

THE TREATMENT OF THE PROBLEM OF EVIL  
IN THE THEATRE OF LENORMAND

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A Thesis

Submitted to the School of Graduate Studies  
in Partial Fulfilment of the Requirements  
for the Degree  
Master of Arts

McMaster University

October 1972

MASTER OF ARTS (1972)  
(Romance Languages)

McMASTER UNIVERSITY  
Hamilton, Ontario

TITLE: The Treatment of the Problem of Evil in the Theatre  
of Lenormand.

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SUPERVISOR: Dr. E. W. Knight.

NUMBER OF PAGES: iv, 160.

SCOPE AND CONTENTS: An analysis of Lenormand's principal  
plays to demonstrate the playwright's portrayal of man's  
innate capacity for evil.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

I should like to express my thanks to Dr. E. W. Knight for the helpful comments he made while I was preparing this thesis.

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## INTRODUCTION

The literary imbroglio surrounding the dramatic output of Henri-René Lenormand has stemmed not only from a failure on the part of critics to come to grips with the true sources from which the dramatist drew his inspiration, but also from an inability to fully comprehend the personality of the man. Seizing upon the parallels existing between Freudian theories and many of the plays of Lenormand, some critics have hastened to label him a disciple of Freud. Others have portrayed his dramas as a vehicle deliberately contrived to propagandize the ideas of Bergson and Poincaré. Yet others see Lenormand as a morbid iconoclast with a pessimistic view of humanity.

The purpose of this dissertation is to examine the morality of Lenormand as expressed in his theatre and to determine the extent to which biographical elements were a motivating factor in the shaping of his ideas. It is in the light of such an investigation that Lenormand's portrayal of man whom he considered to be the prey of ambivalent tendencies, and his concept of and attitude towards the question of evil can best be determined.

The period between the two World Wars was, for the French theatre, one of intense experimentation and innovation. Repudiation of conformity, pseudo-classicism and servile

adherence to realistic scenery was followed by passionate foraging in the realm of subconscious motivation with the avowed purpose of unmasking the subtle complexities of the inner self. Daniel-Rops summarizes the situation as follows:

Malgré les résistances . . . il nous paraît certain que les méthodes du psychiatre viennois doivent provoquer dans notre littérature, un courant de renouvellement, parce qu'elles heurtent avec violence un grand nombre de notions que les Français ont coutume de tenir pour stables.<sup>1</sup>

Among the literary innovators were individuals like J.-J. Bernard, J.-J. Pellerin, Charles Vildrac, Paul Geraldry and Alfred Savoir. Evidence of Lenormand's primary importance in the group is the fact that in 1925 these playwrights unanimously elected him the first president of the "Groupement des jeunes auteurs dramatiques".

Although this group did not form a school of literature in the narrow sense of the term, its members adhered to a common philosophy, namely, the elucidation of the human psyche, the investigation of the latent forces which determine the behaviour of the individual, but which are shrouded deep within his subconscious mind. "Il ne s'agit pas de parler de tout cela, mais de rendre tout cela

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<sup>1</sup>Henry Daniel-Rops, Sur le Théâtre de H.-R. Lenormand (Paris: Editions des Cahiers Libres, 1926), p. 113.

sensible",<sup>2</sup> claimed Gaston Baty speaking about the group of young dramatists who wanted him to "rethéâtraliser le théâtre".<sup>3</sup> Since their goal was the revolutionary emancipation of the French theatre from the intellectual morass of insularity and traditionalism which encumbered its creativity, these men, in their choice of subject matter for their dramas, were considerably influenced by innovative ideas. Metaphysics, psychiatry, spiritualism and sociology were some of the sources to which they had recourse and from which they sought inspiration.

In the introductory chapter to his Melody of Chaos,<sup>4</sup> Houston Peterson describes the theatrical preoccupation with the new fields of exploration opened by psychology which had turned it from an analysis of physiological functions to an investigation of the multiplicity of instincts and emotions which form the consciousness of modern man. Peterson correctly points out that novelists, dramatists and poets alike were concerned mainly, not with man's deeds and definite beliefs, but with his aimless reveries, secret

<sup>2</sup>Gaston Baty, "Théâtre Nouveau, Notes et Documents", Masques, IV (Paris), 14.

<sup>3</sup>G. Baty, Rideau baissé (Paris: Bordas, 1949), p. 7.

<sup>4</sup>Houston Peterson, The Melody of Chaos (New York: Longmans, 1931), p. 1.

motivations and subconscious drives. Lenormand, sensitive to this new direction of psychology, was foremost among those who endeavoured to reveal the incredible complexity, obscurity and absurdity of what was once called the immortal human soul. Referring to the new dramatic trends, he stated:

L'homme des années 1900-1920 a découvert ou cru découvrir son inconscient. C'est là une admirable aventure qui doit conduire à reviser toutes nos valeurs sentimentales. Je ne connais pas d'excitation artistique plus féconde que cette reconstruction de l'univers humain de l'émotivité. Tout le théâtre peut rebondir sur ce tremplin-là.<sup>5</sup>

The directors with whom Lenormand was associated -- Georges Pitoëff, Gaston Baty, Charles Dullin and Louis Jouvet -- were sympathetic to his artistic objectives and refused to accept plays inspired by the naturalism of the previous generation or the commercialism of the debased "Boulevard" theatre.

Lenormand's theatre is infused with an atmosphere peculiar to his dramatic thought. Paul Surer regards it as "le théâtre violent".<sup>6</sup> For Blanchart it is a "univers, en fait, plein de maléfices, dont l'atmosphère exige de robustes poumons pour résister à une asphyxie à peu près constamment

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Comoedia, June 15, 1923, quoted by Louise Delpit, Paris-Théâtre contemporain, Première Partie, p. 107.

<sup>6</sup>Paul Surer, Le Théâtre français contemporain (Paris: S.E.D.E.S., 1964), p. 149.



menaçante".<sup>7</sup> Lenormand's theatre is a study of abnormal human behaviour: moral decadence, vice, undisciplined eroticism and neurotic obsessions. There is no proof, however, of any improbity in Lenormand's quest for morbidity or of any deliberate exploitation of scandalous topics for the purpose of sensationalism. It was rather the case that he was impelled by a passionate desire to unearth the roots of the distortions of human nature and to expose them to full view. His portrayal is that of twentieth-century man, who, in spite of his great scientific and literary achievements, is socially and morally unbalanced.

Most of Lenormand's plays are, to a certain degree, a reflection of his temperament and of incidents which took place in his life. The two volumes of his Confessions d'un auteur dramatique furnish enlightening commentary on his work. This autobiography provides us with the sources of his preoccupation with various themes. It is important to note that the date of production is not necessarily an indication of the order of composition, and that the theme of one play may be developed in another, a fact which lends a certain cohesiveness to Lenormand's theatre. It is for this reason that an analysis of his dramatic treatment of the

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<sup>7</sup>Paul Blanchart, Le Théâtre de H.-R. Lenormand, Apocalypse d'une Société (Paris: Masques, 1947), p. 233.

problem of evil will exclude a chronological examination of his plays unless such a consideration is deemed expedient.

The relevance of our appraisal of Lenormand's personality is not difficult to establish. Early in his career the dramatist became convinced that the work of art should be a release of the subconscious obsessions of the artist. Lenormand's theatre may therefore be regarded as a representation of hidden traits and repressed forces which might have crushed him if he had not made them the subject matter of his plays. His destructive desires, many of which were inhibited in his life, find vicarious satisfaction in his theatre through his projection on the stage of individuals for whom he feels affinity but in whose presence he feels dread.

CHAPTER I  
EROS AND EVIL

Lenormand's dramatic purpose -- that of exploring and revealing the inner, obscure forces, the unconscious conflicts and ambivalent tendencies which motivate the human personality -- was clearly stated by him: "toutes mes pièces tendent vers l'élucidation du mystère de la vie intérieure, vers la déchiffrement de l'énigme que l'homme est pour lui-même".<sup>1</sup> Since Lenormand's dramas constitute a careful probe into the psychological disorders which afflict mankind, the playwright has been subjected to varying critical comments. As early as the nineteen-twenties he was recognized as the "dramaturge de l'inconscient, d'abord, par où il se rattache à un commencement de tradition, -- ensuite il est, dans l'inconscient, le dramaturge de la sexualité, par où il est entièrement original".<sup>2</sup> Pierre Brisson expressed a similar opinion:

M. Lenormand se plaît à montrer dans chacune de ses pièces des personnages dépossédés d'eux-mêmes et qui sont le jouet des fatalités intérieures. Les forces obscures qui les mènent échappent à leur intervention, mais non à la clairvoyance de l'auteur. M. Lenormand nous découvre avec beaucoup d'art les mouvements secrets de la conscience et de l'instinct.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Lenormand, "Mon Théâtre", La Revue Bleue (Paris, April 21, 1928), 234.

<sup>2</sup>Gaston Rageot, Prise de vues (Paris), p. 114.

<sup>3</sup>Pierre Brisson, Le Temps (Paris, October 16, 1924), 5.

In 1925 Lenormand claimed that contemporary man was haunted by a two-sided anxiety: ". . .la double inquiétude qui nous hante, celle de l'homme qui devient et celle du monde qui devient".<sup>4</sup> However, in spite of his desire to portray individuals preoccupied with the problems of mental imbalance and emotional instability, he had no intention whatsoever of propounding or promoting any special doctrine of philosophy or psychology. In his Confessions Lenormand denies the need for the artist to be socially or politically "committed" in the way that Shaw or Ibsen was:

J'ai toujours pensé qu'un art cesse d'être respectable s'il prétend démontrer ou réfuter une doctrine scientifique . . . .L'artiste qui applique ou utilise des théories est la proie d'un bien triste démon.<sup>5</sup>

This kind of statement was, in part, a refutation of the opinion of those critics who claimed that Lenormand wanted to expound the ideas of Freud in his plays. Such a view was founded primarily on the fact that Lenormand's theatre consistently deals with incoherent neurotics obsessed with anxiety who spend their energies in a vain struggle to attain tranquillity and to discover the secrets of their being. But this belief was also the result of erroneous interpretations of statements made by Lenormand. In an interview with

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<sup>4</sup>Lenormand, "Le Théâtre d'avant-garde et ses tendances", Le Nouveau Journal (Lyon, March 10, 1925).

<sup>5</sup>Lenormand, Les Confessions d'un auteur dramatique (Paris, 1949), I, 37.

André Lang, the playwright stated a conviction which was wrongly construed and led to much misconception about his dramatic purpose:

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.<sup>6</sup>

John Palmer echoed the opinions of many of his colleagues when he claimed: "You will find nothing in the plays of M. Lenormand which you have not found already in the works of Freud and his successors".<sup>7</sup> Lenormand vigorously defended himself against this sort of accusation: "Malheur à l'artiste qui voudrait se servir de la psychanalyse, l'exploiter ou l'appliquer dans ses ouvrages! Elle leur conférerait un caractère d'irréremédiable caducité".<sup>8</sup> Lenormand was both surprised and annoyed that many of his plays especially Le Mangeur de Rêves and L'Homme et ses fantômes were regarded as dramatic portrayals of Freudian theories.

Lenormand only learnt of the precepts of Freud in

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<sup>6</sup>André Lang, Voyage en zigzags dans la République des Lettres (Paris, n.d.), p. 265.

<sup>7</sup>John Palmer, "H.-R. Lenormand and the Plays of Psychoanalysis", Nineteenth Century (July 1, 1925), 354.

<sup>8</sup>Lenormand, interviewed by Gaston Picard, Vient de Paraître (Paris, July 1, 1925), 354.

1917 in Davos, Switzerland, after having written most of the "psychoanalytic" plays. Furthermore, the playwright's ignorance of German and the unavailability of a French translation curtailed his examination of Freud's theories.<sup>9</sup> His only source of reference until years later was Brill's translation into English of Freud's work.<sup>10</sup> However, the critics who believed Lenormand's vehement and explicit denials of being a propagandist writer were few in number. Pierre Brisson, one of these, comments as follows:

La critique a raison, lorsqu'elle veut que M. Lenormand soit d'abord un psychanalyste. Et M. Lenormand n'a pas tort, lorsqu'il se défend d'user du théâtre dans le but de répandre une doctrine.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>9</sup>On June 13, 1925, Lenormand wrote in the newspaper Information Universitaire (Paris): "Je ne sais pas l'allemand et la première traduction française d'un ouvrage de Freud, date, je crois, de 1922. J'ai admiré l'ingéniosité des critiques qui ont décelé des traces de freudisme dans mes pièces écrites à une époque où le nom même de Freud m'était inconnu".

<sup>10</sup>Sigmund Freud, The Interpretation of Dreams, translated by A. A. Brill (London: G. Allen & Co. Ltd., 1913).

<sup>11</sup>Pierre Brisson, Les Annales (26 octobre 1924), 441. Ten years later, Christian Sénéchal expressed a similar viewpoint: "Les mystères du subconscient. -- Le premier nom à citer ici est celui de l'auteur dramatique H.-R. Lenormand. Indépendamment de Freud qui ne fit que confirmer sa croyance à la signification des rêves et à la survie profonde des sentiments de la première enfance, H.-R. Lenormand prolonge l'effort du réalisme psychologique au théâtre, en étudiant chez l'homme autre chose que 'La manifestation de sa conscience claire'. Pour lui, la vérité n'est pas un rond de soleil sur un mur blanc, il y a beaucoup d'ombres qui grignotent le disque de la vérité. René Lenormand se sera fait l'explorateur hardi de ces zones obscures qui enveloppent le moi conscient et volontaire".  
Christian Sénéchal, Les Grands Courants de la littérature

François Porché also refused to follow popular opinion and preferred to see Lenormand as a dramatist concerned with revealing hidden truths:

Il plonge dans la vie la plus réelle, qui est la plus secrète, et tâche même à découvrir, derrière la vérité apparente, avouée, la vérité profonde, souvent inavouable, et à s'en délivrer par expulsion ou par arrachement.<sup>12</sup>

The depraved impulses which Lenormand examines in his theatre have their roots in most cases in a distortion of the sexual drive. A substantiation of this affirmation may be established from a cursory examination of the themes of some of the plays of the Théâtre complet. The problem of incest is raised in Le Simoun, that of latent homosexuality in L'Homme et ses fantômes; the Oedipus complex is a theme of Le Mangeur de Rêves and prostitution that of La Maison des Remparts and to a lesser extent of Les Ratés. Furthermore, promiscuity is central to the plot of Les Trois Chambres and Une Vie secrète while Mixture illustrates the conflicts that characterize maternal affection. It is not surprising that critics were aghast at this kind of presentation in the theatre and considered Lenormand's dramas to be experiments

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française contemporaine (Paris: Société française d'Editions Littéraires et Techniques, 1934), p. 234.

<sup>12</sup> François Porché, Revue de Paris (Paris, April 1, 1931), p. 687.

in psychoanalysis rather than theatrical fare. A typical viewpoint is the one expressed by E. A. Baughan, a British drama critic:

The French dramatist's plays are inspired by the curious introspective sickness which the War inspired in sensitive minds. Lenormand's subjects are depressing . . . .I cannot understand why any dramatist should wish to deal with them on the stage. They are unhealthy attempts to dive into the innermost recesses of diseased human minds.<sup>13</sup>

S. A. Rhodes might well have been expressing the sentiment of the majority of his contemporaries towards Lenormand's theatre when he stated that if the designation "Les Fleurs du Mal" had not been made familiar already as the title of Baudelaire's well-known masterpiece, it might have been applied appropriately to name collectively the dramatic work of Lenormand.<sup>14</sup>

However, justification for sexuality as a relevant "point de départ" in the analysis of the human psyche can be adduced. Firstly, of all the instincts and desires, the sexual instinct is the one that most transcends man's conscious awareness of himself. Secondly, the component that

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<sup>13</sup>E. A. Baughan, "Unhealthy Modern Plays", John O'London's Weekly (London, October 27, 1928), 104.

<sup>14</sup>S. A. Rhodes, The Contemporary French Theatre (New York: Crofts, 1942), p. 2.



unites and directs the human sexual impulses is purely mental or imaginative, although it is usually strongly tied to sensual impressions. Thirdly, in the sexual impulse, the gap between man's purpose and nature's seems unusually wide. It is for this reason that there are more perversions of the sexual urge than of any other preservative impulse. Lenormand was conscious of the fact that the restrictions placed upon the union of male and female by the progress of twentieth-century civilization had complicated this biological urge to the extent of producing queer patterns of behaviour. Furthermore, he realized that these restrictions do not accomplish their desired end, that of the suppression of the biological urge; rather, they merely compel the cravings to remain repressed for varying periods and to emerge eventually in morbid, destructive outlets which they have created for themselves.

Lenormand's assertion, at the turn of the century, that the sexual impulse is one of the deepest and most powerful of man's subconscious forces, produced something of a furore, since the previous century had been an age of social idealism, and nineteenth-century man preferred to think that his deepest urges were of a more creditable nature -- towards knowledge and social betterment, for example.

In Le Simoun, regarded by Dorothy Knowles as

Lenormand's most successful play,<sup>15</sup> *Laurency*, a French businessman in the Algerian Sahara, manifests the type of anxiety peculiar to Lenormand's characters. He is unable to find with his passionate, half-caste mistress Alescha the respite and tranquillity which he so earnestly desires: "J'ai besoin de paix et d'une 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".<sup>16</sup> He hopes that with the arrival of his daughter, Clotilde, whom he has not seen since her childhood, he will be able to resolve most of his problems. However, Clotilde's striking resemblance to Laurency's deceased wife, Yvonne, momentarily disturbs him in such a way that the audience is given a glimpse of an imminent inner turmoil within Laurency: "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".<sup>17</sup> Laurency's psychological state is

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<sup>15</sup> Dorothy Knowles, *French Drama of the Inter-War Years* (London: Harrap, 1967), p. 94. *Le Simoun* was first produced by Gaston Baty for Fermin Gémier at the Comédie-Montaigne on December 21, 1921, and, after revivals at the Odéon and the Théâtre Pigalle by Gémier and Baty, took its place in the repertory of the Comédie Française in 1937. It was withdrawn, however, after a mere thirty performances, as a result of ministerial pressure. A newspaper article by Pierre Miller in which he alleged that it was dangerous to put on a play at a national theatre showing colonial settlers in a bad light, was responsible for this action.

<sup>16</sup> H.-R. Lenormand, *Théâtre complet* (Paris, 1942), II, 13.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid., p. 36.

perceived on another occasion. When L'Agha des Laarba proposes a marriage between his son, Giaour, and Clotilde, Laurency's refusal is utter and oddly vehement.

Laurency gradually becomes torn by unbearable incestuous thoughts. In a moment of great emotional stress, he calls Clotilde by his wife's name. On another occasion, in a kind of incoherent, passionate stupor, he kisses his daughter's picture. This nightmarish situation ravages Laurency both physically and mentally as he desperately struggles, like the typical Lenormand hero, to regain even the slightest degree of normalcy against forces beyond his comprehension but which pursue him with relentless fury. He confesses with fair lucidity to the Vérificateur that the unbearable suffering and mental anguish unleashed by Clotilde's presence are even more devastating than his wife's cruelty: "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".<sup>18</sup> Clotilde awakens within Laurency forbidden desires which leave him quivering and frightened. His reaction to his daughter's murder by Afescha is vital for a total comprehension of his moral instability:

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<sup>18</sup>Ibid., p. 137.

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'attente. Et cela se traduit par trois larges aspirations involontaires, qui soulèvent profondément tout son buste.<sup>19</sup>

The relief that Laurency experiences seems to be the expression of an ambivalence between paternal and incestuous love. Serge Radine points out that "le thème de l'inceste, le côté exotique de l'oeuvre mis à part, est le vrai sujet du Simoun".<sup>20</sup>

An analysis of Laurency's incestuous thoughts about his daughter involves a confrontation with the question of classification of feelings into sentiments, dispositions and complexes. It would seem obvious that Laurency's evil thoughts about his daughter do not fall into the first category if we define a sentiment as a psychological constellation acceptable to the individual and with which he consciously identifies himself. We are reminded of Laurency's long and surprisingly lucid confessions to the Vérificateur about his fearful, immoral thoughts concerning Clotilde.<sup>21</sup>

<sup>19</sup>Ibid., p. 165.

<sup>20</sup>Serge Radine, Anouilh, Lenormand, Salacrou (Geneva: Editions des Trois Collines, 1951), p. 59.

<sup>21</sup>Laurency explains his initial reaction to the discovery of his incestuous passion for his daughter: "Depuis que je sais, je n'ose plus dire un mot, faire un geste. Je me sauve quand elle arrive . . . Je me cache derrière le cimetière . . . là où les Bicots jettent leurs ordures. C'est ma place . . . Il y a des moments où je

However, this feeling can hardly be said to be an ideal or that Laurency consciously cultivates it. The most that we can say is that Laurency displays a frightened awareness of it.

Dispositions differ from sentiments in that they are unconsciously accepted. Their activities are spontaneous so that to act in response to them is "second nature". It can be safely assumed that a man's disposition is not inherited, but, like the sentiments, is formed from emotional experience. This point seems to be the crux of the matter. Laurency's deep love for his wife had made him excuse her unfaithfulness. But this love was bizarre because of its very nature, a fact he pointed out to the Vérificateur: "C'était une créature futile et cruelle, je l'aimais peut-être à cause du mal qu'elle me faisait".<sup>22</sup> If one, in view of the evidence, makes the assumption that Laurency's love for his wife was founded in self-destruction, one may therefore conclude that since Clotilde bears such a striking resemblance to Yvonne, Laurency's love for his wife, transferred to Clotilde, is a sentiment which unconsciously seeks self-destruction.

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voudrais être un brute". The playwright draws a parallel between the physical disintegration represented by the garbage and the moral disintegration which is symbolized by Laurency's state of mind. Lenormand, Théâtre complet, II, 137.

<sup>22</sup>Ibid., p. 137.

Complexes, like sentiments and dispositions, may be described as psychological constellations formed from the attachment of the instinctive emotions to objects or experiences presented by the environment, but which, owing to their painful or repugnant character, are unacceptable to the "Self". Complexes may be recognized or unrecognized, that is, repressed. If we place Laurency's incestuous attachment to his daughter in this category, then the most positive proof that we can adduce would be his admonition to his daughter about her style of dress: "Je te prie, à l'avenir de ne plus paraître devant des étrangers dans une pareille tenue . . . ni même devant ton père, tu entends, ni même devant ton père".<sup>23</sup> Laurency's anger, containing as it does an edge of fear, seems to be an emotion which is psychologically repugnant and therefore voluntarily suppressed. However, this suppression only results in more mental disorders.

In describing Lenormand's characters, a careful distinction should be drawn between terms such as "anxiety" and "anxiety neurosis". Anxiety may arise from an active, recognized conflict of instincts. Therefore Laurency's psychological problem may be superficially described as a

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<sup>23</sup>Ibid., p. 152.

conflict between paternal and incestuous love which results in anxiety. Anxiety neurosis, on the other hand, as distinct from mere anxiety, is occasioned by the fact that our fear is of something unknown of which we get terrifying, hallucinatory glimpses and which haunt our days with a pursuing horror. The three long sighs heaved by Laurency at Clotilde's death seem to be indicative of the relief he feels at the disappearance of this horror.

In Le Simoun Lenormand's personal viewpoint is not easy to discover but occasional glimpses are detected in Laurency's conversation with the Vérificateur:

VERIFICATEUR, avec douceur -- La nature ne se soucie ni du bien ni du mal que l'homme s'est donné. Elle ne connaît que des attractions et des répulsions.

LAURENCY, relevant la tête -- . . . C'est mon âme seule qui est ivre . . . . Ce sont les mêmes tourments que du temps de ma femme . . . . C'est le même poison . . . la même grande soif.

LE VERIFICATEUR -- Une soif que rien ne peut éteindre . . . . Les corps ne peuvent pas être mieux saturés que les âmes. Le feu lui-même ne s'assouvit pas sur l'objet qu'il convoite. Il le brûle et s'éteint.

LAURENCY -- Alors, pourquoi le désir?

LE VERIFICATEUR -- Il n'y a pas de raison: C'est la loi.<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>24</sup>Ibid., p. 138.

One important aspect of this conversation is the identification of sexual desire with the desire for knowledge of man's true motivation. The Vérificateur's affirmation of the impossibility of total satisfaction of erotic as well as of intellectual desires seems to represent Lenormand's own viewpoint. Since desire, man's unquenchable thirst for an absolute certainty, is a primary characteristic of humanity, Lenormand's portrayal may be considered pessimistic because, according to the playwright, such desire will be eternally frustrated.

Lenormand's basic amorality and determinism are suggested by the Vérificateur's declaration that nature's impulses cannot be classified as being good or evil but are only indicative of positive or negative energies. Nevertheless, there are instances in Le Simoun which seem to counter Lenormand's amorality and the views of those who see the playwright as a complete pessimist. The conversation between the prophet and the old man is a case in point. The former foresees a holocaust in which humanity will be annihilated in expiation for its evils. He insists on the absurdity of aspiration for longevity since the human race is doomed to obliteration. The prophet points out that man's conscience is the fundamental "mal" which will cause the universal cataclysm. The old man's reply to this morbid prophet of doom is important:



Tu veux que la vie s'éteigne . . . .Mais tu as  
 près de cent ans et tu es encore vivant. Tu  
 dis: "couchez-vous dans la poussière . . . ."  
 mais tu es assis, prophétisant, maudissant . . . .  
 Tu dis que l'univers est un songe . . .mais tu  
 es malade de lui, comme d'une fièvre. Tu te  
 moques des croyants . . .mais tu crois au  
 néant . . . .Es-tu certain d'y croire? Tu n'es  
 peut-être pas plus sûr de lui que nous du  
 paradis . . . .Tu cherches . . . .Tu ne sais  
 pas. Tu es avec nous . . .dans l'angoisse . . . .  
 Certes, il y a beaucoup à dire contre cette vie,  
 en cela, tu n'as pas tort! . . .Et pourtant . . . .  
 (Egrenant son chapelet.) Dieu veuille me la  
 conserver aussi longtemps que possible . . . .  
 Comme elle est, Seigneur, ni meilleure, ni  
 pire . . . .Comme elle est.<sup>25</sup>

In expressing both his acceptance of the world as it is and his refusal to completely condemn humanity or to pray for its annihilation, the old man endeavours to transform despair into optimism. It is worth noting that Lenormand lived life to the full and professed his pleasure in many of the features of modern society. Nevertheless, the final impression left on the audience concerning Lenormand's attitude to the evils of the world is that of an ambivalence between a dour forecast of human extinction and an acceptance of a life of anguish which might lead to transcendence rather than negation. An appreciation of this kind of ambivalence which is an aspect not only of Le Simoun but of most of the playwright's mature dramas is vital for a full understanding of his theatre.

Traditionally, critics have used Le Mangeur de Rêves

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<sup>25</sup>Ibid., p. 82.

to show the influence of Freud on Lenormand.<sup>26</sup> The subject matter of the play is Freudian since it depicts the study of a case of neurosis brought on by an infantile emotional block, reawakened by Luc de Bronte through the psychoanalytic method. However, although the doctrines associated with the name of Freud were both a means of exposition of his characters' thoughts and motives and, indeed, an actual subject matter of his work, Lenormand did not design Le Mangeur de Rêves as a Freudian treatise but as a tragic dramatization of the obsession for discovering knowledge of man's hidden motives:

Le sujet du Mangeur de Rêves, c'est le démon de la connaissance aux prises avec les scrupules et les hypocrisies de la conscience féminine qui fuit devant son grand secret: les tendances érotiques infantiles de l'humanité.<sup>27</sup>

Lenormand's inspiration was not obtained by delving into Freudian theory, a fact he himself did not tire to point out, but by encountering persons like Rose Vallerest who had been profoundly affected by experiences in which Freudian theories had played an important role:

Une pièce comme Le Mangeur de Rêves, la moins voilée de mes réactions au freudisme, n'a cependant pas été conçue sous l'influence directe des théories de Freud. L'influence de Freud n'a

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<sup>26</sup>Pierre Brisson noted that "les conceptions freudiennes s'accordaient étrangement avec ses propres tendances". Les Annales (Paris, October 26, 1924), 441.

<sup>27</sup>Lenormand, Comoedia (Paris, November 23, 1921), 1.

pas été pour moi une influence livresque . . . .  
 Mais j'ai rencontré des êtres profondément  
 modelés, transformés par la pensée freudienne.  
 C'est de ces rencontres qu'est sorti Le Mangeur  
 de Rêves. La pièce est une espèce de confession  
 anticipée, une dramatisation du possible. Les  
 personnages principaux, au sujet desquels on a  
 crié à l'invraisemblance, ont existé. Je n'ai  
 imaginé que l'action.<sup>28</sup>

Most of Lenormand's plays had already been written when he first read Freud and he admitted only two influences:

(1) Like Freud, he believed that incidents in a person's childhood could have repercussions in his adult years.

(2) Dreams, he thought, could be utilized to investigate subconscious motivations. However, it is important to note that Lenormand did not accept many of the conclusions of psychoanalysis. Indeed, Le Mangeur de Rêves is a clever vilification of the practitioners of Freudian theories:

Le Mangeur de Rêves est non pas une réaction directe au freudisme, mais la peinture d'une humanité possédée par le mauvais génie de l'analyse. Ce drame contient d'ailleurs pour celui qui sait lire une amère critique des théories freudiennes.<sup>29</sup>

In this play the psychoanalyst and disciple of Freud, Luc de Bronte, tries to heal his patient Jeannine Felse of a vague fear fostered by dreams. In these dreams which stem from a forgotten childhood incident that had caused Jeannine's

<sup>28</sup> Lenormand, interview with Gaston Picard, Vient de Paraître (Paris, July 1, 1925), 354.

<sup>29</sup> Lenormand, Le Monde (Paris, October 27, 1928).

mother to be murdered by robbers, Jeannine sees her mother lying in a coffin. Luc's obsession with Freud's theories leads him to interpret wrongly Jeannine's dreams as signs of an Oedipus complex on her part. This interpretation, instead of alleviating her anxiety, increases it. In fact, Jeannine's dreams become more frightening as she now sees herself in the terrifying role of her mother's murderer. Nevertheless, she is coherent enough to divine Luc's malevolent intentions: "mais il me semble que si je vous les dévoilais, au lieu de les alléger, vous les agrandiriez . . . en y attachant trop d'importance".<sup>30</sup>

In his zeal to analyze her mind, Luc unleashes forces over which he has no control. The result is Jeannine's suicide.

A close examination of Jeannine's behaviour reveals all the signs of the repressed complexes. It is noteworthy that as Luc persists in his incompetent analysis, Jeannine's dreams become more infused with terror:

Je me voyais tout enfant, près d'une ouverture du rocher. Le vent du soir agitait mon châle vert. Maman était près de moi . . . Et elle tombait sans que je l'eusse touchée. Elle mourait d'un de mes regards.<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>30</sup>Lenormand, Théâtre complet, II, 220.

<sup>31</sup>Ibid., p. 248.

She also dreams that her horse is galloping towards a precipice. Her desire for a violent death is typical of the psychotic who feels the need for punishment: "Mais une mort assez facile, ce serait un bienfait auquel je n'ai pas de droit".<sup>32</sup> Jeannine manifests the type of sexual frustration common to people with repressed complexes: "mais c'est si dur d'être privée de caresses. Il y'avait près d'un an qu'un homme ne m'avait pas serrée dans ses bras".<sup>33</sup>

She is unable to act normally even under the most favourable conditions because of her guilty past which haunts her:

L'an dernier à la clinique, il y avait un jeune homme qui me faisait la cour . . . .Un soir, je n'ai plus su . . .ou plus voulu me défendre . . .et le lendemain j'ai essayé de me jeter dans l'eau.<sup>34</sup>

What Lenormand wishes to show is that for individuals like Jeannine guilt which is repressed produces psychoneuroses which may be described as being the morbid manifestation of such repression. It is Luc, the symbol of intellectual evil, who precipitates evil by reawakening Jeannine's complicity in her mother's murder, a memory which is so

<sup>32</sup>Ibid., p. 277.

<sup>33</sup>Ibid., p. 228.

<sup>34</sup>Ibid., p. 226.

repugnant that it kills her. Thus a revelation of the truth does not promote the salvation that Luc claims that he desires. Instead the result is disaster. Luc claims that his desire to probe the innermost crevices of the human mind is that of the physician who wishes to heal his patient:

Je ressemble à Bakou, ce démon japonais dont la fonction spéciale est de dévorer les mauvais songes et en les dévorant, d'en délivrer le dormeur. Il change la terreur en joie. C'est un démon bienfaisant. Je suis pareil au bon mangeur de rêves.<sup>35</sup>

This pretence is, however, completely unmasked by Fearon, one of Luc's former victims. She holds the mirror to Luc. Fearon, a former polished, upper-class young lady had been analysed years before by Luc. He had revealed to her that under her veneer of social respectability was the heart of a criminal. This revelation had driven Fearon to various nefarious activities, which, according to Luc, were an indication of her true subconscious motivation. Thus in the Le Mangeur de Rêves, it is as the active participant in various evil activities that we meet Fearon. However, now she understands and exposes Luc for what he is, a cruel, pathetic figure so obsessed by psychiatry that he is driven to a state of deriving pleasure from evil:

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<sup>35</sup>Ibid., p. 227.

Tu ne cherches pas la vérité, tu cherches la volupté, en palpant lentement les confidences honteuses. Elles te sont des aubaines meilleures que les plus beaux corps. Elles t'apportent l'assouvissement maladif que les étreintes réelles ne peuvent plus te procurer. Ces secrets étalés te remplacent l'amour. La science n'est qu'un écran avec lequel tu veux cacher ta folie.<sup>36</sup>

So Luc destroys others although claiming to cure them since his interest in analyzing their thoughts has merely been to discover secrets rather than help them. One may also conclude that his attempts to capitalize on Jeannine's hunger for affection by professing an amorous interest in her was merely motivated by a desire to allay her fears of his ultimate intention in order that he might be able to delve even more deeply into her mind. It is Luc's obsessive desire to unearth secrets which leads to disaster.

At this point a comparison of the final outcome in both the case of Jeannine and Fearon is relevant. In the case of Jeannine her anxiety neurosis and obsession had been aroused not by jealousy of her mother, a theory Luc incorrectly believed, but simply by remorse at the fact that she had actually contributed to her mother's murder. Furthermore, a revelation of the truth does not bring deliverance from her condition but precipitates acute despair

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<sup>36</sup> Ibid., p. 290.

and grief which culminate in suicide. Lenormand without doubt wanted to show the evil effects which hidden truths can have when they are revealed.

In the case of Fearon, she has physically survived Luc's malevolent interpretation of her subconscious desires. However, she is steeped in and is being corroded by feelings of virulent malignancy, a state not uncommon to many Lenormand characters. Robert Jones describes her as "an example of active evil".<sup>37</sup> However, unlike most of Lenormand's characters, she is fully aware of her own evil, unrepentant personality:

Je ne pourrais pas connaître une âme sans la dominer . . . et je ne pourrais pas la dominer sans la détruire. Malheur aux faibles! Voilà mon cri de guerre. Sais-tu ce qui m'amuse le plus dans la vie? Séduire, corrompre une conscience pure.<sup>38</sup>

She engages in all types of criminality with unalloyed joy as her thrill comes not only from the acquisition of the spoils but from the high degree of risk involved. Her latent, but overwhelming love for Luc and her hatred of Jeannine had only served to exacerbate the intense jealousy which she felt for the latter:

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<sup>37</sup>Robert Jones, The Alienated Hero in Modern French Drama (Georgia: University of Georgia Press, 1962), p. 49.

<sup>38</sup>Lenormand, Théâtre complet, II, 215.



J'étais jalouse d'elle. Je souhaitais sa mort.  
Quand tu l'as remise entre mes mains, toute  
chaude et les pattes liées, comme une poule  
qu'on va saigner, ah, je t'aurais sauté au cou  
de plaisir.<sup>39</sup>

This theme of the pleasure to be derived from evil  
abounds in the theatre of Lenormand and even minor  
characters display this trait. Belkacem, the robber and  
rebel leader, confesses as much:

Sais-tu pourquoi je prépare la révolte? Ce n'est  
pas pour la liberté, pas même pour le butin . . .  
C'est pour retrouver une saveur perdue . . . une  
odeur dont on ne peut pas se passer une fois qu'on  
l'a connue.<sup>40</sup>

Equally important is the ability of the Lenormand character  
to rationalize his evil. For characters as theatrically  
unimportant as the Agha and to those as important as  
Fearon, evil is a way of life, a chosen path which can be  
justified. The Agha upbraids Laurency for his lack of  
knowledge of man and his ways:

Comme tu connais peu les hommes! Les Arabes sont  
faits pour être volés, parce qu'ils sont eux-  
mêmes de grands voleurs. Quant aux gouvernements,  
ils sont faits pour être trompés parce qu'ils  
sont eux-mêmes de grands trompeurs. Bien plus,  
ils demandent à être trompés parce qu'ils sont  
autoritaires et crédules comme beaucoup de grands  
trompeurs.<sup>41</sup>

<sup>39</sup> Ibid., p. 296.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid., p. 298.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid., p. 53.

This simplistic, illogical attitude towards morality may seem ludicrous but it is not far removed from the twentieth-century commercial mentality. Fearon rationalizes certain of her actions by greatly differentiating between the effects of physical and psychological harm. For her, the latter is far more dangerous since it ultimately leads to the destruction of the individual. She claims: "Voler ce n'est pas détruire; c'est changer les choses de place. On ne détruit vraiment que par la pensée".<sup>42</sup>

L'Homme et ses fantômes treats the theme of sexual promiscuity, the problem of the modern Don Juan whose profligate sensuality masks latent homosexuality. In his Confessions, Lenormand indicates the nature of his inspiration and his concept of the personality of the protagonist:

L'Homme et ses fantômes est, d'abord une interrogation sur la nature de Don Juan. C'est ensuite un témoignage sur la vie sexuelle de tout homme, sur sa lâcheté devant la douleur féminine, sur son insatiable curiosité qui, du mystère des corps, le porte vers celui des consciences et, de celui des consciences, vers celui de la survie. Quant à son propre secret, l'Homme ne fera que l'entrevoir, au seuil de la vieillesse, et la révélation de la dualité de sa nature semble le détacher du monde des formes pour le pousser vers l'univers crépusculaire où lui apparaîtront bientôt les fantômes de ses victimes.<sup>43</sup>

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<sup>42</sup>Ibid., p. 210.

<sup>43</sup>Lenormand, Confessions, I, 126.

The modern Don Juan whom Lenormand simply calls "L'Homme" displays some of the classic symptoms of the sexually maladjusted individual. His relentless pursuit of women is undertaken in a cold, selfish, detached manner:

J'ai un nez de chien pour dépister mon gibier . . .  
cette créature m'attira soudain. Sa rude chemise  
de toile s'entr'ouvrait sur un buste aussi droit,  
aussi ferme qu'un pin. Elle souriait. Je  
m'arrêtai devant elle, j'entrai et presque  
aussitôt, sans une parole, je l'étreignis  
comme un tronc de mélèze.<sup>44</sup>

Since "L'Homme", whose first name is Roger, regards women as merely the impersonal objects of his carnal passion, it is not surprising that once the seduction has been successfully accomplished, his interest in his victim quickly flags: "je ressens parfois, en pensant à celles que je vois souffrir par ma faute, non pas des remords, mais une espèce d'ennui".<sup>45</sup>

The lack of remorse which he feels is the result of his cruel attitude towards women. His seductions are therefore merely the expression of a desire for the satisfaction of an aberrant aspect of his personality. He acknowledges his contempt for women:

<sup>44</sup>Lenormand, Théâtre complet, IV, 2.

<sup>45</sup>Ibid., p. 5.

Songe à leurs hypocrisies, à leurs feintes, à ces délais qu'elles imposent à notre désir, même quand le leur l'a devancé! Pense à leurs ruses de geôliers, à leurs fausses maladies et, même dans les instants heureux, aux chimères, aux inquiétudes et aux complications dont elles savent assombrir la volupté.<sup>46</sup>

The disgust which Roger feels towards women is one indication of his latent homosexuality. Lenormand explains his portrayal of this trait:

L'Homme et ses fantômes est . . . une interrogation sur la nature de Don Juan . . . mon Don Juan présente seulement, comme beaucoup d'hommes que vous appelez normaux, des traces d'homosexualité . . . La hâte avec laquelle il délaisse chacune de ses victimes pour en chercher une autre ressemble à la vengeance. Don Juan nourrit contre les femmes des griefs suspects.<sup>47</sup>

Roger's sexual aberration may be explained in terms of his childhood hatred for his mother and his deep love for his father. This hatred for his mother reveals itself in his life by a hatred for women in general and the appearance of homosexual tendencies. The fact that "L'Homme's" greatest thrill consists of relating the stories of his conquests and their aftermath to Patrice, his best friend, is another clue to the truth which is hidden from himself: "Eh bien, quand j'ai déversé en toi les pleurs, les plaintes, les

<sup>46</sup> Ibid., p. 6.

<sup>47</sup> Lenormand, Paris Soir (June 3, 1924).

reproches que me vaut une rupture, je me sens de nouveau libre et léger comme à vingt ans!"<sup>48</sup> Another indication is the craving for vengeance against women, shared by both Roger and Patrice. The latter voices their feelings:

"Je crois qu'en étalant leurs secrets, nous nous vengeons d'elles".<sup>49</sup> A certain cynicism is also evident: "Les femmes se tuent pour attacher éternellement les hommes à leur proie",<sup>50</sup> claims Roger and he adds, as justification for his actions: "L'homme sans désirs serait un cadavre qui pense".<sup>51</sup>

Desire is in fact the central motive of most of Lenormand's characters. The playwright believed that the desires which produce deviations in sexual activity are not very different from those which produce other personality disorders and eventually neuroses. Laurency, Fearon, Luc de Bronte, Rougé and Sarterre are some of the many Lenormand characters who manifest this desire. When this desire is sexual in nature it fosters the kind of abnormal behaviour displayed by "L'Homme". Referring to

<sup>48</sup> Lenormand, Théâtre complet, IV, 6.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid., p. 5.

<sup>50</sup> Ibid., p. 7.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid.

L'Homme et ses fantômes Lenormand stated: "Ce que j'ai voulu faire, théâtralement parlant, c'est donner l'accent de la vérité à la carrière érotique d'un homme de notre temps".<sup>52</sup>

However, Roger, as well as most of Lenormand's characters, is also plagued by an intellectual desire, that of discovering the secret of his being. In Roger's case there is thus a fusion of intellectual and sexual desire. He seduces and abandons Alberte, Laure, "l'Hystérique", and others in the hope of wresting from them some clue which might help him to gain an insight into his own personality and the motives for his actions. Behind the impassioned eroticism displayed by "L'Homme" in his seduction of "l'Hystérique" lies his desperate, ineradicable quest for self-knowledge:

L'HOMME --- . . .Au premier regard, j'ai déchiffré votre sottise, la pâleur de votre chair et ses désirs. Pas une de vos pareilles n'a pu m'approcher sans s'offrir. Et je les ai prises, parce qu'une faiblesse est en moi, que j'ai longtemps appelée force et que je ne comprends pas encore. Vous êtes à moitié pamée sous mes injures. Elles incendient votre âme, comme la moindre caresse incendie votre corps! N'attendez de moi ni bonté, ni douceur, ni mensonges. Il m'est aussi impossible de vous plaindre que de vous aimer. Je ne puis que me prêter à votre folie. Je ne peux vous mentir comme j'ai

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<sup>52</sup>Lenormand, L'Intransigeant (Paris, October 2, 1938), 2.

menti aux autres. Le désir de la vérité  
devient aussi fort, en moi, que le  
désir.<sup>53</sup>

However, the search of "l'Homme" is in vain. He is unable to find fixity because he does not understand his instability or its origins. He confesses as much to Patrice:

L'HOMME -- L'autre soir, sur le bateau, je me posais une question très simple: "Toutes ces femmes qui ont traversé ma vie, pourquoi les ai-je recherchées?" L'Amour? Je sais bien que ce qu'elles appellent amour ne peut exister pour moi. Le plaisir? Chez la plupart des hommes, la volupté ne grandit et ne s'épanouit que dans la possession d'un seul corps . . . La cruauté? Je ne m'intéresse pas aux souffrances que je cause. Alors, pensais-je, qu'est-ce qui m'interdit la fixité? 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 fermés sur un secret, un secret qui me concernait seul, mais que les femmes, obstinément, m'avaient caché. Et j'ai 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!<sup>54</sup>

Roger's anguished comprehension is of little avail. His morbid investigation leads to the degradation and death of Laure and the death of most of the women he has seduced.

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<sup>53</sup> Lenormand, Théâtre complet, IV, 42.

<sup>54</sup> Ibid., pp. 44-45.

He himself dies still seeking the truth, surrounded by the phantoms of his victims who have taken their revenge by killing him.

In his portrayal of "l'Homme", Lenormand indicates that even the evil man is at times troubled at the thought of justice. Beneath Roger's ridicule of the tattered old woman who claims that one day he will be punished for his evil ways is a tone of unease. His mockery of Alberte who tries to dissuade him from abandoning her by portraying his action as being immoral and unchristian reflects Lenormand's own disquiet about the realities of the Christian concept of the soul. The vengeance threatened by Alberte may be an indication of Lenormand's position that the evils that men do may return to haunt them in disguised or undisguised form:

ALBERTE, avec violence -- Je jure par mon amour  
 que les âmes outragées ont pouvoir de  
 vengeance, quand elles ont sacrifié  
 leur vie et leur salut! (Il ricane.)  
 Tu ne riras plus quand tu me sentiras  
 accrochée à toi, sans poids, sans  
 forme et sans visage, mais bien plus  
 solidement, bien plus lourdement qu'avec  
 ces fortes mains.<sup>55</sup>

Lenormand defended L'Homme et ses fantômes against those who claimed to see the influence of Freud in the play:

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<sup>55</sup>Ibid., p. 15.



On a encore parlé de Freud à propos de L'Homme et ses fantômes: je serais bien reconnaissant à qui pourrait m'indiquer dans laquelle de ses oeuvres Freud a traité de l'homosexualité inconscient de Don Juan, dans laquelle il s'est occupé des rapports qui semblent unir le donjuanisme à l'occultisme.<sup>56</sup>

Paul Blanchart, however, points out Lenormand's debt to the methods of psychiatry:

S'il est vrai que L'Homme et ses fantômes traite les liens complexes qui joignent le donjuanisme à la mystique ou plus exactement, aux déviations du mysticisme, il est vrai également que le secret de Don Juan y est expliqué par une hypothèse sexuelle dérivée de la psychanalyse.<sup>57</sup>

Lenormand's preoccupation with the morality of the creative artist found expression in plays such as Les Trois Chambres and Une Vie secrète. As early as 1906, in his novel, Le Jardin sur la Glace, Lenormand had depicted the special emotional framework of the artist. This theme was also treated in one of his early plays, Les Possédés. In Les Trois Chambres Pierre, the writer, feels the necessity to lead a double life in order to generate his creative powers. His inspiration, he believes, cannot come from a life of matrimonial serenity but from acts of sensual indulgence with a mistress. These infidelities he freely

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<sup>56</sup> Lenormand, "Aidez-moi à détruire une légende", Comoedia (Paris, October 16, 1924).

<sup>57</sup> Blanchart, Le Théâtre de H.-R. Lenormand, p. 74.

admits to his wife, Florence, for by this candour he seeks justification for his actions. He explains to his mistress, Rose:

Il y a un pacte entre nous. Il est entendu que je suis libre de mes actions, à condition d'en rendre compte. Il est entendu que Florence ne souffre pas de mes aventures. Il n'y a qu'une restriction à notre pacte . . . .Une clause tacite, plutôt. Si je donnais ma "tendresse" à une autre femme, Florence souffrirait.<sup>58</sup>

Pierre thus makes a great distinction between the role to be played by his wife, on the one hand, and his mistress on the other. The former symbolizes respect and affection, while the latter satisfies his physical needs and stimulates his creative powers. Pierre's duplicity reveals a selfishness which he does not try to conceal. Speaking about his wife he says:

Elle est persuadée qu'elle tient de mon coeur le peu qui en était à prendre. Et je finis par le croire aussi. Je m'aime d'abord. Je l'aime. . . et les autres femmes, je les désire.<sup>59</sup>

However, Pierre's insistence on this simplistic dichotomy is doomed to failure. He falls in love with Rose, transferring to her the "tendresse" which, according to his classification, belongs to his wife, Florence. In spite of

<sup>58</sup>Lenormand, Théâtre complet, VIII, 17.

<sup>59</sup>Ibid., p. 18.

Rose's plea not to disclose this new turn in the affair to Florence, he does exactly the contrary. The blow is too much for Florence who kills herself. Pierre insists that Rose marry him. However, when this takes place, his creative powers, much to his dismay, seem to disappear. He explains the unfortunate situation to Rose:

PIERRE -- Mon pouvoir d'écrire dépendait de Florence.

ROSE -- Et du temps de Florence, tu disais qu'il dépendait de moi.

PIERRE -- Je le croyais.

ROSE -- Il dépend de toi, seul, mon chéri.<sup>60</sup>

What Pierre does not perceive is the fact that once his mistress becomes his wife, she loses most of her sexual attraction for him. Since his inspiration is directly dependent on sexual gratification, a state he cannot find in marriage, his creative impulse can no longer be stimulated by Rose. The result is that Pierre, in order to recapture his artistic creativity, goes in search of another woman so that he can continue his double life which had been interrupted by Florence's death. As François Porché said: "La maîtresse passe dans la chambre de gauche. Mais, en prenant la place de la disparue, elle en assume le destin".<sup>61</sup>

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<sup>60</sup> Ibid., p. 101.

<sup>61</sup> François Porché, "Le Mouvement dramatique: Les Trois Chambres", Revue de Paris (April 1, 1931), 675.

In this play the artist excuses his sexual promiscuity on the grounds of artistic creativity.

This idea is also the theme of Une Vie secrète. One of Lenormand's purposes in writing this play was to demonstrate "l'identité du désir sexuel et de l'instinct de la création artistique".<sup>62</sup> In this play, the musician, Sarterre, is completely devoted to his artistic endeavour, the creation of music. This music, however, seems unreal and strangely abnormal to his wife, Thérèse. She becomes upset by it. Sarterre, the innovator, the revolutionary in music, feels a direct link between his music and the forces of nature. His initial success, although hailed as a masterpiece, was criticized on the grounds that the inspiration was savage, crude and sensual. The critics claimed that Sarterre's music was too barbaric and that there was in it an absence of the qualities capable of evoking sentiments like love and compassion. However, Sarterre remains unmoved. His rejection of all social obligation and morality and his renunciation of the public taste are followed by his abnegation of modern civilization with all its restrictive codes which, according to him, stifle the creative instincts of the artist.

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<sup>62</sup>Lenormand, Confessions, I, 289.

Like Pierre of Les Trois Chambres, Sartre's attitude is characterized by complete selfishness: "Tant pis pour ceux que je scandalise, tant pis pour ceux que mon art détruit. Je suis une force aussi aveugle, aussi méchante, aussi involontaire que les nuages".<sup>63</sup> For Sartre, the source of his inspiration lies in the suppression of his conscience, what Dickman calls "le contrôle du moi primitif".<sup>64</sup> He thus believes that a total lack of morality is essential to stimulate his creativity which can only flourish if he is freed of the shackles of modern society. The emotion required for the release of the source of music shrouded in his subconscious is what he seeks:

Pitié, remords, tout le paquet est au fond du trou.  
Je n'ai gardé que mon âme d'artiste! Il ne faut  
pas le dire, mais c'est pour cela que je peux  
inventer, parler un langage tout neuf! Pour  
créer, vois-tu, il faut être innocent comme une  
panthère.<sup>65</sup>

The primitive, untamed, unsophisticated existence led by Sartre in Asia had been able to liberate and inspire his soul. Back again in Europe, traditional Western values and concepts throttle his creative instincts:

<sup>63</sup> Lenormand, Théâtre complet, III, 201.

<sup>64</sup> J. Dickman, "Le Mal, force dramatique chez M. Lenormand", Romanic Review (July-September 1928), 218.

<sup>65</sup> Lenormand, Théâtre complet, III, 178.

Vous ne savez même pas ce que c'est que la nature, dans votre Europe retournée comme un champ de pomme de terre et où les bâtisses poussent comme l'herbe à cochons! . . . Moi, je tire ma musique des îles sauvages, de la terre crue, du soleil qui m'a brûlé.<sup>66</sup>

Sarterre's subsequent fanatical pursuit of and triumph in the physical possession of women can be seen as an expression of his desire to seek artistic inspiration in sexual licence:

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, passant et repassant dans les ruelles chaudes, c'est alors que l'idée tombe sur moi! Elle se mêle à mon désir.<sup>67</sup>

Sarterre's need to wallow in degeneracy and depravity leads him to plot the moral degradation of Vera, a singer whom his wife had rescued from a life of debasement. He involves her in all sorts of vice and debauchery and encourages her in the use of powerful drugs. Her life of moral corruption and decay fires Sarterre's creative talents: "On ne peut pas créer sans détruire. C'est avec la mort qu'on fait de la vie".<sup>68</sup> Sarterre's discovery that Vera is on the brink of mental collapse fills him with pleasure as he feels that her destruction will inspire him to reach even greater heights of musical success. However, Thérèse intervenes and

<sup>66</sup>Ibid., p. 201.

<sup>67</sup>Ibid., p. 237.

<sup>68</sup>Ibid., p. 235.

convinces Sarterre that a sordid life of vice is not a prerequisite to musical composition. When Sarterre fully realizes the truth of his wife's moral judgment and the enormity of the crime he has perpetrated against Vera he is utterly aghast. Worse yet, for Sarterre, is the fact that his creative instincts become sterile. By probing into his life, revealing to him the malevolence of his true motives and disclosing to him the truth about his own personality, Thérèse has poisoned Sarterre's source of inspiration:

SARTERRE -- . . .Tu me pouvais pas agir autrement . . . .Personne ne peut agir autrement.

THERESE -- Qu'ai-je fait?

SARTERRE -- Tu m'as détruit.

THERESE -- gémissant et s'agenouillant devant lui --  
Michel

SARTERRE -- En intervenant dans ma vie, en la jugeant, en parlant devant moi, tu as violé le secret de la nature. Tu as empoisonné ma source . . . .<sup>69</sup>

Sarterre's anguish overwhelms him and for two years he does not create anything. However, after pondering the nature of his music for a long time, he concludes that his music, which he now compares with the singing of a bird, contained qualities worthy of admiration, which, hitherto, because of his obsession with evil, he had been unable to perceive. So Sarterre fails to erase all traces of conscience

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<sup>69</sup>Ibid., p. 268.

from his mind. When Vera returns from the asylum for the mentally ill, Sarterre endeavours to help her as much as he can. The shock of seeing her dreadful state reawakens his conscience and gives rise to pity and compassion. However, Vera's mental instability still plagues her and she finally commits suicide. With Vera's death Sarterre's spiritual consciousness and his vanished creative powers return and he implies that his new music will express the humane aspect of his personality.

Consideration must be given to the question of Lenormand's personal opinion regarding artistic inspiration. Pierre Brisson feels that the attitude of Lenormand can be perceived through a consideration of the opinions of the main characters:

M. Lenormand affirme au lieu de démontrer. Il débite Sarterre en trois tranches d'analyse. Le héros commence par se définir, puis Vera le définit, puis Thérèse le définit. En réalité, l'auteur parle seul et tout le temps.<sup>70</sup>

La Vie secrète is an expression of Lenormand's compulsive urge to examine the requirements for and the processes of artistic creation. However, Sarterre's expression of contempt for humanity and his ridicule of the sentiments associated with morality must not be construed as being the viewpoint

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<sup>70</sup>Pierre Brisson, Au Hasard des soirées (Paris: Gallimard, 1935), p. 312.



of Lenormand but rather as an exaggeration of the sympathy he felt for the artist whose creative temperament is inhibited by the mediocrity of everyday existence.

Sarterre's rejection of humanity even reaches the point where he expresses a preference for the company of fools and savages to ordinary men. Lenormand did in fact question the mentality of contemporary man, but his depiction of Sarterre is merely an indication of how the artist's disillusionment with the norms of humanity can be twisted. Thérèse, on the other hand, seems to express the humane side of Lenormand's view about artistic creation. The scene where she upbraids Sarterre for his depraved existence throws the two conflicting opinions into strong contrast:

SARTERRE, réfléchissant -- Peut-être, oui peut-être que l'artiste doit payer son inspiration, comme l'ouvrier paye son pain. L'un paye de sa raison, l'autre, de son bonheur. Cette chose qu'on appelle le génie ne m'a pas été donnée pour rien . . . Je l'ai payé de ma substance.

THERESE, vivement -- Michel, c'est un paradoxe. Il n'existe aucun rapport entre ton génie et un vice honteux. Il n'y a pas de lien entre la plus noble part de notre être et la plus méprisable.<sup>71</sup>

Thérèse realizes that the amoral reasoning utilized by her husband is merely a convenient means of excusing his

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<sup>71</sup>Lenormand, Théâtre complet, III, 236.

own weakness. Like Pierre in Les Trois Chambres Sarterre sees sexual indulgence and immoral conduct as necessities for artistic inspiration. Lenormand himself seems to have been convinced of the link between artistic creation on the one hand, and death and destruction on the other. It should be noticed that after Vera's death and the regeneration of his artistic powers, only his art is once again important to Sarterre. The trauma of Vera's suicide and his role in it inspire him to express in his music warm, human sentiments of love and life. However, he is so engulfed by such creativity that he becomes oblivious to the external world. Once more he is mentally transported to a special realm where the mysterious forces of artistic creation envelop him. Although in Une Vie secrète Lenormand has modified his view of the creative artist as a self-centred, inhumane individual who is free to ignore the traditional loyalties to family and society, a view which found expression in Les Possédés, the final impression is that of a plea for self-justification, an explanation of the writer's need to rebel against or withdraw from the confinements of bourgeois society. There is also the impression that although the artist can never completely conceal his destructive impulses or the appeal of conscience, the genuine creative artist should be motivated by sentiments which will transcend evil.

The idea that good can come from debasement and evil appears at first to be a central theme of Les Ratés. The two

principal characters are simply called "Lui" and "Elle", a fact which perhaps indicates the playwright's desire to accentuate the universality of failure. Lenormand clearly stated the purpose of the play in a letter written to his wife, Marie Kalff:

L'idée est celle-ci: deux êtres qui, dans les circonstances heureuses de la vie, dans le succès, dans la richesse, n'éprouvent l'un pour l'autre que du désir, de l'amour physique. Puis leur vie change. (Il sont artistes.) Ils dégringolent; pour manger, la femme est obligée de coucher avec des amants payants, l'homme dont personne ne veut, se met à boire. Et alors, de cette misère, de cet avilissement, de cette ordure, naît quelque chose de fort et de pur.<sup>72</sup>

The importance of this letter lies in its affirmation of Lenormand's motives as a writer, namely, that his depiction of human misery, degradation and moral chaos springs neither from nihilistic principles nor from morbid pessimism but from his conception of the theatre as the medium for the dramatization of life. In Les Ratés "Lui" and "Elle", author and actress, try to devote themselves to the fulfilment of their art and to their love for each other. However, they are dogged by lack of success which combines with poverty to oblige them to subject their art and love to every kind of indignity. They are forced to join a group of

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<sup>72</sup>Quoted by K. S. White, The Development of Lenormand's Principles and Purposes as a Dramatist (Stanford: 1958), p. 142.

travelling actors although the life of squalor is repugnant to them. Their situation becomes so miserable that "Elle" takes to prostitution as the only possible means of livelihood to support them, and "Lui", overwhelmed by misery, takes to drink.

Their thesis that the life of humiliation and degradation is only external and that it in no way destroys the beauty of the inner self which remains intact and inviolable, at first seems credible. They even go as far to claim that this harrowing example of moral decrepitude has kindled the flame of a more profound love within their souls.

"Elle" says:

Je me trouvais même déraisonnable de partir en tournée et de risquer la misère. Qui pouvait deviner qu'elle nous ferait si riches! . . . C'est presque incompréhensible, ce qui nous est arrivé . . . Tout trahit, tout manque; on est enfermé dans son désespoir comme dans une cave . . . et soudain, quelque chose vous saisit, vous emmène doucement . . . Une porte s'ouvre, au plus bas de la douleur, et voilà qu'il entre une lumière, une tendresse qu'on ne connaissait pas . . . On est tranquille . . . on ne s'inquiète plus . . . Il n'y a plus rien de terrible . . . On est arrivé.<sup>73</sup>

"Lui" takes this idea a step further and argues that evil is a prerequisite for the deep happiness which they now experience: "Il y a, dans la vie, certains sommets qui

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<sup>73</sup>Lenormand, Théâtre complet, I, 90.

sont entourés comme d'un lac d'eau trouble et fangeuse. On ne peut pas les atteindre sans avoir d'abord traversé le lac".<sup>74</sup> However, there is a sudden reversal of feelings on the part of "Lui". He becomes overwhelmed by intense feelings of jealousy about his wife, the prostitute. He convinces himself that her present way of life is indicative either of a natural inclination or of a former habit. He is ravaged by doubt, anxiety and disillusionment and wraps himself in morbid thoughts of revenge which culminate in his murdering "Elle". Even when he has completely realized the full extent of his action "Lui" still appears uncertain of the motivation which precipitated the final act:

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.<sup>75</sup>

Any appraisal of Lenormand's viewpoint should consider his evocation of the profound joy experienced by the couple after their descent into the abyss of degradation as well as the pessimistic "dénouement". The strengthened love and spiritual purification which arose after moral degeneration, a favourite subject of the French Romantic poets, is

<sup>74</sup>Ibid., p. 91.

<sup>75</sup>Ibid., p. 136.

the theme which preoccupies Lenormand in Les Ratés. The catastrophic "dénouement" seems to indicate that those who seek the highest good from the lowest evil are doomed to fail. The apparently revitalized love of "Lui" and "Elle" was merely an illusion which faded with time. Their attempt to rationalize evil as being a source of good appears to have been nothing more than mere specious sophistry. The musician, Crouzols, is typical of the Lenormand character who rationalizes evil: "La trahison, la haine et la déchéance ont libéré en moi une source de beauté".<sup>76</sup> This sentiment is echoed by "Lui":

Il suffit de regarder la vie pour s'apercevoir que le bien, la pureté de l'âme sont devenus aussi vides que des outres crevées . . . et que toute force, toute possession, toute plénitude viennent du mal.<sup>77</sup>

Although Lenormand's preoccupation with the forces of evil is amply demonstrated in Les Ratés, the overall effect of the final scenes of this play seems to be one of stoic acceptance of life's destructiveness and a somewhat imprecise spiritual aspiration rather than one of complete pessimism.

As "Lui" contemplates the corpse of his wife and prepares to commit suicide, he expresses not bitterness but hope:

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<sup>76</sup> Ibid., p. 84.

<sup>77</sup> Ibid., p. 86.

LUI -- Chérie . . . .Tu m'as tellement aimé . . .  
 il y a encore tant d'amour dans tes  
 yeux . . .je me demande . . . .Voilà qu'un  
 nouveau doute m'assaille . . . .et plus  
 formidable que tous ceux d'autrefois. . . .  
 Tes yeux ont l'air de savoir . . .de  
 comprendre quelque chose . . . .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  
 révéélé? (Un silence anxieux.) Ou bien,  
 n'as-tu plus de souvenirs? Plus de  
 conscience? . . .Es-tu seulement sur une  
 rive où autre chose commence? . . .au  
 premier jour d'une autre vie?<sup>78</sup>

In La Maison des Remparts, Lenormand depicts the theme of moral degeneracy and sexual promiscuity. In this play, René and André Malfilâtre, father and son, compete for the favours of the prostitute, Julie, who resides in a bordello in the neighbouring Norman village. Both men endeavour to protect their name and social position. Julie, who aspires to a better life than that in the bordello, persuades André that they should run away together. However, on learning of the plan, René murders Julie in a fit of rage and secretly dumps her body in the lake.

In his Confessions, Lenormand freely admits that most of his plays are a portrayal of society in the throes of moral and social disintegration. La Maison des Remparts

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<sup>78</sup>Ibid., p. 138.

is a good example of a family in this condition. Generations of Malfilâtres have frequented the neighbouring bordello. The grandfather had brought home Pélagie, a former prostitute of that house, and when the play opens she is a servant with the Malfilâtre family. She fully realizes that sexual promiscuity is a feature of the family: "Le plaisir des enfants, c'est celui des enfants . . . . Dès que la cousine Lerouesnier se mêle de mariage, c'est un client de gagné pour la maison des remparts".<sup>79</sup> Lenormand portrays René as the aging hedonist whose physical features are a mute testimony of his crapulence:

René Malfilâtre est un homme d'une soixantaine d'années dont la mise prétend à l'élégance du gentilhomme campagnard . . . . Mais tout, sur lui, a pris l'aspect d'usure, de fatigue, que reflète son visage de noceur vieillissant. Ses habitudes alcooliques se décèlent par un fugitif tremblement de la main.<sup>80</sup>

André's initial appearance leaves an impression of selfishness and deceit:

C'est un garçon de trente ans, de mise négligée . . . . il serait assez beau si son visage au teint marqué de taches de rousseur, n'exprimait, plus loin que l'ennui qui s'avoue, une dissimulation profonde. Un regard toujours fuyant. Un pli de sournoise tristesse au coin de la bouche. Avec sa femme, une froideur morne. Avec son père, une correction qui peut

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<sup>79</sup> Lenormand, Théâtre complet, X, 67.

<sup>80</sup> Ibid., p. 8.



recouvrir l'indifférence aussi bien que la haine.  
Pour Pélagie, c'est de la haine qui ne se cache  
même pas.<sup>81</sup>

In the neighbouring bordello, Madame Bunel, the woman in charge, recognizes the psychological needs which her establishment satisfies:

Pour le confort, le sans-gêne et la rigolade, il n'y a pas de maison honnête qui batte mon vieux bordel! Chez moi, l'homme se sent un homme. Et il faut ça pour le progrès de l'humanité.<sup>82</sup>

Indeed there is a striking contrast, throughout this play, between the hypocrisy and licentiousness concealed behind the veneer of middle class respectability which the Malfilâtre family exhibits and the honesty and integrity which characterize the prostitutes of Madame Bunel. Furthermore, whereas these women display remarkable self-respect and forthrightness, the relationship between André and René is marked by mutual distrust and hatred. Lenormand's portrayal of the prostitutes is intended to counterbalance the sordid, oppressive atmosphere of moral degeneracy which is to be found in the play:

Ce n'est pas une pièce gaie. Ce n'est pas une pièce aimable. Ce n'est pas une pièce égrillarde. C'est un fresque où la tristesse, le désir, la passion se résolvent en poésie. Et à la fin, des profondeurs mêmes du drame, naît une lueur qui devrait me faire pardonner les ténèbres arides où il se déroule.<sup>83</sup>

<sup>81</sup>Ibid., p. 14.

<sup>82</sup>Ibid., p. 89.

<sup>83</sup>Lenormand, Comoedia (Brussels, April 24, 1942).

This play, therefore, may be regarded as a portrayal of Lenormand's confrontation with the moral decay of his contemporaries and their desire to find a new spiritual foundation on which to base their lives. The lack of hypocrisy shown by Julie is in strong contrast to the commonly accepted notions held by Lenormand's contemporaries concerning the mentality and morality of the prostitute. When René Malfilâtre becomes incensed with jealousy on learning that his son, André, has been frequenting Julie, his disparagement and bitter curses only serve to make Julie paint his true picture:

Je fais mon métier. Il paraît même que je le fais bien. Si un prêtre me le reprochait, ou une mère de famille, je ne répondrais pas. Mais toi, sors d'ici . . . .Oui je suis une garce, mais je connais mon métier de garce. Et crois-moi, ce n'est pas un métier facile. Toi, tu n'en connais aucun: tu ne pourrais même pas gagner ton pain.<sup>84</sup>

Lenormand shows Julie as a woman whose courage and sincerity rank her far above the hypocrites and bigots who criticize her. Her relationship with men gives her insight into understanding their personality. What she despises is not their physical desire, which she believes to be natural to men as well as animals, but the hypocrisy which is usually a feature of such desires:

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<sup>84</sup>Lenormand, Théâtre complet, X, 98.

Parce que de connaître toutes les bêtises illusions et les folies qui travaillent les hommes, ça donne envie de mourir. Ce n'est pas leur désir qui me dégoûte. Leur désir est aussi naturel, aussi simple que celui des ânes que j'entends appeler leurs ânesses, au petit matin, dans le brouillard des prairies. C'est leurs sentiments qui me donnent la nausée. C'est leur amour qui sent le vomir.<sup>85</sup>

René escapes conviction for the murder of Julie on a legal technicality although his guilt seems obvious to everyone and even though his son testifies vehemently against him. The judge reluctantly acquits René but implies that a higher form of justice may one day prevail:

LE JUGE -- (Huit heures sonnent.) Huit heures.  
Ce n'est pas l'heure de la justice.

FLORET -- Elle ne sonne pas souvent sur cette terre.

LE JUGE -- J'y crois encore. Je l'attends encore.  
Sans cela je ne pourrai pas faire mon métier.<sup>86</sup>

Lenormand seems to imply, through the words of the judge, that even though injustice may flourish in the world at present, the possibility of an eventual justice should not be discounted. However, the judge points out that morality may be as arbitrary and uncertain as our concept of time which is relative:

LE JUGE -- Quand il est huit heures à dix horloges, en dix instants différents, il n'est nulle part huit heures. Il n'est

<sup>85</sup> Ibid., p. 100.

<sup>86</sup> Ibid., p. 173.

jamais huit heures. La loi morale est devenue aussi incertaine dans le coeur de l'homme, que l'heure, débitée en sonneries, aux clochers de la ville.

FLORET -- regardant l'horizon -- Qu'y faire? Les pins aux bras convulsés vers le ciel, là-bas, sur la lande, sont en prières depuis des siècles. Et la justice de Dieu ne descend toujours pas sur nos marécages.

LE JUGE -- Elle a pourtant foudroyé Sodome et Gomorrhe.

FLORET -- Notre Sodome est encore debout. Et le seul châtiment qui l'accable, c'est l'ennui, le remords. Ceux qui s'en éloignent ne sont pas changés en statues de sel, mais en spectres poussiéreux.<sup>87</sup>

Through the Judge and Floret who regard their society as the modern Sodom, Lenormand depicts the moral chaos and spiritual bankruptcy of his contemporaries. Man's anguished quest for a new morality, a new philosophy to surmount his troubles, is one which is posed in many of Lenormand's plays. However, in his theatre he never offers any solutions, a fact which suggests either the difficulties involved in any attempt at a solution of the problem of evil or the belief of the dramatist that his role is essentially an amoral one.

La Maison des Remparts is usually regarded as "the drama of the prostitute" while Mixture is characterized as

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<sup>87</sup> Ibid., p. 175.

"the drama of the mother". Mixture contains most of the elements relevant to Lenormand's theatre. Indeed, the title itself which suggests ambivalence, expresses a theme central to most of Lenormand's plays. This idea is succinctly summarized by Fearon:

Dans ma jeunesse, une voleuse était une voleuse  
et un clergyman, un clergyman. 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  
mêlé dans le coeur de l'homme?<sup>88</sup>

In this play, the mother, Monique, is presented as the epitome of self-sacrifice. After being cruelly abandoned by her husband, Monique leads a life of self-denial in order to gain enough money to raise her daughter, Poucette, so that the latter would never experience the horrors of deprivation. She tries and abandons in turn the job of singer, dressmaker and dancing instructor. Growing old and becoming increasingly desperate, she turns to prostitution, becomes involved in a murder and finally joins the gang of the famous thief, Fearon.

There are a number of incidents which seem, at first, to stem simply from neglect on Monique's part. As the play progresses, however, we can deduce that these actions result, not from mere coincidence, but from the subconscious

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<sup>88</sup> Lenormand, Théâtre complet, VII, 108.

motivation of Monique. The latter allows her daughter to come in close contact with Fearon and allows Poucette to be on friendly terms with a twelve year old girl who exhibits herself to old men for money. Monique even goes as far as to leave Poucette to the tender mercies of an unscrupulous, degenerate criminal who tries to seduce her.

These subconscious acts of the mother are motivated by latent incomprehensible desires, the nature and scope of which are revealed only in the last Act of the play. Monique's emotional ambivalence centres around the conflict between her maternal love and her subconscious desire for revenge. The degradation and humiliation to which she had been compelled to expose herself in order to gain the minimum of financial security had been undertaken primarily with Poucette's well-being in mind. However, such great mental torture had taken its toll. The result is that Monique subconsciously wants to see her daughter endure some of the difficulties that she has been obliged to suffer.

Depuis ta petite enfance jusqu'à ces dernières années, j'ai mené la vie la plus honteuse, la plus basse, pour que tu ne manques de rien! Oui, mademoiselle est devenue une jeune fille si distinguée, qu'elle craint d'avoir à rougir de sa mère. Mais si sa mère n'avait rien fait dont mademoiselle puisse rougir, mademoiselle ne serait peut-être devenue une jeune fille aussi distinguée!<sup>89</sup>

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<sup>89</sup>Ibid., p. 145.

For Poucette the final humiliation is her mother's frantic efforts to marry her off to a series of wealthy, decrepit, old men. Poucette's refusal and her insistence on her preference for Marston, a young man with whom she is in love, meet with bitter denunciation from her mother who delves back into her past life to reveal some of the shameful indignities she had been forced to undergo for Poucette's benefit. However, the latter senses that her mother is merely trying to make her feel guilty. Indeed it is not long before Poucette sees the whole situation with remarkable clarity and confronts her mother with the truth:

Tu ne veux pas que j'épouse un garçon jeune et honorable, parce que tu n'as pas pu le faire toi-même. Tu ne veux pas que je mène une vie régulière, parce que tu es une aventurière. Tu ne veux pas que je sois respectée, parce que tu te sens méprisée. Tu t'es sacrifiée à moi, c'est vrai. Tu as souffert, enduré, risqué, renoncé par amour pour moi, c'est vrai. Mais il y a en toi une autre mère, qui veut que je souffre, moi aussi, que j'endure, que je renonce et que je risque à mon tour. Tu as subi pour moi les plus horribles humiliations, mais tu ne les as jamais acceptées, tu t'es toujours révoltée contre elles, tu t'es toujours sentie injustement frappée . . . . Tu as toujours attendu ta revanche . . . . Et ta revanche, c'est de me voir humiliée et salie à mon tour! Moi, que tu aimes plus que ta propre vie! Voilà ce qui serait, pour toi, la justice dont tu parles tout le temps: me voir patauger dans les mêmes chemins pleins de fange où tu patauges depuis quinze ans! Voilà ce que tu veux, ma bonne, ma cruelle maman!<sup>90</sup>

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<sup>90</sup> Ibid., pp. 152-153.

This revelation, for which Monique is quite unprepared, upsets her very much. However, Poucette, to placate her, points out favourable features of her personality. Then analyzing her mother's feelings, Poucette explains that her nervous disorders and other manifestations of psychological imbalance were actually caused by her subconscious desire for vengeance: "c'est ton vrai mal, ce désir-là. C'est lui qui te donne tes douleurs et tes crises de nerfs".<sup>91</sup> Monique finally accepts the truth about herself and becomes favourably disposed to Poucette's marriage to Marston. Monique is one of the rare characters of Lenormand whose total knowledge of the truth does not precipitate disaster. Nevertheless, Monique reveals to Fearon a basic feature of her character which is common to many of Lenormand's characters -- the pleasure she derives from evil:

J'ai toujours dû avoir un mystérieux besoin du vice, du danger, de la peur et peut-être du crime. Mais comme j'étais trop faible pour mener cette vie monstrueusesans un prétexte noble, c'est l'amour maternel qui me l'a fourni. Réjouissez-vous. J'ai commis mes turpitudes à l'ombre d'une petite fille. Je ne me suis pas sacrifiée. J'ai suivi ma pente. Il y a quelque chose en moi, de terriblement vil, je ne sais quel sale secret, qui m'attire vers la boue. Soyez contente, j'ai une pierre noire dans le coeur.<sup>92</sup>

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<sup>91</sup>Ibid., p. 154.

<sup>92</sup>Ibid., p. 179.



Lenormand was attracted to theories of psycho-analysis because they allowed him to portray human complexity and contradictions. He seems to have regarded heredity as being a prime mover in the composition of the human personality. It may therefore be assumed that the early passages in Mixture in which Monique gives an account of her mother's malevolent character and her delight in inflicting misery and despair are indicative of the type of behaviour in which Monique herself would later indulge:

Elle ne s'est jamais résignée à mon bonheur. Dès ma petite enfance, elle a su faire tourner en dégoût chaque plaisir, chaque promesse que la vie m'apportait. Si je n'avais pas quitté la maison, elle m'aurait détruite, comme elle a détruit mon père.<sup>93</sup>

Lenormand's presentation of evil in Mixture seems to contradict his deterministic attitude towards Fate. Although there is doubt at the end of the play as to the duration of the happiness which has been made possible by Monique's willingness to recognize the evil motives in her vindictive behaviour, the play on the whole seems optimistic and apparently puts forward the idea of a character being able to break away from destiny.<sup>94</sup> In Mixture, there is evidence

<sup>93</sup> Ibid., p. 9.

<sup>94</sup> Jacques Prévost disliked the play because "les sentiments délicats sont singulièrement simplifiés". J. Prévost, La nouvelle Revue Française (January 1, 1928), p. 108.

that Fate is not all-powerful in its destructiveness. As Serge Radine<sup>95</sup> points out, the optimistic conclusion arising logically out of characterization seems to have taken the playwright by surprise. It is optimistic in spite of Lenormand. The "dénouement" of Mixture may therefore be regarded as an exception in Lenormand's theatre.

One of the principal goals of the playwright was to demonstrate the disastrous consequences which result from man's eternal desires. The overwhelming forces against which Lenormand's characters battle and which are deeply rooted in their subconscious minds are intimately connected with the sexual instinct. For Lenormand evil results from a distortion of man's desires, one of the most important of which is the sexual drive. In La Maison des Remparts, it is the avidity of both father and son for erotic gratification which triggers violence and death. The protagonists of Les Trois Chambres and Une Vie secrète make an attempt to rationalize this sensual craving by concealing it under the mask of artistic inspiration, but in both cases they are forced by circumstances to acknowledge their hypocrisy and the ulterior motives which they attempt to

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<sup>95</sup> Serge Radine liked the play very much and wrote: "Si certains événements de la destinée de Monique paraissent un peu trop outranciers et un peu grand guignolesques, par contre, l'ambivalence de sa nature est remarquablement étudiée et criante de la vérité. Serge Radine, Anouilh, Salacrou, Lenormand, p. 77.

disguise but which lead to depravity and death. In Le Simoun, Laurency's attempt to repress his sexual desire is doomed to fail since he, like most of Lenormand's characters, is guided principally by his instincts and emotions.

The fusion of sexual and intellectual desire can be seen in L'Homme et ses fantômes and Le Mangeur de Rêves. In the former, Roger's rapacious conquest of women conceals not only homosexual traits but also a need to discover the secret of his being and to work out his own destiny. This obsessive quest promotes evil. In the latter, Luc's love for Jeannine is only a minor part of his interest in her; his greatest desire is his mania to probe the innermost recesses of her mind. It is this investigation which culminates in her death. Les Ratés demonstrates Lui's overwhelming but futile efforts to be a success in life, efforts which result in murder and suicide. In Mixture it is Monique's desire to provide a good life for Poucette, a desire which masks her love of evil, that partly causes her to indulge in criminal activities. In pursuit of their desires, the Lenormand characters become the prey of neuroses which rob them of any sense of fixity and leave them hypersensitive and alienated in a world where they struggle hopelessly and where existence becomes meaningless affliction.

## CHAPTER II

### NATURE VERSUS MAN

#### The Physical Environment

A comprehension of Lenormand's treatment of the problem of evil does not limit itself to a consideration of his depiction of the inner struggle which afflicts his characters. Lenormand's conviction that a true picture of man necessitated a portrayal of the external forces of nature with which man is in constant conflict, made him place the majority of his plays in a carefully defined environment where the characters become "le jouet des forces naturelles".<sup>1</sup>

Lenormand's attempt to reintegrate man with nature involved a reversal of the essential process of classical art which had gone to the extreme of separating man from the historical, material, and social environment. However, since Romantic drama had already reintegrated man into history and the Théâtre Libre had shown the relationship between man and his social and material environment, Lenormand's attempt was not completely innovatory. Nevertheless, it met with enthusiastic reception from Gaston Baty who produced

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<sup>1</sup>Lenormand, Confessions, I, 12.

some of his plays.<sup>2</sup>

The claim that in Lenormand's plays geographic and climatic factors assume the role of "personnages abstraits",<sup>3</sup> was explained by the playwright who not only affirmed his inability to separate outside nature from his presentation of human conflict, but also maintained that such a portrayal was neither a philosophical attitude nor a deliberately contrived literary process.<sup>4</sup>

In Les Ratés, the importance of the environment seems to lie primarily in its symbolic value. There is an obvious parallel between the sombre, oppressive atmosphere which becomes increasingly morbid and the gradual social and moral disintegration which overwhelms the protagonists. The first tableau opens on un local triste servant de salle de répétitions<sup>5</sup> and mirrors the frustrations of "Lui" who tries to maintain his idealism about the purity of artistic creation:

Qu'importe que je sois inconnu et misérable, si je  
suis roi dans le pays de mes rêves, où tout est  
grand, où tout est parfait? Je veux, sur l'océan

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<sup>2</sup>"Mais l'univers uni, ce n'est pas seulement les hommes ou les groupements humains. Il y a autour d'eux tout ce qui vit, tout ce qui végète, tout ce qui est. Et tout ce qui est, est matière dramatique; les animaux, les plantes, les choses." Gaston Baty, "Le Théâtre nouveau", Masques, Quatrième Cahier d'Art dramatique, 14.

<sup>3</sup>Daniel-Rops, Sur le théâtre de H.-R. Lenormand, p. 77.

<sup>4</sup>Lenormand, Confessions, I, 13.

<sup>5</sup>Lenormand, Théâtre complet, I, 3.

de la sottise humaine, lancer de grands vaisseaux d'idéal aux voiles éclatantes.<sup>6</sup>

However, with each of the thirteen subsequent tableaux there is a progressive picture of squalor which corresponds with the erosion of the morality of "Lui" and "Elle": the former is now a pauper and alcoholic, the latter a prostitute. The gloom of the railway station in the twelfth tableau seems to reflect the degradation of the protagonists:

Une salle d'attente dans une gare, la nuit. A droite et à gauche, banquettes noires. Au milieu, une table. Un bec de gaz invisible éclaire vaguement, d'en haut. Sur la banquette de droite, on distingue une forme assoupie.<sup>7</sup>

The symbolism of environment can again be noticed in La Maison des Remparts where the grim Channel town with its silted up ports and confining ramparts, the moribund family estate and the mist-enveloped swamps combine to project an image of putrescence which reflects the moral disintegration of the Malfilâtre family. Pélégie's comment that the weather is responsible for André's depression is a typical example of Lenormand's attempt to integrate man with nature:

<sup>6</sup>Ibid., p. 22.

<sup>7</sup>Ibid., p. 106.

C'est la pluie qui te fait le sang noir. Moi aussi, j'ai les sangs tristes par ce temps-là. Les bois sentent l'ennui. Y a rien à faire. Faut attendre.<sup>8</sup>

The great forces of nature like the wind, the rain, the sea, the sun and the fog held a particular attraction for Lenormand whose interest in them centred primarily on the influence which they exert on the human personality: "Cette notion du drame, intégrant au domaine du théâtre les forces naturelles et surnaturelles me séduisait".<sup>9</sup> In Lenormand's theatre, the environment, both social as well as physical, is usually represented as a force of evil.

Although in Les Ratés and La Maison des Remparts the environment plays a passive, symbolic role, it assumes a more active function in Le Mangeur des Rêves. The sombre atmosphere evoked by the gloomy woods, the dark, towering mountains and the mist-covered landscape convinces Luc de Bronte of a significant relationship between the geographic conditions and the mental state of the individual:

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.<sup>10</sup>

<sup>8</sup> Lenormand, Théâtre complet, X, 20.

<sup>9</sup> Lenormand, Confessions, I, 13.

<sup>10</sup> Lenormand, Théâtre complet, II, 185.

Water holds a peculiar attraction for Jeannine whose mental imbalance is indicated early in the play: "Elle était là, penchée au-dessus de la barre d'appui, ses cheveux dénoués, regardant couler l'eau avec des yeux . . . oh, des yeux que je n'oublierai jamais".<sup>11</sup>

This attraction to water becomes an obsession for Nico in Le Temps est un songe. The location is Holland, a country which Lenormand visited while writing the play. In his Confessions he indicates the disturbing effect that the whole place had on him:

Cette bâtisse rongée de lèpre, entourée de canaux croupissants que recouvrait le pullulement des lichens et des mousses, les campagnes frappées de stupeur, les étangs bordés de roseaux, le brouillard sur les chemins d'eau, tout le paysage prenait pour moi le caractère à la fois abstrait et sensible du drame. L'eau stagnante qui m'entourait, c'était l'élément primordial des influences "atmosphériques" qui allaient conduire l'action.<sup>12</sup>

It is important to note Lenormand's assertion that the stagnant water was the primary element among the atmospheric influences that dictated Nico's development. For Lenormand, the environmental element and the manner in which Nico was bound to it is the crux of the drama. However, his statement may also be regarded as an attempt to counter the opinions of those who saw the play as an illustration either of Einstein's

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<sup>11</sup>Ibid., p. 180.

<sup>12</sup>Lenormand, Confessions, I, 200.



theory of relativity or the metaphysical tenets of Bergson or Poincaré: "Le Temps est un songe par exemple, est une transcription de la doctrine de Bergson ou d'Einstein sur la relativité du temps",<sup>13</sup> claimed Robert de Beauplan in 1926 and two decades later Paul Blanchart expressed a similar opinion: "six courts tableaux ont suffi à Lenormand pour enclore l'énigme de la relativité".<sup>14</sup> Lenormand objected vehemently to such statements: "La pièce était écrite en 1915, plusieurs années avant que je n'entendisse prononcer le nom d'Einstein, que je n'ai d'ailleurs jamais lu".<sup>15</sup> Some of the playwright's critics chose to ignore the fact that at the time of the composition of the play the theories and doctrines of these men were unknown to Lenormand. The characters and the atmosphere of the play were in fact created from Lenormand's own experiences.

Le Temps est un songe opens with the return of Nico Van Eyden to his home in Utrecht, Holland, after a sojourn of several years in the East Indies. Awaiting his arrival are Rienke, his sister, and Mme. Beunke, an elderly servant.

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<sup>13</sup>Robert de Beauplan, L'Illustration (Paris, February 13, 1926).

<sup>14</sup>Blanchart, Le Théâtre de H.-R. Lenormand, p. 39.

<sup>15</sup>Lenormand, Comoedia (Paris, October 16, 1924).

Romée, a young lady with whom Nico had been on friendly terms before his departure overseas, and to whom he eventually becomes engaged, experiences a strange hallucination while approaching the house. She explains to Riemke that while she was walking along the stagnant, mist-covered pond, a sudden fog had enveloped the pond from which she had suddenly perceived a man's head jutting out. This phenomenon had vanished just as quickly as it had appeared. Romée explained that she had experienced an overpowering sensation of helplessness while gazing at the man's face, for although it seemed vaguely familiar, she felt completely powerless to help him or even to call out to him. The distance between them seemed vast and insurmountable. Romée's mental lucidity and clarity of perception had enabled her to note specific differences between the state of the pond as it actually is and as it appears in the hallucination. In the latter, the reeds at the edge of the water had been cut and a green row-boat was moored there. Looking through the window the two women confirm that there are no such changes in the pond. When Nico enters the house, Romée is disturbed to recognize his face as being the one which had appeared in her strange vision. In spite of the efforts of the two women to keep the hallucination from being realized, Nico does ultimately commit suicide by drowning himself in the same pond which appeared in Romée's vision.

The degree to which the environment acts as a

destructive force of evil may be ascertained by a study of Nico's reaction to it. In Holland, Nico's sense of displacement springs from the contrast between the hot, exotic, tropical climate of Java which he loves and the dank, oppressive climate of Utrecht which seems to weigh upon him like a malevolent force. The mists and darkness which his sister accepts as a natural feature of daily life seem, to Nico, to atrophy his very being:

NICO -- (Riemke) . . .ne pourrait plus quitter ce pays. S'il lui fallait dire adieu aux campagnes frappées de stupeur . . .au brouillard sur les chemins d'eau . . .elle mourrait . . . Elle tire sa vie de ce qui me détruit.

ROMME -- Qu'est-ce qui te détruit, mon amour?

NICO -- Tu le sais bien. Ces vapeurs grises qui passent, qui passent pendant des semaines, . . .cette pluie qui est encore de la brume . . .cette brume qui est déjà de la pluie . . .cela me désagrège.<sup>16</sup>

For Nico, this environment is an active force of evil which corrodes his physical and spiritual well-being. For him Holland offers no hope of happiness primarily because of the menacing nature of the oppressive atmosphere: "Ici, le bonheur est gâché, pourri d'avance".<sup>17</sup> He reveals that an

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<sup>16</sup>Lenormand, Théâtre complet, I, 173.

<sup>17</sup>Ibid., p. 175.

important feature of the family is the sensitivity to climatic conditions, "Dans la famille, nous sommes extrêmement sensibles à ces influences".<sup>18</sup> For Nico, Java represents an unforgettable paradise of luxuriant foliage and beautiful colours, a land where the natural elements present a singularly benign and salubrious picture:

NICO -- La mer est tout près. De la véranda, on voit flamboyer son brasier bleu . . . et à l'heure du jasant, on voit les barques malaises amarrées par l'arrière, se soulever imperceptiblement, comme pour essayer leur souffle . . . .Chaque après-midi le vent fait lever derrière les banyans de lourds nuages violets et l'odeur des fleurs devient aussi épaisse et sucrée qu'un sirop.<sup>19</sup>

However, Nico's unalloyed joy in Java is in stark contrast to the suffering wreaked on his sister by the forces of nature in the same country. Her rapid, physical deterioration seems to have been directly influenced by natural elements:

Elle n'a jamais supporté le climat des Indes. Là-bas, la fièvre s'était installée en elle, à demeure. Elle jouait, riait, babillait, mais on la sentait dévorée par un feu intérieur. On eût dit qu'une étincelle de la grande flammé solaire avait pénétré dans ce petit corps pour le dessécher lentement.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> Ibid., p. 174.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid., p. 176.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid., p. 173.

In Utrecht, Nico senses a frightening parallel between the heavy slime-covered water of the marshes which obsesses him and the decrepitude of the people who come in contact with it:

L'eau est morte, ici . . . .On devient comme elle . . .stagnant, moisi. Regarde nos voisins: ils ne sont pas plus vivants que leurs maisons . . . . Ils sont aussi insensibles, aussi mornes qu'un arbre pourri, qu'une bâtisse rongée de lèpre.<sup>21</sup>

Nico's order for the reeds to be cut symbolizes his struggle against a force which repels him and yet holds a sinister fascination for him. After this order has been carried out, the marsh takes on the appearance that it had in Romée's dream and the house even seems to project a foreboding picture of a human face. However, Nico now seems to be plunged in an even greater state of depression and he desperately endeavours to find a measure of solace in his love for Romée. The curious identification which he begins to feel with the water stems not from its stagnancy nor from its sombre appearance, but from the fact that he believes that the water holds the key to his search for the true meaning of life: "A présent, je me demande si la vérité n'est pas au fond de l'eau . . .tout au fond . . .sous la vase . . .".<sup>22</sup> To Nico's sensitive and tormented mind,

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<sup>21</sup>Ibid., p. 171.

<sup>22</sup>Ibid., p. 216.

the intricate pattern of the algae on the surface of the water seems to be a mysterious medium through which the water is trying to convey to him a vital secret, but one which is beyond the range of his comprehension. It is his inability to grasp the meaning of existence which agonizes Nico and which finally precipitates his suicide. His confession to Romée, "Eh bien, je me sens positivement rongé, envahi, étouffé par une lèpre de pensées, de tourments, de doutes",<sup>23</sup> is indicative of his anxiety.

A fair appraisal of the degree to which the environment is a destructive force of evil in Le Temps est un songe should, however, include an examination of the role played by the personality of Nico in his own destruction. Early in the play he confides to Romée that what he is trying to forget is the sense of destiny and fatality which, in Java, he had been able to block from his conscious mind:

NICO, marchant de long en large -- Ce que l'homme doit oublier: son destin, sa fatalité, cette idée que s'il peut à la rigueur se croire libre dans l'espace, il se sait prisonnier du temps. Là-bas, on arrive à ne plus y penser.<sup>24</sup>

Nico therefore sees Time as a prison in which he is inextricably immured. For him any sensation of spatial freedom is a mere illusion; true happiness consists in

<sup>23</sup>Ibid., p. 195.

<sup>24</sup>Ibid., p. 177.

escaping the restricting confines imposed by the shackles of Time.

Nico's conception of Time is the result of profound experiences in the East Indies where certain mystics, especially an elderly priest, had convinced him, through a series of psychic phenomena, that the past, the present, and the future do co-exist. Nico believes that a revelation of the secrets of the past and the future can be communicated to those who are physically and mentally prepared to receive the proper vibrations. However, his depression seems to stem primarily from his belief in predestination and in man's complete inability to modify even in the slightest degree the inexorable march of Fate. His personality and his actions are therefore influenced both by his morbid determinism and the unfavourable climate.

In Holland, at the age of fifteen, Nico's sensitivity to the stifling atmosphere of Utrecht and his incapacity to resolve the vexing doubts and problems of the meaning of existence had been responsible for his initial attempt at suicide. This attempt illustrates the fact that the environment as a distinctive force of evil had been only partly responsible for Nico's desire for death. Whereas the atmosphere in the East Indies had been conducive to his enjoyment of life, back again in Holland, the same frightening questions with which he had been plagued before going to Java

and which he had been able to put out of his mind while there, once more arise to crowd his overburdened mind with even greater malignity:

L'esprit s'apaise vite, là-bas . . . .On ne souffre plus de l'inconnaissable. On accepte la vie. Ici, on la refuse. On demande à comprendre! (Aprèment.) Comprendre? . . .Croire, voilà ce qu'il faudrait . . . . Destinée ou liberté, âme ou matière, il faut se confier à l'un quelconque de ces mots vides. Le repos est à ce prix. Mon mal, c'est de ne pas vouloir, de ne pas pouvoir être dupe.<sup>25</sup>

The disintegration of Nico's personality results primarily from his unquenchable thirst for absolute certainty, his doubts about the reality of the external world, his rejection of the traditionally accepted notions of life and the consequent anguish caused by his inability to surmount these troubles. Nico believes that Time and Space have no absolute reality but are merely terms invented by man in an effort to understand some of the mysteries of eternity. For him the thought of death does not bring despair but joy. He believes that death should not be avoided nor delayed but eagerly grasped, since it offers the key to the solution of the enigma of existence. In conversation with his servant, Saidyah, Nico explains this viewpoint:

Hier, aujourd'hui, demain, ce sont des mots, Saidyah. Des mots qui n'ont de réalité que pour nos mesquines cervelles. Hors d'elles, il n'y a ni passé, ni

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<sup>25</sup>Ibid., p. 194.



avenir . . . . Rien qu'un immense présent . . . .  
 Dans l'éternité, nous sommes en même temps à  
 naître, vivants et morts . . . . Mourir, ce n'est  
 pas dormir, ce n'est pas rêver . . . . C'est  
 maintenant qu'on rêve . . . . Les arbres, la terre,  
 les vapeurs, voilà le rêve inexplicable. Mourir  
 c'est éveiller, c'est savoir, c'est peut-être  
 atteindre ce point de l'éternité d'où le temps  
 n'est plus un songe . . . cette marche où tout  
 coexiste.<sup>26</sup>

It is the environment which acts as a catalyst on  
 Nico's determinism and on his quest for ultimate truth to  
 precipitate the final disaster. The murky, stagnant water  
 which at first repelled Nico so strongly, gradually attracts  
 him:

Au début, je n'aimais pas l'eau d'ici. Je la  
 trouvais fangeuse, immobile, répugnante. Mais  
 depuis, je l'ai beaucoup regardée. J'ai passé  
 des heures tout seul penché au-dessus d'elle . . .  
 et je me suis mis à l'aimer . . . . Il y a des  
 mares noires au pied des vieux remparts . . . . On  
 dirait des yeux fixes qui possèdent la vérité.<sup>27</sup>

Nico drowns himself in the pool, vainly seeking the secrets  
 of the meaning of life which for so long have eluded his  
 grasp.<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> Ibid., p. 213.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid., p. 215.

<sup>28</sup> Pierre Bost was enthusiastic about the play and regarded it as one of the best of contemporary dramas: "Evidemment, les personnages sont trop dans la confidence, et nous apportent au nom de l'auteur, trop d'explications qui prennent forme de conférences; mais le sujet est si fort, son développement est si rigoureux, que le drame l'emporte sur tout. Et pourtant, ici plus que jamais, nous savons dès le début comment il se déroulera. L'étonnant, c'est que ce dénouement prévu s'impose comme un dénouement fatal, si bien

The force exerted by the water in Le Temps est un songe is not, however, as powerful as that exercised by the mountain in La Dent rouge. This play Lenormand regarded as "le plus froid de mes drames climatériques".<sup>29</sup> Its composition was influenced by Lenormand's reaction to the Alps on the occasion of his first visit:

J'ai, sous la menace des chutes de pierre et à l'écoute des bruits que font les entrailles des monstres alpestres, rêvé de transporter en conflits humains l'horreur qui me venait des personnes de trois mille mètres et de cent millions de tonnes.<sup>30</sup>

The "Dent rouge" is a steep, unconquered mountain, overhanging a remote Swiss village, the inhabitants of which display profound superstition as well as an acute dislike of strangers. Both Pierre Tairraz, the central character, and his brother Amé, have an overpowering desire to conquer 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 . . . La nuit, quand je vois les cimes  
qui me regardent par la fenêtre, eh bien, il  
me semble 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!<sup>31</sup>

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que cette hâte que nous avons de voir arriver la fin n'est pas du tout celle du spectateur qui a deviné, mais celle du spectateur qui veut être délivré d'une angoisse, fût-ce par la catastrophe inévitable.  
Pierre Bost, "Spectacles et Promenades", La Revue Hébdomadaire (February 18, 1933), 365.

<sup>29</sup>Lenormand, Confessions, II, 105.

<sup>30</sup>Lenormand, Confessions, I, 89.

<sup>31</sup>Lenormand, Théâtre complet, III, 22.

However, Pierre's ambition to scale the mountain is foiled by his delicate, graceful, foreign-born wife, Claire, who dissuades him from this project because of its dangerous nature. Claire's hope of fully integrating herself into Pierre's somewhat backward society is frustrated by the isolation and the primitive nature of the locality. Pierre, on the other hand, unable to reconcile his montagnard instincts with the promise to his wife not to climb, finally, under the influence of local superstition, sees his wife as the source of all his troubles. In a fit of rage, he beats her, revokes his promise not to climb and immediately begins to make preparation for the ascent. Pierre's attempt to reach the peak is successful, but, on the return journey, he falls to his death.

In La Dent rouge, the concept of the mountain as a destructive force seems to pervade the entire play. It is a force which affects the lives of all the people in the valley. The mountain is personified as an untouchable spirit, beyond the grasp of man, and ready to wreak vengeance on anyone who dares to break its unwritten laws. The grandfather intones this belief with fervour and credulity:

La montagne n'est à personne. Les cimes sont pas faites pour les hommes. L'homme traque le chamois: là où le chamois s'arrête, y faut que l'homme s'arrête. Voilà ce qu'est juste. De mon temps, pas un chasseur aurait grimpé plus haut que la Farouche . . . .On savait ce qu'est permis et défendu . . . .La montagne veut pas sentir le pied des hommes sur sa tête . . . .Faut pas la

mettre en colère, ou alors, gare les pierres!<sup>32</sup>

The old man's opinion is held by the vast majority of the villagers and reflects the awe with which the mountain is regarded. Even Claire, despite her background of social polish and upper class education, senses the presence of a diabolic force on the mountain:

Il ne faut pas que tu retournes à la Dent rouge, Pierre. C'est trop dangereux. Toute la nuit j'ai compté les chutes de pierre. Quels grondements! Et si près . . . on aurait dit qu'elles allaient emporter la cabane! C'est sinistre, cette espèce de râclément qu'elles font. C'est comme si la montagne toussait. Dis, Pierre, dis que tu n'iras plus là-haut.<sup>33</sup>

In this play Lenormand presents environment as an active force of evil controlling people's lives and dictating a pattern of behaviour which must conform rigidly to an unwritten code of superstition. Like Nico in Le Temps est un songe, Claire undergoes the kind of suffering which results from the effects of a hostile environment. Born in America, of an immigrant father who doted on her, she had been brought up in a boarding school where she had been imbued with the refined social graces and the gentility expected of an upper class lady. Therefore it is not surprising that her life in the Swiss village among the crude, superstitious peasants, becomes unbearable. Her attempt to

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<sup>32</sup>Ibid., p. 20.

<sup>33</sup>Ibid., p. 59.

live in the harsh environment of her peasant husband is doomed to fail. The adverse climate is one source of her depression:

J'étouffais . . . . Vous autres, vous êtes habitués à l'hiver. Vous n'éprouvez pas cela. Mais voilà huit jours que la neige tombe . . . . Quand on pense qu'elle s'amasse, heure par heure contre les murs, devant les portes, sur le toit, partout . . . il semble qu'on ne pourra plus jamais sortir, qu'on ne sentira plus jamais l'air libre et le ciel sur sa tête.<sup>34</sup>

However, it is the mountain which Lenormand uses to illustrate man's destruction by the forces of nature. The mountain is personified as a woman whose charms entice some of the young men of the village to vie with each other to conquer her. Amé is shocked at Pierre's love for Claire and his reluctance to climb. He upbraids his brother:

AME: Tu renonces à la Dent rouge pour une garce étrangère.

PIERRE: La montagne sera encore là demain.

AME: Demain? Tu n'auras plus son pucelage. C'est aujourd'hui qu'on la baise.<sup>35</sup>

This theme of the quest is central to many of Lenormand's plays. Thus the conquering of the mountain in La Dent rouge seems to be similar to the possession of women in L'Homme et ses fantômes, Les Trois Chambres and Une Vie secrète.

Lenormand frequently places his characters in distant,

<sup>34</sup> Ibid., p. 36.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid., p. 57.

exotic lands like Asia and Africa partly because of his conviction of the need for an international flavour in the theatre and partly because of his interest in ethnology. Lenormand was motivated by a great desire to dramatize the psychological changes which the expatriate undergoes when he finds himself in the totally unfamiliar setting of an exotic country.<sup>36</sup> Although such themes may appear somewhat outmoded today, for the French theatre of the nineteen-twenties, they were radical innovations. Lenormand's Confessions indicates the nature of his conception:

Les écrivains qui recherchent le pittoresque pour le pittoresque se fondent sur l'artifice. Le seul exotisme que je reconnaisse pour valable, c'est le retentissement intime d'une expérience de dépaysement et de transplantation. C'est le test de l'exil et de la solitude appliqué à une âme capable d'en souffrir et de s'y enfiévrer.<sup>37</sup>

In Le Simoun, the physical environment -- the burning sun and suffocating heat -- is presented as a malevolent force

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<sup>36</sup>Lenormand espoused Nietzsche's idea of the literary possibilities inherent in the study of how men's instincts are stimulated or modified by various climates. Contrary to the belief of Lenormand, this idea was neither new nor revolutionary and had been considered by various French writers.

<sup>37</sup>Lenormand, Confessions, II, 65.

which influences men's behaviour and contributes to their gradual disintegration.<sup>38</sup> The initial appearance of Laurency on the stage indicates the extent to which his health has been affected by the harsh conditions:

C'est un homme de quarante-cinq ans, usé, alourdi par l'existence subtropicale. Ses manières hésitantes, sa voix sans timbre, révèlent une volonté brisée. Il s'arrête parfois au milieu d'une phrase pour respirer.<sup>39</sup>

Laurency realizes that his ill health is partly the result of the hostile environment: "si je ne m'étais pas laissé manger par ce traître de pays, ah . . .".<sup>40</sup> Clotilde who comes out to Algeria from France immediately notices the adverse climatic conditions: "la tête me tourne il faisait si chaud dans la diligence".<sup>41</sup> However, the non-Europeans are portrayed as being better able to withstand the environment. Aïescha, Laurency's mistress who is of mixed Arab and Spanish descent, points out that "il n'y a guère Européens qui

<sup>38</sup> Paul Blanchart claims: "C'est non seulement l'un des drames les plus intéressants et les plus intégralement équilibrés de H.-R. Lenormand, mais encore une 'pièce-type', car elle marque l'avènement dramatique de l'exotisme, considéré non plus seulement comme un élément de pittoresque, mais comme un authentique facteur psychologique". P. Blanchart, Le Théâtre de H.-R. Lenormand, p. 45.

<sup>39</sup> Lenormand, Théâtre complet, II, 8.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid., p. 38.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid., p. 38.

résistent à de pareils étés".<sup>42</sup> The Arab chief compares his physical state with that of Laurency, to the disadvantage of the latter:

Sidi, c'est un fait que tu te fatigues . . . .Tu as tenu longtemps, mais le climat est mauvais et ton activité diminue. Moi, je me sens fort comme un vieux cèdre.<sup>43</sup>

It is almost as though the locality is forbidden to Europeans who must pay the penalty for remaining there. It is not unlikely that Lenormand, who had strong anti-colonialist sentiments, was in fact hinting at just such an idea in this play. However, he portrays the weather not only as a destructive force which ravages the physical well-being of people but also as an important element in the ruthless actions in which they engage. The final tableau opens on le patio, un soir étouffant de simoun. Des rafales soufflent par intermittence à travers la nuit. Au dehors, le sable et la poussière mènent leur sarabande.<sup>44</sup> Clotilde who will be murdered by a jealous Aïescha that very night becomes disturbed at the fury of the simoon and the feeling of imminent destruction:

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<sup>42</sup>Ibid., p. 92.

<sup>43</sup>Ibid., p. 56.

<sup>44</sup>Ibid., p. 142.



As-tu vu le ciel, après le dîner? . . . Je suis  
 montée sur la terrasse . . . C'était effrayant.  
 Des nuées jaunes galopant à ras de terre . . . Et  
 le soleil! On aurait dit une poche de sang . . .  
 Le vent était déjà si furieux que les tentes des  
 nomades volaient en pièces . . . Y a-t-il du  
 danger?<sup>45</sup>

The darkness of the night seems foreboding to Laurency's messengers, the Mozabites: "La nuit est si noire qu'un Djinn s'y perdrait".<sup>46</sup> Unknown to them, robbers hired by the Arab chief are waiting to murder them for the gold they are carrying.

However, in Le Simoun, it is on Laurency, the central figure, and his incestuous thoughts about his daughter that the main action centers. Many critics have considered the environmental elements to be of paramount importance and have thus labelled the play a "tragédie climatérique".<sup>47</sup> Such an interpretation was in accord with the theories of Gaston Baty and was highly regarded by Gémier. This kind of opinion is, however, questionable. Le Simoun is basically a psychological drama in which the destructive forces of nature play an important but not a fundamental role. There is no doubt that Laurency's health is adversely affected by the hot African sun. However, it is his emotional instability which springs from his incestuous thoughts about his daughter that leads to

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<sup>45</sup> Ibid., p. 147.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid., p. 150.

<sup>47</sup> Edmond Sée, Le Théâtre français contemporain (Paris: Armand Colin, 1938), p. 45.

Laurency's destruction. Furthermore, his disturbed mental state is deeply rooted in his love 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".<sup>48</sup> The fact that Laurency's attempts to restrain his feelings about his daughter collapse just as the simoon begins to storm indicates that he is in the grips of emotions which have been brought on by his own personality and exacerbated by the climate.

Lenormand did not believe that the environment of tropical countries injects evil into the expatriate. It is rather the case, according to the playwright, that the tropical country which is closer to nature erodes from the individual the false conventions of Western society thus liberating his instincts. The instincts then surge to the surface of his being and hold sway. The two best examples of this theme are to be found in A l'Ombre du Mal and Terre de Satan. Of the former play John Palmer says:

The presence of a positive and active principle of evil is felt in every play of M. Lenormand. However, there is one of them which is almost wholly concerned with the affirmation that evil exists, that it has its own logic and its own devotees.<sup>49</sup>

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<sup>48</sup>Lenormand, Théâtre complet, II, 137.

<sup>49</sup>John Palmer, Studies in the Contemporary French Theatre (London: Martin Secker, 1927), p. 75.

In A l'Ombre du Mal the leading character is Rougé whose warped concept of the difference between justice and injustice makes him see evil as a goal unto itself. Rougé is the French colonial administrator in Equatorial Africa. He had suffered terribly when he was younger and was working for a private company in Africa because one of his superiors had not only ignored his request for quinine and other necessities, but had callously sent him the wrong materials. Two years of injustice and suffering have instilled in Rougé a sadistic love for evil and for the twenty years before the play opens, he has led a life of evil which he believes to be quite normal:

Cette volonté du mal et de l'injustice, que vous considérez comme une perversion, elle est normale. Elle est la loi de l'homme et peut-être de l'univers. C'est le désir de la justice qui est exceptionnel et monstrueux.<sup>50</sup>

Rougé is the typical colonial administrator who feels ~~nothing but contempt and hatred for the people and country~~ over whom he rules. For him the whole African continent is symbolic of evil:

Vouloir du mal écarte de soi le mal. Si nous sommes encore debout après vingt ans d'Afrique, vingt ans de massacres, d'épidémies et de trahisons, c'est que nous avons vécu, tous les deux, à l'ombre du mal.<sup>51</sup>

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<sup>50</sup>Lenormand, Théâtre complet, IV, 138.

<sup>51</sup>Ibid., p. 180.

Rougé wallows in evil with obvious relish. In the trial of the two village chiefs, L'Almany and Maelik, the innocence of the latter is evident, but in spite of, or perhaps because of, this innocence, he is cruelly punished by Rougé.

By chance, Préfailles, a visiting administrator, turns out to be Rougé's former sadistic employer. In confessing his guilt, Préfailles intimates that his cruelty had been motivated by the savagery of his environment:

Je n'étais pas un homme cruel. Non. Mes administrateurs me trouvaient juste. Rien de ce qui m'approchait n'avait à souffrir de moi. Mais j'étais un homme jeune et enivré de sa jeunesse . . . Je crois que ce fut une plaisanterie féroce, une farce que les circonstances rendirent abominable. (Un silence.) 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, embrassés 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.<sup>52</sup>

In the case of Préfailles who was once upright, his will had been crushed by forces within the country, forces which had unmasked his true penchant for evil. Rougé's demonic nature, on the other hand, had been unleashed not only because of the subsequent cruel treatment he had received

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<sup>52</sup>Ibid., p. 224.

at the hands of Préfailles but because, like the latter, his instincts for cruelty, feeling no need for repression in a primitive society which is a truer reflection of man's basic nature, have surged to his conscious mind where they reign supreme.

Rougé's delight in evil excludes the traditional observance of such rites as acts of vengeance. The reason is that for the mind completely overwhelmed by evil, vengeance has little meaning:

C'était quelque chose de plus fort que la vengeance . . . à chaque punition que j'infligeais, c'était comme une détente furieuse, une décharge de tout mon être . . . Eh bien, j'ai vécu pour ces spasmes d'âme. Je me suis nourri de ces rêveries de forces mauvaises. J'y ai trouvé les délices les plus sombres, les seules délices de mon existence.<sup>53</sup>

Since there is constant antagonism between the "Self" on one hand, and the complexes and instincts on the other, there is, of necessity, antagonism between the will and the impulses. Impotence of the former and liberation of the latter take place when the complexes or instincts are excessively aroused and the will is crushed or sublimated. Such an action, according to Lenormand, takes place in an environment which is natural to man, unfettered

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<sup>53</sup>Ibid., p. 156.

by social conventions and the hypocrisy of conscience. Even the young, idealistic le Cormier, adopts the viewpoint that evil will flourish because it is natural to man. His explanation to his wife indicates this belief:

Vous autres femmes, vous cherchez toujours des causes à la méchanceté. C'est une façon détournée de la justifier. Elle n'a pas besoin d'être expliquée. Elle est naturelle. De même que certains hommes sont avares, ou généreux, d'autres sont cruels, par tempérament.<sup>54</sup>

### Social Conflicts

Lenormand believed in the basic hostility between men. He thought that man's aggressiveness has two primary sources: (1) the innate striving for destruction (the death instinct) (2) the frustration of his instinctual drives imposed on him by civilization. Like André Gide who travelled to Central Africa in 1925, Lenormand regarded colonialism as gross exploitation. His play, Terre de Satan, shows many of his anti-colonialist views. The setting of this play is similar to that of A l'Ombre du Mal and furnished Lenormand with the perfect opportunity to voice his lifelong dislike of Christianity: "Avec Terre de Satan je suis retombé dans les mots mêmes qui, à l'âge de la

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<sup>54</sup>Ibid., p. 134.

puberté, me servaient à exprimer ma haine et mon incompréhension".<sup>55</sup> Lenormand was skeptical of the virtues of religion, and one of his primary aims in Terre de Satan is to show the harm inflicted on native people by Christianity. He believed that the imperialist slogan of "divide and rule" was one which was directly or indirectly aided and abetted by Christianity which caused destructive divisions and tensions among the ranks of the native Africans. The play in question well illustrates this point. On the one hand are the baptized natives who cling tenaciously to vaguely understood precepts which they unsuccessfully endeavour to translate into their everyday life. On the other hand are the "hommes panthères" and the followers of Goré-Goré who insist on following their traditional beliefs and practices.

Christian fanaticism is well illustrated in the person of Soeur Marguerite for whom the winning of souls is the epitome of goodness even though she wishes for the death of such converts:

Plus d'une fois, jadis, j'ai prié pour que le bon Dieu mette bien vite au Paradis les malades que nous venions de baptiser. Je disais: "s'il guérit, il n'ira peut-être plus chez le féticheur. Prenez-le mon Dieu".<sup>56</sup>

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<sup>55</sup> Lenormand, Confessions, II, 164.

<sup>56</sup> Lenormand, Théâtre complet, X, 194.

Her fear of the fact that the natives may reject Christianity indicates that she partly suspects that her doctrine is regarded by them as being totally irrelevant. Lenormand believed that Christian missionaries were guilty not only of putting native people against each other but also of displaying a patronizing attitude which stems from contempt and ignorance. Père Sahler propounds a doctrine of evil which is oversimplified and dangerous:

La terre que vous habitez est devenue le refuge de Satan, chassé depuis quelques siècles du vieux monde par l'Eglise et ses représentants. Oui, l'Afrique . . . de vastes régions de l'Afrique.<sup>57</sup>

By equating Europe with goodness and Africa with evil, Sahler displays the kind of naivety which foreshadows the failure of his evangelism among the blacks. Père Sahler's zeal to evangelize the native and his deep hatred for their traditional religious practices which he regards as being evil blind him to the fact that he is in the process of destroying native customs. The "hommes panthères", however, fully realize that conversion to Christianity is the first step in the erosion of their social cohesion, a state which will bring the disintegration of their way of life. They therefore compel Sahler and his followers to install images

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<sup>57</sup>Ibid., p. 271.



of Goré-Goré in the Church and remove those of Christ. However, one of the baptized natives, angered by this move, sets the Church on fire and destroys the sacred symbols of Goré-Goré. The result is the annihilation of all Christians by the "hommes panthères", blacks as well as whites.

Lenormand's antipathy towards Christian missionaries stemmed not only from the destructive religious innovations which they introduced into the lives of the natives but also from the hypocrisy and bigotry which they often displayed. Père Sahler, for example, frequently indicates a racist attitude towards black people. He claims: "Satan existe, mais pas en nous, innocents à la peau blanche, capables de fidélité, de sacrifice et d'amour . . . pas en nous".<sup>58</sup> Sahler thus attempts a justification of ethnic prejudice by means of religious sanctions.<sup>59</sup> His identification of Satan with blackness is a subconscious desire to

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<sup>58</sup> Ibid., p. 296.

<sup>59</sup> Nicolas Remy, a demonologist, traces the history of the attitude of the Christian religion towards blackness and claims that a significant part of the racial hostility of modern times is due to the attitude of the Church which equated Satan with blackness and by extension with black people. Nicolas Remy, Demonolatry (London: John Rodker, 1930), p. 41.

further dehumanize the African and to instil in him a sense of self-hatred and a feeling of lack of moral worth.<sup>60</sup>

The baptized African, contaminated by the noxious dogma, becomes convinced of his innate evil and is thus psychologically destroyed. In this play Lenormand's viewpoint is voiced through Fearon who appears under the name of Lady Sullivan. She is one of the few Europeans to see the situation in its true perspective. She sees the Church as a force of evil which is destroying the lives of the native people:

Il vaut mieux, pour eux, faire leurs guerres de sauvages, que mourir à la peine en travaillant à vos routes, et à vos chemins de fer. Mille fois mieux! Oh! si vous croyez que je ne vous connais pas! Mais je sais que des centaines de têtes pensives et humanitaires comme le vôtre ont fait de ce pays un enfer de mensonges et d'ivrognerie.<sup>61</sup>

Fearon's dislike for the missionaries and their work is so strong that in the rebellion she sides with the natives.

Lenormand's treatment of the theme of racial injustice is again depicted in L'Asie. François Porché comments on the wide implication of the conflict presented in this play:

<sup>60</sup>The attitude of Père Sahler is reminiscent of that of the ministers of the Dutch Reformed Church in South Africa who are vigorous supporters of the policy of apartheid.

<sup>61</sup>Lenormand, Théâtre complet, X, 240.

. . . l'une des plus attachantes qu'il ait composées, l'une de celles qui suscite les plus sérieuses réflexions. Le conflit que l'auteur invente n'est ici que l'un des aspects d'une lutte autrement vaste, qui, elle, n'est point imaginaire, et qui, si violente qu'elle soit déjà, ne fait que commencer.<sup>62</sup>

In this play, De Mezzana, a French soldier who has spent several years in Asia and who is married to a princess of one of the regions conquered by the French, wishes to divorce his wife and keep their two children. De Mezzana was quite content to live with his non-white wife in Asia for eight years, but now that he is returning to Europe where he feels that his wife will be a source of deep embarrassment, he desires to rid himself of her. His fiancée, however, while wishing to marry him is disturbed by the callous manner in which he plans to treat his wife:

Tout dépend de ce que vous voulez accorder à cette malheureuse. Si c'est la justice, eh bien, qu'elle reparte, mais qu'elle reparte à son heure et en emmenant ses enfants.<sup>63</sup>

But De Mezzana is adamant. His refusal brooks no compromise. The princess, however, infuriated with jealousy at De Mezzana's romantic involvement and overcome with remorse at the thought of losing her children, avenges herself in

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<sup>62</sup>François Porché, "Le Mouvement dramatique: Asie", Revue de Paris (January 15, 1932), 437.

<sup>63</sup>Lenormand, Théâtre complet, IX, 90.

a manner calculated to hurt her husband as much as possible. She kills her two children.

Lenormand did not think that the colonialist's record of harshness to native people could last forever and he claimed that the day would come when "l'épais sirop, couleur de sucre brûlé, va se mettre à couler sur l'Europe comme le caramel sur la tôle du confiseur".<sup>64</sup> In his plays which have a tropical setting -- Le Simoun, A l'Ombre du Mal, Terre de Satan and Asie -- the playwright's strong anti-colonialist feelings can be seen in his treatment of the theme of racial injustice. In these plays the lines of social stratification in the colony are clearly shown by Lenormand. Their position within the particular social class affects the characters' lives, their self-esteem and their role in the play. The European is invariably in the highest social class. This position he gains not only because of his wealth and power but also because of his race. In the second category are to be found persons of mixed blood such as Aïescha and De Mezzana's children, or other non-Caucasians such as the princess, the Agha, or Giaour. At the bottom of the social scale are the natives who are usually black. The attitude of the European is usually characterized by prejudice and cruelty. Rougé's contempt and hatred for the natives over whom he rules is never left in doubt. He despises them as

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<sup>64</sup>Lenormand, Confessions, II, 212.

individuals: "Quinze francs valent mieux qu'un nègre, vivant ou mort"<sup>65</sup> and he conceives of them as being little more than subhuman brutes:

Le chimpanzé ne comprend pas les contradictions. Et vous oubliez toujours que nous régnons sur des chimpanzés. Retournez donc simplement au village et priez l'Almany de venir me parler. (Souriant.) Je vous garantis qu'en cinq minutes j'éclaircirai cette sombre histoire. J'ai appris la langue des singes, moi.<sup>66</sup>

Rougé's assistant, Le Cormier, thinks that his wife is wasting her time trying to show affection to the Africans. For him they are merely crude savages incapable of being transformed by love and incapable of love: "Tu regretteras l'illusion que ta puissance d'amour pouvait transformer les hommes. Ma pauvre enfant. L'amour n'a jamais transformé que les hommes capables d'aimer".<sup>67</sup>

The visiting administrator, Préfailles, refuses to see the Africans as human beings. He condones the barbaric treatment inflicted on them by Rougé and does not think that Mme. Cormier will succeed with them because, according to him, genuine affection cannot be bestowed on those who are not one's own kith and kin:

<sup>65</sup>Lenormand, Théâtre complet, IV, 144.

<sup>66</sup>Ibid., p. 147.

<sup>67</sup>Ibid., p. 169.

On ne peut aimer que ce qui nous ressemble et les noirs ne sont pas nos semblables. Non, des malheureux qui, pour se préserver de la foudre, mangent la charogne putréfiée des foudroyés, ne sont pas nos semblables . . . .Des hébétés, dont la vie entière coule, terrorisée par les esprits du mal et les menaces d'un féticheur, ne sont pas nos frères . . . .Des brutes capables de certaines trahisons, de certaines stupidités, ne sont même pas des hommes.<sup>68</sup>

Préfailles justifies his former cruelty to Rougé on the grounds that he had been contaminated by the evil life in Africa:

C'est l'âme noire qui nous souffle ses obsessions. Par moments, on se sent animé des volontés absurdes que les nègres prêtent à leurs fétiches. On dirait que l'idée de choisir le plus déshérité, le plus perdu de mes compatriotes et de le persécuter, me fut dictée par un de leurs informes génies.<sup>69</sup>

Like Père Sahler in A l'Ombre du Mal, Préfailles equates Africa with evil and Europe with goodness: "Afrique: ça veut dire la Noire, l'Obscurcissante. Le progrès, la bonté, la justice même, pour beaucoup d'entre nous, ce sont de beaux souvenirs, des souvenirs d'Europe".<sup>70</sup>

The relationship between the European colonist and the non-Caucasian is often marked by mutual distrust as well

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<sup>68</sup>Ibid.

<sup>69</sup>Ibid., p. 224.

<sup>70</sup>Ibid., p. 167.

as racial hatred. Lenormand paints the picture of the person of mixed blood true to the concept held by the Europeans. Aïescha is portrayed as une métisse d'Arabe et d'Espagnol, admirable créateur de trente-deux ans, à la peau couleur de noix, au regard instable et brûlant.<sup>71</sup>

According to popular prejudice, mixed blooded people are supposed to be extremely passionate, mentally unstable, and easily roused to anger. Laurency's description of Aïescha to Clotilde confirms this point: "Ce n'est pas une femme qu'on épouse . . . .C'est une sang-mêlé . . .une violente . . .une déséquilibrée . . . .Il ya en elle comme du feu . . .une force sauvage qui ne s'apaise jamais . . .".<sup>72</sup>

Lenormand's plea for tolerance can be detected in his portrayal of the tragic racial confusion which the offspring of mixed marriages sometimes suffer. Aïescha voices her self-pity with candour: "Qui donc aime l'enfant d'une prostituée? Une fille sans race? Une sang-mêlé?".<sup>73</sup> She despises her Arab blood and elevates her European ancestry: "Ma mère, je ne la connais pas! Je ne lui ressemble pas! Je crache sur elle! . . .Je suis tout entière Espagnole, tu entends?".<sup>74</sup> In upbraiding Giaour for conveying to her

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<sup>71</sup>Lenormand, Théâtre complet, II, 7.

<sup>72</sup>Ibid., p. 43.

<sup>73</sup>Ibid., p. 84.

<sup>74</sup>Ibid., p. 11.

the Agha's offer of a reward if she kills Laurency, she emphasizes her European background and claims that she is not a cheap Bedouin who can be easily bought: "Il me prend pour une Bédouine! . . . Une esclave à qui suffit le plaisir de trahir le maître. Il oublie que j'ai du sang espagnol. Je ne suis pas si simple qu'il croit".<sup>75</sup>

Alescha's dislike for Clotilde stems not only from jealousy because Laurency has transferred his affections to his daughter but because of the fact that the latter is white: "une poupée de trois francs qui m'a volé ma place! Une tête en cire qui me méprise parce qu'elle est blanche".<sup>76</sup>

In Asie, De Mezzana feels a gulf between himself and his two children who bear some of the Asiatic features of his wife. Instead of accepting the children for what they are, he plans to transform them:

Je les garde quoiqu'il arrive. Ce sont mes enfants, mais pas encore mes fils. Ils ne seront mes fils que quand je les aurai séparés d'elle et repeints à la couleur de ma race. J'en ferai des garçons blancs. J'effacerai la sombre tache originelle . . . le péché de noirceur.<sup>77</sup>

De Mezzana fails to see the feelings of uncertainty and hostility which he will create in his sons if he persists with his plans. It is the princess who points out to him

<sup>75</sup> Ibid., p. 109.

<sup>76</sup> Ibid., p. 159.

<sup>77</sup> Lenormand, Théâtre complet, IX, 41.



the possible disastrous consequences of the actions which he contemplates:

Tu ne comprends qu'en voulant effacer en eux ce qu'ils tiennent de moi, ce qui, de mon ventre et de mon esprit, a passé dans leur être, ce qui colle à leurs petites têtes aussi fortement que la couleur à leurs corps, tu les rends malheureux! Tu déchires leurs âmes aussi cruellement que si tu grattais leur peau avec un couteau.<sup>78</sup>

De Mezzana's sadness when he contemplates the fate of his two sons in a world which is hostile to racial mixing, reflects the view of Lenormand who thought that contemporary opinions on racial purity were overemphasized:

Je trouve intolérable que dix ans après la guerre, et dans une démocratie européenne, deux enfants de sang mêlé soient considérés comme des espèces de singes apprivoisés, dont les grands-parents habitaient en haut d'un cocotier. Quel sera leur avenir dans ce pays? Où faudra-t-il qu'ils vivent? Où seront-ils à leur place? Pas ici. Pas en Asie. Où?<sup>79</sup>

De Mezzana's decision to divorce his wife but keep his two sons results from a guilt complex on his part. He considers the procreation of his two half-caste children as a crime for which he seeks expiation:

<sup>78</sup> Ibid., p. 47.

<sup>79</sup> Ibid., p. 74.

Puisque j'ai commis la faute d'engendrer des  
 métis, aux désirs contradictoires, aux âmes  
 perpétuellement offensées aux destins difficiles,  
 je ne puis la réparer qu'en me consacrant à eux.  
 La malédiction qui coule dans leur sang augmente  
 mon amour et me dicte mon amour.<sup>80</sup>

Lenormand believed that the growth in the numbers of people of mixed blood was inevitable and that the hostility shown to them was morally wrong. In comparing the increase of such people with the new international flavour in the theatre, he stated: "Qu'on le veuille ou non le métissage est devenu la loi du monde. Sur presque toute la surface de la terre, le mélange des formes artistiques accompagne celui des sangs".<sup>81</sup>

In Lenormand's "tropical plays", the dramatist depicts racial prejudice as a social attitude which comes into existence as a result of the relations which develop between different races. The attitude of men like Rougé, Préfailles, Laurency and Père Sahler show the rationalizations of prejudiced people to make their prejudice appear logical and just.

In spite of Lenormand's dislike of plays which preach a gospel or support philosophical or scientific theories

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<sup>80</sup> Ibid., p. 91.

<sup>81</sup> Lenormand, "La danse et l'homme d'aujourd'hui", Le Ballet contemporain, Collection Comoedia (November 20, 1925), 14.

and his concept of the dramatist as merely an observer of human foibles, there is little doubt that in his plays which have a tropical setting his sympathies lie with the downtrodden natives who find themselves at the mercy of colonialist regimes. Lenormand believed that the racism displayed by men like Rougé and Préfaillies is a passion chosen to satisfy needs which otherwise would have found equally irrational outlets. One may therefore establish a connection between the unrestricted sexuality of Sarterre on the one hand, and the vehement prejudice of Rougé on the other. In Sarterre's case eroticism and depravity are regarded as being necessary for artistic creation. In Rougé's case, racism is excused as being the effect of living in a barbarous environment. In both cases evil is rationalized and the Lenormand hero, unable to come to grips with the malevolence deeply rooted in his personality, pursues his destructive goals while concealing his aggressive impulse under the cover of rational purpose.

CHAPTER III  
BIOGRAPHICAL ELEMENTS

The preponderantly autobiographical inspiration of the plays of Lenormand may be ascertained from a study of his Confessions d'un auteur dramatique. This work is usually considered the main source of information about the playwright because of the paucity of other biographical material. In the preface of Daniel-Rops' study on him Lenormand asserts:

Un monde de souvenirs, voilà surtout ce que mes drames me représentent. Je ne m'enorgueillis pas de l'impossibilité où je me trouve d'inventer des événements sans rapport avec les expériences de ma vie. Du moins cette faiblesse devrait-elle m'épargner l'accusation de nourrir mon théâtre de systèmes et d'abstractions.<sup>1</sup>

Lenormand's preoccupation with introspective exploration, hidden motivations, and the uncovering of the frightening truths which haunt and frustrate men in their efforts to adapt themselves to the world of reality, was dictated by a passionate belief that one of the primary concerns of the writer should be self-analysis. Therefore the majority of his leading characters are either direct images of himself or a representation of various facets of his own temperament.

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<sup>1</sup>Daniel-Rops, Sur le Théâtre de H.-R. Lenormand, p.20.

Other characters are modelled on acquaintances whom he describes in his Confessions. Similarly, the setting of most of his plays was not unknown to him. Thus a comprehension of Lenormand's fundamentally ambivalent outlook towards life which affected his conception of morality can best be determined by a study of his personality and the factors which contributed to the development of his basic attitudes.

Lenormand's early youth was marked by excessive affection and constant admonition from his over-indulgent, over-protective mother towards whom he developed a deep resentment mixed with a great desire for a sense of freedom and self-assertion: "La personne de ma mère dégageait un charme fait de naïveté, d'inquiétude et d'adoration. Son amour pour mon père et pour moi fut, jusqu'à sa mort, coloré par la crainte et le pessimisme".<sup>2</sup> His disgust with his mother's solicitude led him to treat her with repugnance and contempt. However, his delight in ridiculing her numerous solecisms and intellectual deficiencies and his anger at her frequent expressions of concern for his health were often mitigated by pangs of remorse at his malicious behaviour. Lenormand's recognition of the virtues of his mother and his admission of his own cruel attitude towards her gave birth,

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<sup>2</sup>Lenormand, Confessions, I, 63.

from early in his life, to an ambivalent love-hate relationship which left its mark on his personality:

Quand, à dix ans, préparant ma première communion, je m'accusais devant l'aumônier du lycée Janson de Sailly, de "n'être pas toujours gentil avec ma mère," je décelais, avec le vocabulaire de mon âge, le complexe d'amour haineux qui a ravagé mon enfance.<sup>3</sup>

Thus any assumption that Lenormand's attitude towards his mother was essentially one of hatred, is by no means correct. In spite of his loathing for his mother's foibles, and his reluctance to return the affection which she lavished on him, Lenormand's basic love for her was never completely effaced. His affirmation of this fact on the occasion of her death furnishes adequate proof.<sup>4</sup> Nevertheless, the conflicting sentiments of love and hatred which were at the roots of his feelings for his mother played a major role in the development of many of the ideas which are reflected in his theatre.

Lenormand admitted that L'Homme et ses fantômes was a direct influence of the guilty feelings which he had about his mother.<sup>5</sup> The emotional reaction experienced by "L'Homme" is similar to Lenormand's and, like the latter, he is torn by remorse when his mother dies:

<sup>3</sup>Ibid., p. 67.

<sup>4</sup>Ibid., p. 69.

<sup>5</sup>Ibid., p. 69.

J'étouffe de remords, et je ne peux pas la pleurer . . . .Depuis qu'elle n'est plus là, l'horreur de moi me monte à la bouche! J'ai toujours été son ennemi . . . .Enfant, je ne cherchais qu'à l'humilier, à la prendre en faute. Je la guettais comme un pion . . . .Je me dérobaïs à ses caresses. J'évitais ses baisers . . . .Et l'âge ne m'a pas rendu moins odieux. Sa maladie même ne nous a reconciliés qu'en apparence. J'étais à son chevet, paralysé par la gêne. Je voudrais m'agenouiller, effacer enfin toute une vie d'ingratitude . . . .Je ne pouvais pas parler . . . .Je n'osais même pas la regarder . . . .(Avec emotion.) Mais quand elle a cessé de respirer, quelque chose s'est dénoué dans mon corps. J'ai baisé sa joue, que je n'avais pas touchée depuis mon enfance. Je lui ai dit que je l'aimais.<sup>6</sup>

Lenormand's unsatisfactory relationship with his mother affected his attitude towards women in general. His sexual development was marked by extreme timidity. "J'étais un mâle honteux dont l'ardeur contenue tout le jour dans le sillage des femmes ne se libérait que la nuit en rêves obsédants".<sup>7</sup> Latent homosexual tendencies also appeared to be evident:

Plus précise m'arrive l'image d'un garçon de quelques années mon aîné, Gustave de P., dont la présence ou l'absence, la voix et les propos me bouleversèrent. Chastes amours asexuées, qu'un regard, une pression de la main comblent de bonheur.<sup>8</sup>

Lenormand's early hypersensitivity and his fascination with homosexual impulses permeate many of his plays, most notably

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<sup>6</sup>Lenormand, Théâtre complet, IV, 57.

<sup>7</sup>Lenormand, Confessions, I, 33.

<sup>8</sup>Ibid., p. 31.

L'Homme et ses fantômes. His initial sexual experience at the age of seventeen was with a prostitute. The fact that this was the only kind of woman whom he frequented for the next thirteen years and that he seems to have effected a separation between physical desire and emotional attachment is of some significance. Like Sarterre of Une Vie secrète who seeks artistic inspiration in the eager pursuit of prostitutes, Lenormand associated prostitutes with his strongly felt desire for freedom and artistic creation. For him they symbolized

. . . la découverte de corps nouveaux et recherche d'un état que j'appellerais pré-créateur, l'immersion dans un torrent d'images, d'impressions et de rêveries dont je savais que sortirait un jour une pièce de théâtre. Or, cet état ne me semblait pas concevable sans une promesse de débauche.<sup>9</sup>

Like "l'Homme" Lenormand's attraction to prostitutes was not completely of a sexual nature: "Elles étaient les clés de l'univers connaissable et la forme plastique des secrets sans nom à la poursuite desquels s'élançait ma jeunesse".<sup>10</sup> It seems fairly clear that the theme of desire which is central to Lenormand's theatre was inspired early in his dramatic career not only by his erotic relationship with prostitutes but also by the emotional aberrations which seem

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<sup>9</sup> Ibid., p. 288.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid., p. 289.



to have been kindled by this association.

Lenormand's predilection for the company of women rather than that of men indicated his need for the kind of satisfying emotional relationship which had been stunted because of the hostility he had shown towards his mother:

Toute conversation avec un homme, si proche de moi soit-il par l'esprit, débouche finalement sur l'ennui. Ce n'est pas un signe de grandeur que de pouvoir, des heures durant, bavarder avec une jolie fille insignifiante et de sentir la fatigue intervenir dans tout échange un peu prolongé avec les meilleurs de ma profession. Je m'inquiète et me méprise d'une pareille attitude. Je n'ai jamais pu la modifier. Je ne connais le naturel, la détente, le plaisir, qu'en présence d'une femme.<sup>11</sup>

His attachment to those who were usually consigned to the lowest rung of the social ladder underlines his desire to break the restraining bonds of the norms of society which had been instilled in him by his mother.

The antipathy with which Lenormand regarded his mother may be strongly contrasted with the adoration that he felt for his father: "J'étais de ces enfants chez qui l'adoration de l'un implique le refus de l'autre".<sup>12</sup> The playwright's father, René Lenormand, was a musician of

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<sup>11</sup>Lenormand, Confessions, II, 70.

<sup>12</sup>Lenormand, Confessions, I, 67.

great ability who attempted to revolutionize his compositions by abandoning traditional European harmonic standards in favour of rhapsodies woven around Arabic and Oriental themes.<sup>13</sup> The artistic temperament and love for music which the playwright inherited from his father was evident at an early age, "dès la quatrième ou la cinquième année, j'étais un enfant inquiet, précocement sensible à la musique".<sup>14</sup> In his youth, Lenormand's interest in distant, exotic lands was stimulated by listening to the impassioned melodies of his father. The bizarre atmosphere conjured up by the mysterious mellifluous sounds intoxicated Lenormand's sensibilities and transported his imagination into enchanting realms which fired his creative instincts:

Bien des années avant d'avoir parcouru le monde, j'ai été musicalement obsédé par l'atmosphère des terres lointaines. Toute mon enfance s'est passé à l'écoute. Mon père . . . composait au piano. J'ai entendu se matérialiser . . . la centaine de mélodies exotiques dont la vérité ne doit rien qu'à ses rêves. La musique de mon père emplissait ma cervelle d'enfant d'images exotiques.<sup>15</sup>

In his theatre, Lenormand uses the musical leitmotif

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<sup>13</sup> Henry Woolet, Un Mélodiste français (Paris: Fischbacher, 1936).

<sup>14</sup> Lenormand, Confessions, I, 18.

<sup>15</sup> Lenormand, "Voyages et Création Dramatique", L'Intransigeant (Paris, June 16, 1938).

to create particular kinds of emotional atmosphere or to delineate and intensify his characterizations. Plays such as A l'Ombre du Mal, Le Simoun, and Une Vie secrète attest to this fact. Throughout A l'Ombre du Mal the mysterious sounds of the drums of the Africans create a foreboding atmosphere which adversely affects the Europeans. In Le Simoun, Laurency's final submission to the dictates of his instincts is preceded by the sensuous singing and dancing of a troupe of travelling artistes. In Une Vie secrète, Sarterre dedicates his entire life to his musical compositions. So fierce is his zeal to attain new heights in musical accomplishments that he convinces himself that he is outside the scope of and superior to all moral laws. His fanatical search for inspiration shows itself in his subsequent life of vice and degradation. Lenormand's interest in remote lands and their exotic culture was stirred not only by his father's music but also by the tales of the family physician, Dr. Ruck. This man who was of Asiatic origin and who had travelled extensively in Africa and the Far East left a lasting impression on Lenormand's mind: "Cet homme d'une douceur exceptionnelle, éveilla mon enfance au rêve des pays lointains".<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> Lenormand, Confessions, I, 16.

Lenormand's personality was marked by conflict. In his youth ambivalent emotions divided him on sensual matters: "J'ai, de l'adolescence à l'âge mûr, cherché la volupté dans un zone intermédiaire entre le rêve et le spasme".<sup>17</sup> There was a definite contrast between appearance and reality: "Vouée en apparence au plaisir, ma vie était un compromis entre la débauche et la chasteté".<sup>18</sup> The type of relationship which exists between Luc de Bronte and Jeannine Felse in Le Mangeur de Rêves is similar to that which Lenormand had with certain women:

J'ai cherché la volupté en palpant lentement des confidences difficiles. Tels secrets maladifs, obstinément traqués et dévoilés avec peine, au prix de véritables tortures, accroissent les délices de la possession charnelle.<sup>19</sup>

The conflicting emotions which overwhelmed Lenormand were not wholly sexual in nature. The facade of self-assurance which he displayed to his contemporaries masked the timidity and fear which he often felt. The doubts which frequently plague him about his ability as a writer early in his career were often replaced by a feeling that he was "prêt

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<sup>17</sup> Ibid., p. 291.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid., p. 292.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid., p. 265.

à déchiqueter en quelques saisons le théâtre de Boulevard, la comédie bourgeoise, toutes les conventions dont vivait la scène française".<sup>20</sup>

Lenormand's preoccupation in his theatre with the sordid aspects of life results from the fact that such elements held a peculiar attraction for him. His description of the thrill he experienced on the occasion of his first visit to the Alps also includes a description of the fascination with which he regarded the goitrous people of the region:

Ces plis de peau verte au coin de la bouche, ces mufles au nez cassé, ces lippes supérieures énormes et poussant de l'avant, comme la langue d'un fourmilier, ces nuques de crétines, aussi pelées que le col d'un dindon, leurs nattes en chignon, sous lesquelles passait la ficelle noire du chapeau valisan, ces têtes tout en maxillaires, ces gueules fleuries de pourriture, ces regards vides ou lourds d'un sadisme infantile, ces malédictions de la chair et de l'esprit qui frappent les larves humaines grouillant au pied des plus gigantesques remparts de roches de l'Europe, c'était pour le jeune amateur de monstres en voyage pré-nuptial, une aubaine qu'il se garda bien de laisser échapper.<sup>21</sup>

It was his observation of these decrepit people and their primitive existence that gave Lenormand the idea for La Dent rouge. The majority of the characters of this play are faithful replicas of those whom Lenormand observed

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<sup>20</sup>Ibid., p. 120.

<sup>21</sup>Ibid., p. 66.

when he visited the Alps and who made such a lasting impression on him. They display the same repulsive traits and habits. Lenormand's obsession with squalor which finds expression in his theatre was discernible even in his youth when he sometimes showed a preference for the unsanitary conditions and the misery and vice existing in slums rather than for the reconstructions and improvements which often took place. Yet Lenormand was often stirred by a deep sense of humanity and many times felt revulsion at the conditions of poverty and degradation which were a daily feature of the existence of many people. The fact that he was capable of experiencing such diametrically opposed sentiments when confronted by parallel situations underlines the deep ambivalence which marked his personality and which the playwright himself at times found so perplexing. It is therefore not surprising that in Mixture Lenormand's portrayal of Monique is that of a woman capable of profound love and at the same time severe hatred towards her daughter. The playwright merely transfers to his characters sentiments which were deeply rooted in his own personality.

In describing his artistic nature, the playwright did not conceal his love for chaos:

J'aurais voulu, dans ma jeunesse, voir le sadisme et l'inhumanité se lever sous mes pas. Les vœux d'harmonie, d'équilibre et de progrès obsèdent l'homme social. L'écrivain préférera toujours, dans le secret de son cœur pourri, le désordre, un chaos dramatique et les gémissements des opprimés.<sup>22</sup>

Yet Lenormand was by no means a completely morbid or pathological person. He frequently showed an exuberant spirit and a love of life. His ambivalence seems to have centred around the contradictions existing between his obligations as a writer and his obligation as a social creature. The artist in him was interested in the human tragedy and therefore preferred to envision scenes of misery, suffering and degradation. This side of his personality conflicted with his attempt to adopt a more positive attitude towards life. Lenormand believed that ambivalence was a natural reaction to the complexities of modern life:

La vie moderne, avec toutes ses surprises, m'amuse, passionnément; j'ai pour elle la plus grande curiosité, en même temps que la plus vive inquiétude de tout ce que son jeu détruit. Devant elle, les hommes de nos générations ne peuvent avoir qu'une attitude double. L'adhésion à la vie moderne ne peut être spontanée que chez certains naïfs . . . . Nous vivons avec deux personnalités en conflit presque constant.<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>22</sup>Ibid., p. 85.

<sup>23</sup>Lenormand, interview with Marius Richard, "Au fond aimez-vous la vie moderne?", La Liberté (Paris, November 18, 1930).

Throughout his youth and indeed for much of his adult life, fear was a constant companion of Lenormand. This irrational fear seems to have resulted from the deep feeling of insecurity which showed itself in his childhood and which was partly due to the rigid discipline and the frequent maternal expressions of apprehension to which he was then subjected. The feeling of fear was so strong that it was the emotion that weighed most heavily on the playwright when his mother died:

La peur s'est emparé de moi. Peur du corps qui m'avait fait, peur du visage auquel le repos ne conférait ni la beauté, ni la majesté, que l'on s'efforce de découvrir aux traits des bien-aimés devenus immobiles, mais une extraordinaire innocence . . . peur, aussi, de ma propre mort, devant la disjonction de l'agrégat familial.<sup>24</sup>

Five years later, at the age of fifty, Lenormand was seized by the same fear on the death of his father. It was a fear which was perhaps more keenly felt because of his deep adoration for his father and the fact that this sentiment had nurtured, from his early youth, a sense of great disquiet:

C'était la limite que j'assignais à mon pouvoir d'endurer, de surmonter, d'accepter. Gamin tourmenté par la foi, je priais Dieu de me faire mourir le premier. Chacune de ses maladies me prenait aux entrailles et j'en jouais l'issue avec

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<sup>24</sup>Lenormand, Confessions, I, 84.



le destin. Si le nombre des marches d'un escalier était pair, sa vie serait sauve. Si j'abordais du pied gauche le trottoir d'une avenue, il ne guérirait pas.<sup>25</sup>

The fear and subsequent inner turmoil and anxiety which Lenormand experienced directly influenced his artistic development. Anxiety is a theme which permeates the vast majority of the dramatist's plays and is perhaps the most characteristic feature of his dramatic thought. Jean-Paul Bichet points out that Lenormand supplied "au chapitre de l'anxiété une sorte d'illustration"<sup>26</sup> and in the words of Clouard, "la déchéance consentie, la complaisance aux tentations, la peur des fatalités cachées, rôdent à travers ce théâtre comme des serpents".<sup>27</sup> Individuals like Nico, Jeannine, "Lui" and Laurency are typical of the Lenormand character who lives in a world of intense fears and doubts and whose struggle to liberate his mind and to comprehend his motivating obsessions leads to disaster:

Une fatalité pèse sur ces êtres, mais leur pire peine, c'est qu'ils n'ignorent pas que le sort qui les traque est en eux: ce sont des modernes,

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<sup>25</sup>Ibid., p. 78.

<sup>26</sup>J.-P. Bichet, Etude sur l'anxiété dans le théâtre français contemporain (Paris: A. Colin, 1927), p. 65.

<sup>27</sup>Henri Clouard, Histoire de la littérature française (Paris, Albin Michel, 1950), II, 431.

hélas! qui n'ont même plus la ressource d'accuser  
ni le Ciel ni l'enfer.<sup>28</sup>

Most of these characters manifest a pathological drive towards self-destruction, a fact which accounts for the high incidence of suicide in Lenormand's plays.

Lenormand's dramatic ideas were considerably influenced by the works and ideas of various writers. His predilection for a literary career seems to have appeared early: "Bien entendu, j'écrivais. Il ne me souvient pas de n'avoir pas griffonné sur des rames de papier écolier. Des années avant d'être un écrivain, j'avais des tics d'écrivain".<sup>29</sup> Some of the writers who appealed to Lenormand's fancy were Poe, Nietzsche, Maeterlinck, Tolstoy, Dostoievsky and Jules Verne. The fact that the majority of writers who found favour with Lenormand and whose works played an important role in the formation of the playwright's literary concepts were from countries other than France is of some significance.

Lenormand was convinced that the traditional process of French rationalism had failed to fully explore the field of subconscious motivation. His preference was therefore

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<sup>28</sup> François Porché, "Le Mouvement dramatique", Revue de Paris (April 1, 1931), 201.

<sup>29</sup> Lenormand, Confessions, I, 74.

for writers who appealed to the sensibilities. His rebellion against the principles of rationalism which were a fundamental aspect of French education originated in his schooldays:

J'étais, sans le savoir, depuis ma treizième année, à la suite de Maeterlinck et d'Edgar Poe, en quête des mystères de l'homme et de la création. Le rationalisme intégral que l'enseignement officiel ne pouvait ni ne voulait dépasser, me semblait un aboutissement dérisoire de la culture.<sup>30</sup>

For Lenormand, the unfathomable depths of men's passions and the psychological complexities of the human personality required a different method of analysis than that adopted by French classical writers. Rejecting classicism and its rationalistic implications, Lenormand, even as a youth, had begun to formulate the concepts which led to his creation of dramas based on introspection and hidden motivation:

"J'ai voulu en finir avec l'homme des périodes classiques, l'archétype de la dramatique nationale".<sup>31</sup>

Lenormand's delight in reading Poe's tales of terror is noteworthy. It was his contact with certain works of this writer that convinced Lenormand of the failure of French rationalism to elucidate many aspects of human behaviour:

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<sup>30</sup>Ibid., p. 77.

<sup>31</sup>Ibid., p. 12.

Je pressentais, en découvrant la Maison Usher et la Princesse Maleine, que l'univers classique n'était pas tout l'univers connaissable. Edgar Poe me ramenait obstinément vers la part des rêves, à laquelle j'ignorais qu'il me faudrait heurter un jour.<sup>32</sup>

Lenormand's early attempts at writing dramas showed the influence of Poe. Such compositions revolved around degeneracy, insanity and vicious crimes, themes which recur in his mature dramas such as La Maison des Remparts, Terre de Satan and Le Temps est un songe.<sup>33</sup> Poe's influence is also perceptible in some of the plays which do not appear in the Théâtre complet. In La Démence de William Howlson, for example, Lenormand even went as far as to imitate Poe's choice of names and places. Man's capacity for evil and the forces which can be unleashed by the vehemence of instinctive drives were subjects which held a peculiar fascination for Lenormand. The influence of writers who treat such themes is perceptible in most of the playwright's early works. The works of Ford and Marlowe also had a great attraction for Lenormand. Lenormand's treatment of the problem of evil was therefore influenced not only by his own personality but also, and to

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<sup>32</sup> Ibid., p. 79.

<sup>33</sup> Lemonnier quotes a letter written to him by Lenormand in which the latter acknowledges that the idea for writing Le Temps est un songe was partly inspired by the reading of Poe. Léon Lemonnier, Edgar Poe et les poètes français (Paris: Plon, 1934), p. 122.

a considerable extent, by the works of writers whom he admired and whose ideas convinced him of the necessity of exploring the realm of subconscious motivation which, hitherto, in the playwright's view, had received only perfunctory treatment from most French writers.

Most of Lenormand's plays are located in places which he himself visited and which he incorporates as important elements into his dramas. The importance of such areas lies not only in the dramatist's familiarity with them but also in the particular atmosphere emanating from them which he endeavoured to weave into the total fabric of his plays. Lenormand's interest in distant lands and the atmosphere which they evoke dated from his childhood when his mental peregrinations were nourished by his father's music and the tales of Dr. Ruck as well as by his own voracious reading. Even as a youth, he displayed a peculiar fascination for those elements of nature -- fog, mists, and dark bodies of water which, according to him, seemed to conceal mysterious powers:

A Condé-sur-Noireau; . . . petite ville du Bocage, nous descendions chez une vieille amie de la famille, Mme. Robillard, austère figure en noir qui habitait une maison dont l'étroit jardin s'inclinait jusqu'à la rivière. Ce segment d'eau sombre et encaissé m'attirait. Le Noireau coulait noir, sans reflets, sans murmures, épaissi par les déchets des teintureries et des fabriques. J'ai longuement rêvé, devant ce passage d'eaux

tout à fait mortes, dans l'attente et la stupeur de mystères informulables.<sup>34</sup>

The idea that sombre waters and impenetrable mists and fog shroud some kind of mystery obsessed Lenormand and found expression in many of his dramas, such as Le Temps est un songe and Le Mangeur de Rêves.

It was this kind of atmosphere which Lenormand found in Brittany and which inspired him with his drama of the supernatural, L'Amour magicien:

C'est en voyant ces gonflements, ces poussées de vagues accourant concentriquement comme à un rendez-vous, ces roues d'écume tournant au-dessus d'un récif secret, que j'imaginais la disparition de Berthe Carolles. Je rentrais lourd de tous les personnages de L'Amour magicien. Peu de pièces ont pris racine en moi avec plus de vigueur et furent composées dans un état plus proche de l'hallucination médiumnique.<sup>35</sup>

Lenormand's visits to the Alps were motivated both by a need to find peace and a desire to fire his creative instincts. The feeling of serenity and repose which he found there may be contrasted with the "délire alpestre" created by the tremendous height, the chaos of boulders and the mountain air, all of which transformed the playwright's emotions into a creative urge. From the Dauphiné region Lenormand

<sup>34</sup>Lenormand, Confessions, I, 23.

<sup>35</sup>Lenormand, Confessions, II, 130.

drew his inspiration not only for La Dent rouge and Mixture but also for the cretin girl of L'Innocente.

The main source of Lenormand's dramatic inspiration, however, was not France, but other European countries and Africa. At age twenty-four Lenormand decided to spend some time in England ostensibly to obtain a teaching post, but perhaps, even more important, to visit the land of his literary idols -- Shakespeare and the Elizabethan dramatists of terror. London offered him the opportunity to indulge his taste for the macabre. His youthful interest in this city had been further stimulated at the Sorbonne by his extensive reading of the dramas of terror written by the minor Elizabethan playwrights like Middleton, Ford, Greene and Dekker: "J'avais, d'instinct, voué à ces chefs-d'oeuvre oubliés une passion de fanatique".<sup>36</sup> In London, Lenormand's fervent interest in the gruesome details of evil deeds made him retrace the steps of Jack the Ripper, seek out the records of London's most grisly criminal cases and search with great zeal for the ancient torture chambers described by Daniel Defoe. This obsession led him to conjure up images of phantom-like criminals lurking in the obscurity of the fog eager to pounce on unsuspecting victims. In

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<sup>36</sup>Lenormand, Confessions, I, 108.

Lenormand's mind London came to symbolize collective misfortune as evidenced by calamities such as the great fire and the plague:

Londres a toujours été pour moi la capitale prédestinée du malheur collectif. Qu'elle le doive à sa lumière, à son histoire ou à l'aspect criminel de tant de ses quartiers, cette ville, que j'aime entre toutes, m'a depuis mon enfance, incliné vers la rêverie mélodramatique.<sup>37</sup>

Lenormand's admiration for the Elizabethan playwrights of terror, and his sojourn in London doubtless influenced his earliest dramas especially those produced at the Grand Guignol. The heavy fog of London was one feature of the city which captured Lenormand's imagination. All the phantoms which he evoked seem to come alive. On a foggy day the tombstones of the cemetery of Bunhill Fields assumed an even more chilling appearance. Whenever he could, Lenormand lived in buildings overlooking the Thames. He was greatly attracted by the dark, heavy water, "ses noirs courants fangeux, le flux et le reflux des brouillards, marée atmosphérique superposée à l'autre".<sup>38</sup> The area between Commercial Road and the docks was frequented by Lenormand and provided the source, twenty-five years later, for entire scenes of Mixture.

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<sup>37</sup> Ibid., p. 95.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid., p. 87.



Holland was the chief source of Lenormand's inspiration for Le Temps est un songe. This country enveloped him "comme une écharpe, comme un bras s'arrondissant autour de l'épaule".<sup>39</sup> The noxious and somewhat unreal forces of nature which weigh upon Nico and finally contribute to his death were observed by Lenormand when he visited the country in December, 1911:

Royaume incertain, plein de féeries lumineuses  
et d'illusions d'optique, élément hermaphrodite  
où l'eau emprunte à la terre sa couleur, la  
terre à l'eau sa densité. Dédale marin dont  
les horizons sont des mirages, le sol un  
gouffre liquide.<sup>40</sup>

Similarly, the possessed and demoniacal characters who appear in some of Lenormand's plays had their origin in Holland. The playwright claimed that while in the country he met individuals who dabbled in the occult:

Nous savions qu'il existait, dans certaines  
provinces, de ces chasseurs de démons qui  
parcouraient les fermes, armés d'un crucifix,  
de reliques et d'une fiole d'eau bénite, pour  
expulser le malin du corps de ces victimes.<sup>41</sup>

After being discharged from military service in April, 1915, Lenormand went to Switzerland to recover his health. Because of its neutrality, this country became the centre for the free expression of ideas, particularly

<sup>39</sup> Ibid., Confessions, II, 151.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid., p. 199.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid., p. 203.

those against the War. The international atmosphere of Davos where Lenormand resided and the author's familiarity with the details of sanatorium life provided him with much of the background for Le Lâche. In this play, Jacques, a French painter, pretends to be suffering from tuberculosis in order to escape front line duties with the Army during the First World War. When he takes refuge in a Swiss sanatorium with his wife, his malingering is discovered. Persuaded to spy for France and inadvertently for Germany, Jacques is tricked into divulging secrets of his country's espionage system to German agents, an act which leads to his death. Jacques shows many of the traits of Lenormand's own personality. His belief in the absurdity and inhumanity of war, the sanctity of life, the necessity of courting dishonour in the pursuit of one's ideals reflects Lenormand's own viewpoint:

JACQUES -- L'homme est bête. Il n'ose même plus dire qu'il aime la vie. Il la jette en pâture à des mots effroyables, que, moi, je ne comprends pas. Est-ce que la vie n'est pas très précieuse. Et que puis-je connaître au delà?<sup>42</sup>

Lenormand did not lay stress on the role of men as members of a political or national group and therefore found it difficult to conceive of an enemy for whom, because of national boundaries, he should feel animosity. However, the pangs of moral conscience and the remorse which Jacques feels at having evaded military service strangely resemble

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<sup>42</sup>Lenormand, Théâtre complet, V, 27.

Lenormand's admission, years after the end of the First World War, that his early idealistic attitude towards war smacked of hypocrisy:

L'artiste, mis en présence du fait de la guerre et des hasards de la destruction, . . . croit se justifier. La faiblesse de sa position me paraît, aujourd'hui, évidente. Vitupérer la guerre? Pourquoi pas la peste ou le choléra? Le refus de réel ne saurait conduire à la grandeur que les saints et les martyrs. Ce qui me gêne, dans ma profession de foi, c'est qu'elle implique un sordide amour de soi. Elle n'est pas tout à fait exempte d'hypocrisie.<sup>43</sup>

From 1936 Lenormand travelled extensively in Europe following the performances of his plays and observing the modifications introduced by foreign producers and directors. However, the excitement which he felt in places like Austria and Greece appears to have been minimal compared with that which he experienced in Africa. Lenormand made at least eight trips to Africa where he allowed his mind to absorb the riot of colours, the vast panorama and the sounds and odours of the continent. Three of his plays are located entirely in Africa (Terre de Satan, Le Simoun and A l'Ombre du Mal). In L'Homme et ses fantômes there is a reference to a trip to Algeria while a part of the action of Le Mangeur de Rêves takes place in Oran. The

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<sup>43</sup>Lenormand, Confessions, I, 235.

idea of Le Simoun grew out of a trip he made in 1913 in Algeria. He met the secondary characters of the play while travelling in M'Zab, Laghouat and Ghardaia. The desert of Southern Oran provided Lenormand with the necessary location for much of Le Mangeur de Rêves. His inspiration for Terre de Satan and A l'Ombre du Mal sprang from his observation of the colonialist exploitation and the religious hypocrisy of many of the Europeans in Africa. He was shocked at the inhumanity shown towards the natives and the religious and racial bigotry to which they were subjected. Lenormand's humanity and his sympathy with the cause of the Africans made him express through these plays his strong disapproval of the injustice meted out to the blacks. Lenormand was, throughout his life, a bitter opponent of any system which robs individuals of their basic dignity as human beings. Therefore the same kind of opposition which he voiced against colonialism was also expressed against the racist policies of the Nazi regime. Towards the latter part of his life, Lenormand seems to have been steadily inclining towards the view that there were situations in which the dramatist had to abandon his amoralistic attitude and take a stand for his beliefs.

The extent to which the characters of Lenormand's theatre are a reflection of the attitudes of the playwright himself or of people with whom he came in close contact

deserves to be studied. Lenormand pointed out:

Toutes mes pièces m'ont été inspirées par des êtres vivants, par des incidents de ma vie d'homme et d'écrivain errant, par des drames à demi vécus, par cette inquiétude sur l'avenir des sociétés humaines que j'ai traînée avec moi dans les cinq parties du monde.<sup>44</sup>

Both Daniel-Rops<sup>45</sup> and S. A. Rhodes<sup>46</sup> believe that this kind of inspiration contributed to the originality and interest of Lenormand's dramas.

Luc de Bronte, the psychologist who appears in Le Mangeur de Rêves and in the background of Une Vie secrète and L'Homme et ses fantômes seems to be a projection of certain traits of Lenormand's personality. Luc's relationship with Jeannine Felse resembles that of Lenormand and his mistress Rose Vallerest. In both cases the incidents and attitudes bear a close likeness. Like Lenormand, Luc is a writer who attempts to discover the truth about people without their knowledge. In connection with the unveiling of hidden truth Luc tells Jeannine:

Vous connaissez le vivier qui est dans la cave?  
On y garde les truites pêchées dans le torrent.  
Et l'hôtesse vous prie de choisir vous-même,  
avec une épuisette, celle que vous mangerez ce

<sup>44</sup>Quoted by Helen Harvitt, Representative Plays from the French Theatre of Today (Boston: D. C. Heath and Co., 1940), p. 35.

<sup>45</sup>Daniel-Rops, Sur le Théâtre de H.-R. Lenormand, p. 39.

<sup>46</sup>S. A. Rhodes, The Contemporary French Theatre, p. 36.

soir. Eh bien ces truites me font penser aux vérités que j'essaye de capturer au creux de l'âme humaine. Les unes et les autres cherchent l'ombre, la profondeur . . . .Et il fait aussi obscur dans ce vivier que dans les consciences.<sup>47</sup>

Lenormand's remark to Rose Vallerest on the same subject and under similar circumstances is worthy of comparison:

Ces truites font penser aux vérités que l'on essaie de capturer au creux de l'âme humaine. Les unes et les autres cherchent l'ombre, la profondeur . . . .Et il fait aussi obscur dans ce vivier que dans les consciences.<sup>48</sup>

Both Luc and Lenormand used music to soothe their mistresses and to create the sensuous atmosphere which is a prelude to erotic activity. In both cases the initial seduction is approached with a mixture of fear and doubt. Furthermore, when his mistress commits suicide, Luc, like Lenormand, does not display much grief and becomes quickly reconciled to this fact. However, in spite of the fact that the two men share certain characteristics, there is a marked difference in the degree of cruelty and indifference shown to their mistresses. Whereas Luc displays a callous and at times cynical attitude towards Jeannine under the guise of helping her through analysis, the tender affection which Lenormand felt for Rose was never completely erased

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<sup>47</sup>Lenormand, Théâtre complet, II, 189.

<sup>48</sup>Lenormand, Confessions, I, 263.

in spite of the many vicissitudes which their relationship underwent. Therefore in Le Mangeur de Rêves, Luc who shows certain psychotic tendencies, appears to be an exaggeration of Lenormand's personality. Lenormand himself admitted that "les thèmes du Mangeur de Rêves s'entre-croisaient en moi".<sup>49</sup> However, as he himself pointed out in reference to his real and fictional nature: "Oui, c'est moi dans mes rêves d'écrivain; ce n'est pas moi dans ma vie d'homme".<sup>50</sup>

This statement seems especially relevant to Michael Sarterre of Une Vie secrète whose delight in his secret life of debauchery, whose passion for Africa, and whose contempt for European civilization and Christian morality are reminiscent of a posture which Lenormand himself adopted. However, the playwright pointed out that he never intended the portrayal of Sarterre to be a reflection of his own personality.<sup>51</sup>

Lenormand's admission that in L'Homme et ses fantômes there is "un passage qui concerne évidemment le

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<sup>49</sup> Ibid., p. 269.

<sup>50</sup> Rhodes, The Contemporary French Theatre, p. 278.

<sup>51</sup> "Est-il besoin de préciser que je ne fus jamais Sarterre." Lenormand, Confessions, I, 290.

rêveur triste, saturé de musique et obsédé par la femme, que j'étais alors",<sup>52</sup> indicates that the personality traits of "l'Homme" are a truer picture of his character than are those of Sarterre. Both the real Lenormand and the fictional one who is "l'Homme" use travel as a means of escaping the embraces of over-affectionate women. Roger's affairs with "l'Hystérique" and "la Berlinoise" are, for the most part, similar to certain of Lenormand's love affairs. Maternal hatred is shown by "l'Homme" who confesses that "quand, dans son amour pour moi, elle s'inquiétait de mes folies de jeunesse, une telle colère me prenait que je devais m'enfuir".<sup>53</sup> A similar antipathy was felt by Lenormand for his mother: "Je n'ai, jusqu'à l'âge d'homme, employé mes dons précoces, qu'à la prendre en faute, à lui prouver son infériorité intellectuelle, à bafouer les trésors qu'elle prodiguait sans cesse".<sup>54</sup> Both Lenormand and "l'Homme" occasionally experienced feelings of remorse at their cruel attitude and felt a

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<sup>52</sup> Ibid.

<sup>53</sup> Lenormand, Théâtre complet, IV, 57.

<sup>54</sup> Lenormand, Confessions, I, 64.



compulsion to confess; in the case of the former, the avowal was made to the parish priest and in the case of the latter, to his close friend Patrice. Both Lenormand and "l'Homme" were attracted to prostitutes, lived promiscuous lives and were interested in women primarily under the mistaken notion that women are the holders of psychic secrets which can only be wrested from them by acts of sexuality. Roger's discovery at the end of the play that his erotic behaviour had merely been a mask for his true homosexual impulses seems to reflect Lenormand's disquiet at the recognition of this trait in himself. However, unlike "l'Homme" this latent tendency did not show any overt symptoms in his adult life.

Pierre in Les Trois Chambres is another expression of Lenormand's complex personality. This man, who is a writer by profession, has an agreement with his wife that she will allow him unrestricted sexual licence with other women, because, according to him, the creative instincts can only function when the senses are aroused. This was the exact agreement existing between Lenormand and his wife. Indeed, the playwright, like Pierre, did not hesitate to reveal this pact to other women:

Ne pensez pas à Marie. Il y a un pacte entre elle et moi. Je suis libre de mes actions. Elle ne souffre pas de mes aventures, parce qu'elle vit sur une illusion: celle que le monde des sens

et celui du coeur sont séparés. Voilà dix ans que le pacte joue.<sup>55</sup>

Pierre whose prolific literary output is inspired under a variety of circumstances and for whom stupidity holds "un attrait bizarre",<sup>56</sup> reflects another of Lenormand's traits. The playwright's claim that "la sottise exerçait alors sur moi un attrait morbide"<sup>57</sup> and his compulsion, like Pierre, to recount all his sexual adventures to his wife, underline this point. Both men ultimately realize that their indulgence in sexual promiscuity had been undertaken solely to gratify their erotic instincts and not, as they previously rationalized, to fire their creative talents.

In spite of the similarities existing between Lenormand and many of the characters whom he portrays, there is an essential difference which should be noticed. Whereas the fictional characters are, for the most part, weak, neurotic individuals, Lenormand, in spite of his idiosyncracies, displayed a mental stability and a zest for life which is absent in his characters. For him, the work of art served a cathartic purpose:

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<sup>55</sup> Ibid., p. 262.

<sup>56</sup> Lenormand, Théâtre complet, VIII, 32.

<sup>57</sup> Lenormand, Confessions, I, 285.

L'artiste exorcise ses démons en les dépeignant.  
 Parfois aussi, dans une anticipation pleine de  
 crainte, il aime à se voir déchiré par eux.  
 L'appréhension d'une amère destinée le pousse  
 à en scruter les détails; il met en scène l'homme  
 qu'il craint de devenir un jour.<sup>58</sup>

The female characters in Lenormand's plays were inspired by women whom he knew and with whom there often existed an amorous relationship. Marie Kalff, "une comédienne touchée par la grâce poétique et que ni l'arrivisme ni la cupidité ne conduisaient",<sup>59</sup> and who was married to Lenormand for forty years, inspired the character of the wife mainly in those plays where the protagonist was a representation of the playwright himself. It was from Marie's many recitals of Claudel's poetry and especially from the frequent provincial tours required by her role in La Vierge folle by Henri Bataille that Lenormand, who accompanied her on these depressing rounds, conceived of Les Ratés. The play mirrors the confused mixture of hope, fear, love, doubts and idealism, which, at that time, characterized the relationship between Marie and Lenormand:

La naissance des Ratés fut facile. Elle a pris, avec le temps, les couleurs du deuil, mais elle mûrissait avec la douceur d'un printemps voilé. Elle s'entoure aujourd'hui, pour moi, des

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<sup>58</sup> Ibid., p. 15.

<sup>59</sup> Ibid., p. 189.

brouillards d'or qui cernent les souvenirs de jeunesse ou ceux des premiers amours. Il est évident que ses héros sans nom, ce Lui et cette Elle, ne sont qu'une transposition dramatique de Marie et de moi-même.<sup>60</sup>

The dreary hotel rooms, hastily packed suitcases, the constant smell of powder and make-up, and the wearisome train rides which were features of the existence of the playwright and Marie are faithfully reproduced in Les Ratés. The grace and sensitivity with which Marie played the role of "Elle" in this play can again be seen in Une Vie secrète in which she inspired and played the role of Thérèse, Sarterre's understanding wife who, in order to further her husband's works, accepts the concept that an artist must "raviver sa flamme à des yeux nouveaux".<sup>61</sup> Furthermore, the kind of compassion shown by Florence of Les Trois Chambres, who excuses her husband's acts of infidelity on the grounds of his artistic temperament, recalls the forgiveness which Marie bestowed on Lenormand for his extra-marital affairs.

However, it was perhaps Rose Vallerest, whom Lenormand met in Davos in 1917 where she was under psychiatric care, who inspired Lenormand's most interesting feminine characters. Rose's personality at the time was

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<sup>60</sup> Ibid., p. 119.

<sup>61</sup> Lenormand, Théâtre complet, III, 32.

characterized by inertia, egocentrism, anguish and obsessive dreams. Her initial friendship with Lenormand soon developed into an erotic relationship. The steady deterioration in Rose's mental condition, in spite of Lenormand's efforts to provide a stabilizing influence, led to frequent visits to mental institutions where feelings of grief and acute depression culminated in her suicide. That Lenormand's interest in Rose was stimulated by his enthusiastic discovery of Freud's theories seems fairly evident. However, the character inspired by Rose's personality, Jeannine Felse, does not constitute an exposition of Freud's theories but simply portrays the artistic expression of a literary creation.

The similarities between Rose Vallerest and Jeannine Felse of Le Mangeur de Rêves are striking in that both women exhibit the same symptoms of illness and the same kind of personality even in the details of their dress and physical mannerisms. Lenormand's description of Rose "penchée au-dessus des tourbillons glacés, ses cheveux dénoués, si belle et si misérable que j'avais envie de pleurer, quand j'allai la chercher"<sup>62</sup> recalls the scene in the play where Jeannine appears "penchée au-dessus de la

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<sup>62</sup>Lenormand, Confessions, I, 264.

barre d'appui, ses cheveux dénoués, regardant couler l'eau".<sup>63</sup> Similarly, the reaction of Rose to Lenormand's protestations of love: "je ne comprends pas," disait-elle, "tant de femmes sont plus belles, plus saines et faites pour la joie"<sup>64</sup> is echoed by Jeannine when confronted with the advances of Luc: "Tant de femmes sont plus jeunes, plus saines et faites pour le plaisir".<sup>65</sup> In both cases there is a revelation that the burden of a childhood conflict which has fostered an emotionally unhealthy attitude towards love and life results in a state of misery and mental trepidation which causes suicide.

In L'Homme et ses fantômes the role of Laure, the abandoned lover whose rejection by "l'Homme" is such a traumatic experience that the subsequent grief and despair unhinge her mind and plunge her into a world of dreams and fantasies, was inspired by the morbid enchantment which marked Rose's preoccupation with her feelings of sorrow: "Ce corps qui semblait s'abandonner n'était qu'à peine conscient de nos étreintes. Je prenais Rose dans mes bras: je ne tenais qu'une forme rêvante, enchantée par son

<sup>63</sup> Lenormand, Théâtre complet, II, 180.

<sup>64</sup> Lenormand, Confessions, I, 265.

<sup>65</sup> Lenormand, Théâtre complet, II, 224.

désespoir".<sup>66</sup>

A certain resemblance can also be detected between Rose Vallerest and Rose, Pierre's lover of Les Trois Chambres. The fictional Rose who flees her first lover because she refuses "d'avoir appartenu à un homme, tandis que j'en aimais encore un autre"<sup>67</sup> recalls the action of Rose Vallerest who abandoned her first lover in favour of Lenormand because "Elle n'avait pu supporter de se donner à un homme, alors qu'elle en aimait un autre".<sup>68</sup> Both Roses were affected by the pact between the writer and his wife, similar to the one which existed between Lenormand and Marie Kalff, a situation which they found difficult to understand.

Apart from Marie Kalff and Rose Vallerest, the woman whose influence is most strongly felt in Lenormand's portrayal of his feminine characters is Georgina, "voleuse professionnelle et visiteuse occasionnelle d'une maison de passe de la rue de Brey".<sup>69</sup> Born in the Klondike of a Scottish father and an Indian mother, Georgina, with her dark,

<sup>66</sup> Lenormand, Confessions, I, 261.

<sup>67</sup> Lenormand, Théâtre complet, VIII, 58.

<sup>68</sup> Lenormand, Confessions, I, 267.

<sup>69</sup> Lenormand, Confessions, II, 81.

full-blooded, sensual lips, her bitter smile, her robust figure and the air of mystery which enveloped her, fitted perfectly Lenormand's conception of the character of Fearon. Although she unburdened her past life and her troubles to Lenormand and an amorous relationship developed between them, the playwright seems to have been more interested in probing her mind and analysing her emotions than in helping her. Nevertheless, his attitude of indifference was not untouched by occasional feelings of regret:

Le monde intérieur qu'elle me livrait, je m'en suis nourri sans vergogne. Je n'ai pas su ou pas voulu entendre les appels désespérés qui montaient vers moi. C'est là que réside la culpabilité vraie de l'écrivain, embusqué derrière les lois de sa fonction.<sup>70</sup>

In the three plays which she inspired -- Le Mangeur de Rêves, Mixture and Terre de Satan -- Georgina as Fearon, seems to incarnate the spirit of evil and destruction. However, her role as rebel against the established order echoes the sentiments which Lenormand strongly felt but was too timid to put into practice: "Georgina représentait la force dévastatrice, le démon incendiaire blottis dans les profondeurs de ma conscience et que je n'ai jamais pu faire passer à l'action".<sup>71</sup>

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<sup>70</sup>Ibid., p. 37.

<sup>71</sup>Ibid., p. 38.



The close and almost sentimental relationship that grew between Lenormand and Georgina is similar to the one which exists between Luc and Fearon. The difference is that whereas Georgina had no malevolent effects on Lenormand, Luc, unable to free himself from the emotional and psychological grasp of Fearon succumbs to her overwhelming power of evil. Both Georgina and Fearon see the hypocrisy and evil underlying the craft of the writer and the resemblance between his life and theirs. Georgina's belief is clearly expressed:

Je l'ai su au premier coup d'oeil. Vous êtes un artiste, n'est-ce pas? Un peintre ou un écrivain. Vous volez les secrets des gens. Moi, je leur vole des pelisses et des perles: nous sommes de la même famille.<sup>72</sup>

Fearon tells Luc:

Oh nous ressemblons plus que tu ne penses. Tu te crois un homme de science? Une espèce d'apôtre? Tu es un artiste. Et un artiste, je n'ai jamais rien vu qui soit plus proche d'une voleuse.<sup>73</sup>

The distinction drawn by Lenormand between physical theft which involves the transfer of objects from one place to the other, and moral theft which can precipitate the destruction of the personality plus the uneasiness which he felt at his inability to help Georgina, indicate that in

<sup>72</sup>Ibid., p. 34.

<sup>73</sup>Lenormand, Théâtre complet, VII, 108.

spite of the fact that he often seems to postulate a belief in the amorality of the creative artist, he himself was not completely without moral scruples.

Many of the scenes from Le Mangeur de Rêves such as the one which depicts Brown's passion for stealing shoes, are faithful reproductions of incidents from the life of Georgina. The nefarious activities pursued by Fearon, her love of evil and her delight in the corruption of people with an unblemished past, were reflected to a certain degree by Georgina who frequently expressed a desire to seek revenge on society and to reverse those concepts of morality cherished by most people. In Mixture Fearon resides in London but makes frequent trips to the continent in pursuit of her illegal ventures. Similarly, Georgina "circulait de Londres à Vienne, de Paris à Berlin avec l'aimable ubiquité d'un moderne Puck, promu agent de destruction dans une société pourrissante".<sup>74</sup> Nevertheless, in spite of their preference for a life of crime and vice, both Fearon and Georgina manifest a yearning for purification and a peaceful death in the land from which they came. Fearon wishes to ". . . aller mourir dans le pays d'où elle est venue, Klondike. Dans la neige, toute seule. S'étendre sur le

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<sup>74</sup>Ibid., p. 125.

tapis blanc et s'endormir dans le silence. Une voleuse qui rêve de pureté".<sup>75</sup> Georgina explained a similar desire to Lenormand: "J'irai au Klondike, où je suis née. La mort est si propre, là-haut! On se couche dans la neige et on attend. La blancheur vous prend toute éveillée, lucide et purifiée".<sup>76</sup>

Fearon's support of the revolt of the Africans against the European missionaries in Terre de Satan contains elements of Georgina's intense dislike for Europeans, principally because of the prejudice she suffered as a result of her racial background: "J'ai pour les blancs tout le mépris qu'ils me rendent".<sup>77</sup> In spite of the fact that in this play Fearon is once more seen as an international thief and smuggler, it is her affinity for the blacks and her vehement opposition to colonialism and Christian evangelism which are highlighted. Furthermore, although Lenormand draws no explicit relationship between her racial background and her support for the blacks, there seems to be a parallel between her admission that she has "quelques

<sup>75</sup> Ibid., p. 109.

<sup>76</sup> Lenormand, Confessions, II, 40.

<sup>77</sup> Ibid., p. 33.

gouttes de sang indien dû côté de ma mère" and her recollection of subsequent racial slights on the one hand, and her sympathy for those who because of their ethnic background were subjected to inhuman treatment. That Lenormand chose Fearon to voice sentiments which he himself felt very deeply indicates the extent to which Georgina was the stimulus for the expression of such ideas.

The subject matter of the bond existing between Monique and Poucette, the mother and daughter of Mixture, was provided for Lenormand by the relationship between Constance, an eccentric Englishwoman whom the playwright met in 1905 and her daughter Lelia. Like Monique, Constance was driven by the sheer necessity of survival to seek one unprofitable job after another and finally in desperation to resort to prostituting herself. Lelia, whose job as a dancing instructor in a large hotel on the Côte d'Azur exposed her to a variety of men, many of whom tried to seduce her, did not hesitate to flatter those wealthy patrons whose interest in her, she hoped, would develop along serious lines. Lenormand was convinced that his portrayal of the fictional mother and daughter was true to the personalities of Constance and Lelia:

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<sup>78</sup>Lenormand, Théâtre complet, X, 246.

Ma transposition théâtrale de l'existence de Constance et de sa petite fille Lelia épouse étroitement le réel, dans l'analyse des rapports entre mère et fille. Chez l'une, la passion exaltée, l'exagération névrotique des sentiments, chez l'autre, une tendresse traversée de révolte et de velléités de libération.<sup>79</sup>

Unlike the amorous relationships which existed between Lenormand and the other women who inspired his principal female characters, there was no such bond existing between the playwright and either Constance or Lelia. Indeed Lenormand who was not particularly attracted to the personality of the former refused to encourage her interest in him. In fact, the playwright seems to have been more bent on observing the personality clash which occurred between the two women and which furnished him with valuable details for the composition of his play than in having a love affair:

Aux frontières de la pureté et de la prostitution morale, entre les crises de nerfs et les raccommodements larmoyants, entre les injures et l'adoration, les deux femmes exerçaient sur moi leur fascination. J'avais nourri de leur drame les derniers tableaux du mien.<sup>80</sup>

Nevertheless, Lenormand did play a disruptive role in the relationship between Constance and Lelia. The play-

<sup>79</sup> Lenormand, Confessions, II, 326.

<sup>80</sup> Ibid., p. 327.

wright so arranged a performance of Mixture that the fictional characters played by Ludmilla Pitoëff in the role of Poucette and France Ellys in that of Monique were seen by Constance and Lelia who were in attendance. The unfortunate result -- Constance's fervent efforts to marry off her daughter to a series of old men, and her daughter's vehement refusals, events which simulate the action of Mixture -- was completely unforeseen by Lenormand whose anxious fears of his power to control the lives of real people through the intermediary of his characters left him depressed. The subsequent news that Lelia was leaving her mother primarily because of the latter's changed attitude after seeing Mixture made Lenormand even more dejected.

The parallel between Lenormand's literary inspiration and his introspection and erotic activities, seems, from the examples cited in this chapter, to have been clearly established. His masculine characters, projections to a greater or lesser degree of facets of his own personality, seek, like Lenormand, a sense of stability in a world where rampant passions and evil instincts transcend sentiments of benevolence and wreak havoc and destruction. In the case of his female characters, the veracity of his theatrical portrayal depended on the intensity of the emotions evoked in him by the particular women. Marie Kalff, Rose Vallerest and Georgina McAllyster, women with whom there existed a

deep emotional bond, are, with minor modifications, directly transposed into his plays. Other women such as Cornillier whose interest in hypnosis and clairvoyance became the basis of the creation of the character of Beatrice of L'Amour magicien, Lucie, whose physical features and unstable personality gave Lenormand the idea for La Folle du ciel, and whose Asiatic background and sense of fatalism were fundamental to Lenormand's conception of Asie, served the playwright as models which he transformed in his theatre to conform to his dramatic principles.

## CONCLUSION

Lenormand portrayed, in a profound and disturbing manner, the alarming discrepancy between man's self-image which represents him as basically rational and humane and his actual behaviour which is characteristically irrational. Like Freud, the playwright realized that the repression of man's instinctive drives leads inevitably to a search for substitute forms of gratification not only in fantasies such as those experienced by Laurency but also in direct experiences, such as the violence and depravity demonstrated by Préfailles and Rougé.

Lenormand's study of man demonstrates that evil is an essential rather than an accidental or acquired part of his nature. Unlike the supporters of "rational humanism" who argue that since man is basically good, the responsibility for any corruption of his behaviour must lie with society which forces him to be ruthless, competitive, aggressive and acquisitive, Lenormand's dramas indicate that the cause of violence and pathological behaviour lies deep within the nature of man himself. For the playwright, irrational behaviour is natural to man.

Lenormand's depiction of man's essentially demonic nature and the creative as well as destructive implication of most human actions is the basis of his portrayal of the



problem of evil. His conviction of the fundamental ambivalence which lies at the centre of human nature and his portrayal of the irrational aggressiveness which is a feature of man's personality were important innovations in the French theatre. Lenormand's belief that the dramatist should not endeavour to resolve the problems of society made him take a greater interest in the psychoses of the individual rather than in his role as a unit of a national or political group.

Nevertheless, there seems to be the suggestion in a play like Mixture that the individual can curb his drive for destruction by substituting creative acts for his highly irrational aggressiveness. By implication, and this point can be demonstrated by the great majority of Lenormand's plays, where there are few creative opportunities for the expression of aggression, the instinct of destruction will be unleashed and will satisfy its cravings by acts of barbarity. Rougé's crimes and Sarterre's debauchery seem to affirm this viewpoint. Of equal importance, however, is Lenormand's portrayal of the urge for self-destruction which is precipitated not only by repressed feelings as in the case of Nico but also by vicious behaviour directed against others which, because it is pathologically induced and hence guilt-ridden, rather than displacing the urge for self-destruction merely increases it. In the case of Roger

of L'Homme et ses fantômes, for example, the initial impression is that his aggression is directed by self-interest, in this case the sexual conquest of women. However, on closer observation of his personality, we find that his egoism is merely a mask for his nihilistic urge for self-destruction.

Lenormand's dramas enjoyed great prominence in the nineteen-twenties principally because of his originality which consisted of his depiction of the role of subconscious motivation on the human personality. The eclipse which the reputation of the writer and the popularity of his works have suffered today has stemmed from the fact that since his innovative presentation of the problem of evil, the kind of psychotic character whom he portrays has become commonplace on the stage. Therefore, while one may not disagree with the assertion of Gabriel Marcel<sup>1</sup> who claimed in 1951 that Lenormand was indisputably the man who contributed most to the French theatre between the two World Wars, the opinion of Maurice Coindreau may be difficult to defend:

On ne mentionne plus guère le nom de Lenormand. Pourquoi? . . . Je n'ignore pas la puissance de la mode. On ne trouve pas, évidemment, dans l'oeuvre de Lenormand le grain de loufoquerie que les philosophes de l'absurde ont monté en épingle . . . En cela, sans doute, est-il sage, car les problèmes qu'il traite sont éternels et

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<sup>1</sup>Gabriel Marcel, "Le Théâtre de H.-R. Lenormand", Opéra (February 21, 1951).

assurent à son oeuvre une longévité que ne connaîtra pas celui d'un très grand nombre des favoris du jour.<sup>2</sup>

The opinion of André Maurois who also foresees the artistic longevity of the theatre of Lenormand is worthy of note:

On a trop peu parlé des Confessions d'H.-R. Lenormand, car c'est un livre aussi remarquable que le théâtre de cet auteur, en ce moment négligé, mais qui aura<sup>3</sup> sa juste place dans l'histoire de l'art dramatique.

Even if this kind of appraisal seems optimistic, there is little doubt of the significance of Lenormand's contribution to the French theatre.

He was one of the earliest dramatists of the twentieth century to portray the spiritual disorders of his age, as well as the mysterious elements in life itself. He gave expression to the compulsions of the irrational by wrestling with the phantoms of his mind and projecting them on the stage as living figures. It is this conception of art as catharsis which has deceived many critics whose perfunctory examination of his theatre has led them to conclude, because of the pessimistic overtones of the plays, that the playwright was a prophet of doom. Indeed, although Lenormand often referred to himself as "l'oiseau de malheur", his empathy with people, especially those at the bottom of the social ladder

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<sup>2</sup> Marcel Coindreau, France-Amérique (New York, February 4, 1951).

<sup>3</sup> André Maurois, Opéra (Paris, July 15, 1949).

to whom he made vigorous efforts to bring the theatre, his work through the "Société Universelle du Théâtre" which sought world peace through international co-operation in the Arts and his battle against the censorship of dramatic works during the Vichy period, all point towards his positive outlook on life.

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