itself, on the other hand, to one of the most serious technical flaws in his theatre. If the tableaux give the author's plays their most compelling and most poetic quality, it is because they present the audience with a view of the character in conflict with the mysterious forces within him. There comes a moment however in the playwright's drama when he has to explain the nature of this conflict in some manner. Although these explanations do not always reveal completely to the character the hidden impulses that are at the basis of his anxiety, the audience often becomes too aware of the psychological mechanism that is motivating the hero. Lenormand, instead of hinting, on several occasions prefers to be explicit and the play shows the threads of a theory of psychology. After subtly implying that Béatrice's possession may be self-willed in order that she can give some consolation to the man
she loves, Lenormand finds it necessary to have Albert express this precisely. The author himself recognized his flaw in doing this but, nevertheless, it remains in several of his plays.

The danger of this revelation is not only the discarding of the most powerful aspects in Lenormand's theatre; the mystery that is understood intuitively, but also it causes an unfortunate pause in the play's development. In Mixture, the tableaux move on smoothly in succession until the ending of the play. Then Poucette, showing an insight that comes as something of a surprise, is given the lengthy role of an analyst. The explanation that she gives of her mother's ambivalence is too precise and most of it is superfluous for the audience's understanding of the play. Again in Le Simoun the rapid development of the climax is halted for a long scene in which Laurency confesses his desire for his daughter. Although his subconscious wish to rid himself of Clotilde is not expressed in words and thus becomes more effective for it, this pause remains the weakest technical aspect in the whole play. This flaw is particularly evident in A l'Ombre du Mal. After tracing the drama of a colonial administrator bent on committing injustices, the author finds himself compelled to devote a large section of the play to clarifying the reasons for Rougé's actions; the result is that the play appears to be

11Lenormand, Confessions, II, 139.
less the depiction of a human situation than the demonstration of a principle.

Some of Lenormand's plays, on the other hand, show the advantages that the discarding of such explanations produces. Soeur Marguerite's love for Le Cormier in Terre de Satan is never formulated outright. Her subconscious desire is shown most clearly when she puts her head on his shoulder and permits him to speak to her about love. Realizing her true emotions for Le Cormier, which she simply describes as a demon within her, she allows herself to be captured and killed by the native rebels. The explanation for her action arises from the logic of the chain of events that preceded it and does not call for the insertion of any further elucidation. In this way the play becomes more even in its texture and the absence of a lengthy pause provides a more natural ending. Again in L'Homme et ses fantômes, L'Homme's desire to understand the mystery of his Self is inferred from his Don Juan role and his subsequent interest in mysticism. The real aim of these activities receives its best expression at the end of the play with his final words, "Je veux savoir...". Although Luc de Bronte's analyses may seem to pose the same type of objection, they are relatively short and basically misdirected.

Nevertheless, this does not mean that the explanations are inherently a stylistic flaw. They do prove to be acceptable if they are integrated naturally into the work. Nico's thoughts on time, though they give the reasons for which he
took his life, are a logical aspect of his extreme sensitivity and consequently neither strain the structure of the play nor clog the psychological mechanism of Nico's tragedy. The same can be said in the case of Les Rates in which Lui's final realization of the absurdity of the universe crowns his attempts to construct a world of illusions. It is not, moreover, this conclusion that leads him to despair but rather the reason that he is driven to murder and suicide is the unexpressed implication that his life has been a failure.

The essential point is that the dramatic weakness of the revelation is not necessarily an outgrowth of Lenormand's aims of depicting human psychology. Such an assumption has been implied by John Palmer:

>Obviously an author who brings into his theatre motives and instincts of which even those who are prompted by them are often unaware finds it necessary on occasion to suspend the action of his play while the characters discuss and analyse their motives, and at times he is even driven to introduce the familiar raisonneur, who interprets much that might have remained obscure in the behaviour of his characters.\(^\text{12}\)

Although these are clear features of many of the author's plays, the hidden motives and instincts are expressed in a more satisfactory way by means of involuntary gestures or actions, and slips of the tongue. Laurency's passion, Béatrice's love, Monique's desire for revenge do not need to be explained on stage for the audience to realise that they are the true,
unconscious sources of the actions of these characters. Their confessions and analyses do not, furthermore, spring naturally either in form or in content from the plays themselves. For example, the lucidity of Poucette's accusations against her mother strains the audience's credibility and they do not issue from the logic of the story itself but rather appear as a clumsy and unexpected superimposing of explanations by the author. They lack the subtlety with which Lenormand had previously made Monique's inner desire known and they destroy the even texture of the work.

Another stylistic flaw arises out of the revelation of the character's subconscious motivations. For Lenormand to construct circumstances in which this can occur, the play often requires an intricate web of relationships and the author is forced to prepare the ending in a somewhat unlikely manner by resorting to such devices as coincidence and coups de théâtre. In order that Jeannine may realise the truth of her actions during the attack by the villagers, the playwright has to create a scarcely credible situation in which she meets one of the bandits who was involved in it. Even Le Temps est un songe, one of the better constructed plays in Lenormand's theatre, shows the same type of artificial ending. Mme Riemke's sudden illness at the train station provides for Nico's return to the house where he commits suicide. This play, like the other, loses much of its dramatic value by introducing
improbable incidents which show too clearly the hand of the playwright forcing the situation.

A further charge has been made by Robert Kemp that, in the case of Le Simoun, not only is the revelation forced but the whole play approaches la pièce bien faite: "L'art des préparations y est poussé à une perfection maniaque". Indeed, very little can be subtracted from the play as each part has a bearing on the outcome. For example, Giaour is presented upon the stage in order to reveal Laurency's passion and to cause a love rivalry between Aiescha and Clotilde that ends in the death of the latter. Also Clotilde's striking resemblance to Laurency's wife and Aiescha's insight into the true nature of Laurency's affection for his daughter are both unconvincing. The ending of the play thus appears to be contrived and it detracts from the impact of the play. It should be stressed, however, that it would be difficult to find another case similar to Le Simoun in Lenormand's theatre. Indeed, Le Lâche suffers from the opposite defect in that sections of the play have no relevance at all to the action of the drama. Especially so are the scenes of the invalids at the sanatorium, which were probably intended simply to describe the author's experiences and impressions during his own stay at a similar hospital.

A more important objection that can be directed against Lenormand's theatre is that his attempt to weave a drama around

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13 Kemp, Vie du Théâtre, p. 30.
a subject can be reduced to a truism or to an objectionable simplification. This is apparent in Les Ratés when Lui explains the murder of Elle as the result of a very blunt and questionable psychological principle:

Je ne sais qui a dit: "On finit toujours par tuer la chose qu'on aime." Oui... Ou bien, c'est elle qui vous tue. L'un ou l'autre arrive fatalement. Ce n'est qu'une question de temps.14

Such criticism does the author less than justice; the whole tragedy is not simply based on this simplified maxim but there is no alternative to it as the reason for which Lui kills Elle. The case is clearly marked with Lenormand's presentation of the artist in Une Vie secrète. The play is the demonstration of the author's theory of artistic creation which the hero, Sarterre, outlines only too well. Lenormand himself recognized the dramatic error of the play:

Le personnage de Sarterre s'explique trop et prend des allures de porte-parole... Il se dévergonde trop consciemment. Il devient un peu le Père Système de la débauche tarifiée.15

The concept, moreover, of the sources of creativity is itself open to the criticism of being too simplistic and somewhat crude. The principle that art is born out of destruction, which Sarterre expounds and upon which he acts, is an example of abstract thinking. It does not, by any means, persuade the audience that the suffering which the artist causes others is permissible. Furthermore, the degradation that Vera undergoes

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14 Lenormand, Théâtre Complet, I, 136.
15 Lenormand, Confessions, I, 289-290.
and the complete subjugation of Thérèse to her husband's desires, which are apparently necessary in order to satisfy the demands of Sarterre's art, form a situation that appears too contrived; and the rebirth of his talent, which is the result of Vera's suicide, is very artificial. In addition, the manner in which Sarterre conceptualises his inspiration testifies to a notion of art that has been long ago abandoned as an acceptable view of the origins of artist creation. Sarterre sees himself as "une force aussi aveugle, aussi méchante, aussi involontaire que les nuages et l'eau."16 This theory that he holds of his role as an artist closely approaches the ideas of the Romantic writers. For Sarterre his art springs not from himself but from what he calls "le Vieux" that resides within him:

Ce n'est pas moi qui fais ma musique. Je l'écris. Mais il y a quelqu'un qui dicte.17

It is because of this aspect of the play that Ernest Seillière appropriately included it in his work, La Religion romantique et ses conquêtes. Since the concept is so outmoded, it fails to have real impact; it remains very unconvincing for today's audiences and in part this accounts for the rapid falling off of Lenormand's popularity as a dramatist with the post-war theatre-going public.

16Lenormand, Théâtre Complet, III, 201.
17Ibid., p. 185.
A l'Ombre du Mal provides a further example of a similar flaw. Although Lenormand attempted to show in his tropical plays that European concepts of morality were not absolutes and consequently have no meaning in other cultures, this play tends to argue the point inversely. Man's instincts, which the tropical climate liberates, are not free of order since they direct themselves towards evil:

La justice? Mais cela n'existe pas, la justice...
C'est une idée d'homme, une petite idée d'homme.
Ce n'est pas une réalité... Voyez, au contraire,
combien vivante et inextinguible est l'injustice!...
Quel ressort, quel rebondissement elle a.18

It is extremely difficult to accept the idea that European concepts of injustice exist as an absolute law while justice is nothing more than a man-made idea. Subsequently Mme Le Cormier's death which is intended to demonstrate this principle appears to be an incident gratuitously manipulated by the author.

Lenormand's tendency to base his plays on certain ideas defined by the main characters does not extend far beyond the examples mentioned above. The author's other works, however, have often been viewed simply as the demonstration of principles that are expressed on the stage but which are not the playwright's central concern. The most common examples of this are found with his "psychological" plays in which the figure of the analyst has been accepted as the character who

18 Ibid., IV, 226.
explains the author's dramatic intentions. For this reason *Le Mangeur de Rêves* may, at first sight, be regarded as the theatrical representation of the Oedipus complex and *L'Homme et ses fantômes* as an attempt to show the relationship between a Don Juan character and homosexuality. In part, such conclusions are the result of obscurity in the author's plays themselves, but, to a great extent, they represent the lack of a close scrutiny of his drama. Approaches of this type, however, have been common with regard to Lenormand's theatre and have led to a tendency, in recent years, to overlook the worth of his work. The general acceptance of the belief that he is an exponent of Freudian thought has prevented critics from appreciating the finer points of the author's drama. A similar injustice has occurred with *Le Temps est un songe*, at the hands of one of Lenormand's most noted critics, Sergei Radine. This drama is studied chiefly in the light of Nico's philosophy of time which is attributed to the theory of relativity. The true merits of the play as the characterization of the central figure of the tragedy, the method by which the author creates an atmosphere of fatality, and the anguish of a person confronted with uncertainty are therefore given minimal importance. This kind of misinterpretation of Lenormand's dramatic aims accounts, to some extent, for the lack of interest that presently exists towards the author's

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19 Radine, Anouilh, Lenormand, Salacrou, p. 84.
works. Rarely has it been realised that the playwright strove
to depict that part of man that escaped analysis, that could
not be explained in terms of any scientific or psychological
theory. The most significant aspects of the author's drama
in which his poetic ability is shown are precisely those that
are not expressed in words but, as in the theatre of silence,
those that reveal a mood or a frame of mind by means of care-
fully selected and almost discreet gestures. The relation-
ship between the theatre of silence, also known as the theatre
of the unspoken, and Lenormand's drama is made by L. Cazamian:

These obscure data of our inner lives are so
elusive that drama frequently abandons the
attempt to convey them by words, leaving them
to be deduced, as often as not, from the very
hesitations of the speakers; and the paradoxical
charge of making dialogue a matter of silences
might apply to Lenormand no less than to Bernard. 20

A lack of close examination of Lenormand's plays also
provides an explanation for the charge that his theatre is
melodramatic. This criticism is found in the reviews by one
of the playwright's most consistent and most outspoken critics,
André Rouveyre:

Mais le tour est familier de l'auteur en état de
crise: aussitôt qu'il est tendu et que l'heure
serait si naturellement de se contenir, de
réfléchir et de s'exprimer convenablement, c'est
tout aussitôt les moyens excessifs du ressort
mélodramatique où sa pensée s'écroule. 21

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21André Rouveyre, "Mixture", Le Mercure de France, 1er décembre 1927, p. 225.
Rouveyre's attacks on Lenormand's drama reflect, to a significant extent, the conservative currents of literary thought that opposed innovation of the French stage especially when it was a question of an author influenced by foreign sources. The critic met each production of the playwright's work from a position that lacked both sympathy and insight. The objection posed by Rouveyre however was voiced not by him alone but also by other critics as Maurice Martin du Gard who claimed that when Lenormand was faced with the necessity of action in his plays, he resorted to melodrama.22

The legitimacy of these accusations is difficult to ascertain because of the lack of a clear definition of melodrama on the critic's part. In addition, the issue has not been studied to any great depth in the major works dealing with Lenormand's theatre. The wide-spread and often inconsistent use of the term has made this a forbidding task. Nevertheless, the grounds upon which Lenormand's plays have been denounced as melodramatic can be assessed and shown to be, in most cases, the result of hasty conclusions that have failed to take into account important aspects of the author's drama and that have been coloured by the particular prejudices of the critics themselves.

An unqualified classification of the playwright's theatrical work as melodrama is impossible. It does not contain

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22Martin du Gard, Carte Rouge, p. 225.
many of the classical features that are necessary in order to substantiate such a view. The heroes in Lenormand's plays do not possess the shallow characterization that is part of melodrama nor do the plots of the author's works involve traits as persecuted innocence or moral didactism. Neither are his plays concerned with arousing emotions of sentimentality or pathos, ingredients that are all but inseparable from the nineteenth century melodramatic pieces by Hugo and by the acclaimed father of melodrama, Pixérécourt.\textsuperscript{23} Such devices as the conflict between the dark villain and the pure heroine are almost completely unknown in Lenormand's theatre. The charge, therefore, if it has any validity, can only be made against certain techniques which Lenormand employs and which merit, in the eyes of Rouveyre and Martin du Gard, the accusation of melodrama.

Certain effects that are associated with melodramatic plays are found in the playwright's works; a bell tolls at Lui's death and there is an insistence on his pathetic situation. Needless to say, this is insignificant in the whole of the play which lacks other examples. Other aspects of \textit{Les Ratés} are the complete opposite of what are customarily a part of melodrama as extravagant settings and an optimistic ending. The penetrating depiction of Lui's spiritual and mental troubles, furthermore, is alien to the sketchy characters

that people the stage of even the less simplistic melodramatic plays. This points to the most important objection that can be raised against Rouveyre's criticism. The depth of the subjects which Lenormand presents upon the stage contradicts the superficiality which melodrama shows in the psychology of its characters and the themes which it treats, sacrificing them to the action of the plot.

Le Lâche serves as a good illustration of this and also shows how the author has handled a dramatic situation which, in the hands of a less competent writer, could have turned into melodrama. Here Lenormand has to tread the fine line that divides heightened dramatic effect from melodrama. The story of espionage and counter-espionage in the play is not intended to simply entertain the audience although this may appear to be the case at first sight. The complicated intrigue that develops towards the end of the play as Jacques is forced to work for the French secret service, becomes the dupe of a German spy, and is subsequently executed for treason, has many of the features of melodrama. As a melodramatic device, however, such an intrigue would be presented for its own sake in order to exploit emotional responses from the audience as surprise, fear and suspense. In Le Lâche, on the other hand, this spy plot which occupies only the last two acts of the play, is an integral part of Jacques' internal conflict. It shows the extent to which he has been demoralized by self-doubt and the condemnation of others as he ends up the tool and the
victim of those he morally opposed. Le Lâche is, as Paul Blanchart has claimed, "une pièce d'âme, plus qu'une pièce d'action",\(^{24}\) because the intrigue is essentially a psychological portrayal.

Similarly La Maison des Remparts may appear to be melodrama, this time in the murder-mystery manner, but again melodramatic effects are avoided. The identity of Julie's murderer is not hidden for a lengthy period of time; melodrama requires that the evil-doer in this example of the genre remain unknown to the audience until the final scenes; and the drama consequently lacks the suspense and surprise ending that are the conventional central devices of the police thriller. Moreover, as in Le Lâche, the intrigue is not exploited for its own sake. Rather it serves to demonstrate the degeneracy of the Malfilâtre family and to heighten the moral anguish of André. In the same manner, the crimes that Monique commits in Mixture are not intended to offer thrills to the audience but to show the complicated character of the apparently self-sacrificing mother.

The most serious criticism against melodramatic writers is that they are guided by the tastes of the public. Although it was never Lenormand's intention to cater to popular subjects, his interest in occultism was a fad among many of his contemporaries. This feature of the playwright's drama, by his own admission, at times produced effects that

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are desired by writers of melodrama. On the production of

L'Homme et ses fantômes, especially the final tableaux of the

play, he comments:

Ils produisent sur le public le plus intense effet
de panique de tout mon théâtre. J'ai vu des femmes
quitter la salle de l'Odeon, à l'apparition des
fantômes de l'appartement incendié et recourir aux
bons offices du vestiaire. 25

This aspect of Lenormand's work can be traced to his
earlier interest in the Grand Guignol, which to some extent
manifested itself in his later works. For this reason
ostensibly Paul Surer has classified the author's work as
one of the most characteristic examples of the "Théâtre violent"
between the wars. 26  Although the occult does not enter into
all of Lenormand's plays, the emotional response that it pro-
duces in L'Homme et ses fantômes and L'Amour magicien is
undeniably strongly dramatic. The author, however, was sincere
in his use of the theme of the supernatural believing that the
théâtre d'égouante was a viable literary genre. Moreover, as
shown in the preceding chapter occultism is, with the exception
of La Dent rouge, by no means extraneous to the action and
conflicts of the plays, but rather is tightly interwoven with
the psychological and environmental forces: it is not one of
the gratuitous elements that the melodrama featured.

Nevertheless, the declining reputation of Lenormand's

25Lenormand, Confessions, II, 132.
26Surer, Le Théâtre Français, p. 185.
plays since the late 1920's may be accounted for by the ephemeral topicality of occultism and also of psychological theories. Now that the wide-spread enthusiasm that mysticism and Freudian psychoanalysis enjoyed has since faded, the success of many of Lenormand's plays has decreased. Although his true merits do not lie specifically upon fashionable psychoanalytic or occult theories, they are the salient features of his drama through which he expressed his concept of man as a creature motivated by instinct, a point of view that has been somewhat outmoded by modern thought. Added to this, certain artistic flaws have caused hesitations on the part of recent critics to accord literary importance to Lenormand's works.

The weak construction of his plays which result from the lengthy explanations is the author's greatest fault in this respect. The improbability of many situations in Lenormand's dramatic works has lent substance to the criticism against his theatre, although the fantasies of a contemporary such as Giraudoux are accepted. The basis of this attack is the belief that his drama is placed in a naturalistic setting, although his opinions on dramatic techniques in many respects similar to those of Gaston Baty, and the *mise en scène* given to a number of his plays by Pitoëff should discourage such an idea. The greatest feature of Lenormand's theatre is the art with which the author has presented man's subconscious phantoms and the forces of nature and the occult upon the stage. The tableau, the use of lighting and the expressing of psychological conflict
by gestures and involuntary acts are aspects of the author's works which attest to an artistic ability that has fallen into an undeserved neglect.
CONCLUSION

A NOTE ON THE AUTHOR AND HIS OEUVRE

Lenormand's work is, to a great extent, a product of its times. Enriched by the new ideas of the early twentieth century, it incorporated the complexity of Freudian thought and the interplay of man and exterior influences. These ideas on the working of the human mind provided a rich source of inspiration to the author. Yet Lenormand's drama is more than the adaptation of scientific theory to the stage. The concepts that psychoanalysis gave him were transformed through the author's own personality and creativity. In contradiction to the scientific method, the value of Lenormand's drama resides in what is left unexpressed, which he captured artistically in his tableaux. Action is rarely a progression in Lenormand's plays. It is presented in a succession of fixed moments, a method which seems to indicate the influence of Bergson's concept of time. The greatest impact of the author's work is found in this presentation of subconscious conflict, and it was heightened through the talents of Pitoëff.

The most important source of Lenormand's drama owes less to Freud and to Bergson than it does to the author's own life. In fact, a description of the playwright's characters could in most cases equally apply to Lenormand himself, for the world that he created on the stage was a reflection of his own experiences. Lenormand's drama can be said to be the fruit
of his incessant introspection as he searched the recesses of his own personality. This is perhaps the author's greatest fault in that his characters as himself are very much neurotic products of an era and his works echo too strongly the values of his times. A life-long Don Juan, the author's promiscuity was aroused less by a need to satisfy his physical wants than by the desire to grasp something that would appease his anxiety. He believed that women held the key that would unlock the secrets about himself which always escaped him. Living in an era of tensions and doubt he tried to give a solid basis to his life, a certitude that would end the emotional uneasiness of a man caught between the inability and the need to discover truth. It was a dilemma that made him both an amoralist and a moral critic, both a sceptic and a believer in the occult.

Although it cannot be said that Lenormand tried to present himself on stage in a single character, he was to a great extent part of all of his characters. Like Jacques, he was an aesthete repulsed by the horrors of war; like Albert, he struggled for a means to believe in what science contradicted; like Sarterre, he sought to create without restraint. He injected into all of his characters the conflicts and the ambivalence that were his own in an age of transition as he defied the conventions of the past and suffered the uncertainties of the future.

He was, in fact, a part of what had gone by and what was to come. Although in many ways a Romantic in his view of
artistic creativity, his characters like Lui and Nico anticipate the anguish of the existentialist hero confronted with the absurdity of the universe. He wanted to renew the stage by applying a modern psychoanalytic interpretation of man and at the same time bring drama back to its origins by the recreation of ancient Greek tragedy. If he produced plays that condemned Christianity because he believed that man's nature was fundamentally amoral, he also expressed in his drama the feeling that evil existed in a world devoid of meaning.

Lenormand recognized the contradictions that were deeply implanted in him and in his works but he never attempted to rectify them. He thought that man could not be understood if he is looked upon as a unity because man is the conflict of ambivalent desires and motivations which rage in his subconscious mind. The author's thought cannot be regarded as a single philosophy precisely because it absorbed these contradictions without answering them. Lenormand tried to show the complexities of the human psyche which his characters strive to unravel but, like the author himself, they struggle fruitlessly in this task; for man, who has accomplished tremendous scientific feats, is incapable of deciphering the inscrutable mystery of his own being:

Partout le tourment d'expliquer, de connaître, qui se brise sur les murailles de l'inconnaissable.¹

¹Blanchart, Le Théâtre de H.-R. Lenormand, p. 119.
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