A STUDY OF SELECTED CHARACTERS IN THE DRAMAS OF FRANÇOIS DE CUREL

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

François de Curel was born at Metz, June 10, 1854. On his father's side he belonged to the oldest Lorraine nobility. The family traced its ancestry to a distinguished crusader, Gauthier de Curel, who is mentioned by Joinville in his Chronicle. A fondness for outdoor life, especially for hunting, seems always to have been characteristic of the Curel family. This was most pronounced in the life of his grandfather, who published two books on the subject.[1] Curel's mother was a de Wendel, a family established for more than two hundred years in the metallurgical industry of Lorraine. The great iron works at Creusot were founded in 1781 by Ignace de Wendel at the order of Louis XVI.[2] The de Wendels are still among the most important steel owners in Europe.[3]

Curel was a very intelligent child. At the age of four he knew how to read. Not long after that he began to read the classics. He later said that this wide reading created for him as a child a very adventurous dream life.[4] As a result when he was only six or seven years old he started composing short dialogues or narratives. Sometimes he told them to his little comrades, who listened with interest and amusement.[5]

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[1] Paul Blanchart, François de Curel, Son OEuvre (Paris: Editions de La Nouvelle Revue Critique, 1924), p. 11.

[2] Gilbert de Voisins, Les Quarante, Fauteuil XII-François de Curel (Paris: Librairie Félix Alcan, 1931), p. 41.

[3] H. A. Smith, Main Currents of Modern French Drama (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1925), p. 230.

[4] Blanchart, op. cit., p. 15.

[5] Loc. cit.

It was at the College de Saint Clement at Metz that the author had his early training. While there he won a prize for the best written essay.[6] For some time, however, he was prevented from following the profession of literature. His family wanted him to become an engineer so that he might have a part in the direction of the great iron mills in northern Lorraine. He passed his baccalaureat at Nancy, and, in 1873, entered the Ecole Centrale des arts et manufactures in the same town. Here he displayed a genuine scientific aptitude. After his graduation in 1876, to prepare himself still further for his work, he went to Germany to study. When he returned to his own province he was forbidden by German authorities to apply his knowledge on his own mills unless he would consent to become a German. This he refused to do. His technical training and contact with labor problems were later to form the background for some of his best works.

Fortunately for Curel, he was not dependent upon his original plans for means of livelihood. He was of a wealthy family and had inherited a large country estate. The next few years he devoted simply to "living" in the larger and better sense of the term. He divided his time between Paris and his country home. He became a country gentleman, an aristocratic sportsman, with writing as an avocation. Hunting and the study of contemporary literature occupied most of his waking hours.

For the author these years were very fruitful in observation and experience. He gathered actual knowledge of the life about him; he studied the diverse workings of the mind and the causes of human conduct. He developed a fondness for solitude and intense meditation. His delight was to wander

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[6] François de Curel, Le Repas du Lion. Introduction by A. G. Fite (New York: Oxford University Press, 1926), p. vi.

in the forests where every tree seemed like a confidant. This was later to have a marked influence upon his writings. Everything about nature that affected his emotions tended to draw him more closely to the profession of literature.

At the age of thirty-one, the author published his first literary work, a novel entitled L'Eté des Fruits secs. His other three novels, L'Orphelinat de Gaëtan, Le Sauvetage du Grand Duc, Le Solitaire de la Lune, although not successful, gave promise of talent for the theatre. After reading Le Sauvetage du Grand Duc, the critic, Charles Maurras, wrote in exhortation: "Au théâtre! Au théâtre, M. de Curel."

Curel heeded the advice of Maurras by turning to the field of drama. After failing to secure representation at the Théâtre Français and the Odéon, he thought of Antoine, who had recently founded the Théâtre-Libre. Simultaneously, under three different names, he sent to Antoine in 1891 three of his manuscripts: L'Amour brode, La Figurante, and L'Envers d'une Sainte. Antoine selected these three plays, by supposedly different authors, from among five hundred dramas submitted to him for presentation during that session.[7] He wrote to congratulate all three authors. Curel left to Antoine the decision as to which of the three plays should be presented. Antoine selected L'Envers d'une Sainte although he thought the other two would receive a better welcome from his public. He would, he said, be the only one who would present such a play as L'Envers d'une Sainte; the other plays might receive a welcome elsewhere. He did believe, nevertheless, that the play he had selected would win for its author a reputation as a

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[7] Samuel Montefiore Waxman, Antoine and the Théâtre-Libre (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1926), p. 156.

dramatists.[8]

Had it not been for Antoine's foresight and determined energy, Curel would probably never have been known in the field of drama. Antoine realized that Curel had struck an original note in contemporary French drama; so he defended him against all opposition, literally forcing a hearing for his earlier works. The plays, however, resembled neither by their general inspiration nor by their execution the majority of works presented by Antoine. Few dramatists discovered by the Théâtre-Libre were as talented as François de Curel.

Curel later had occasion to render homage to this producer by stating that the Théâtre-Libre had rendered to the modern French theatre the great service of freeing it from all literary schools and coteries; this independance had greatly furthered its originality.[9] The dramatist wrote, also, in the introduction to his complete works, that he could not speak without emotion of his relations with the Théâtre-Libre; that he preserved for Antoine an unfailing gratitude for his continued confidence in his future.[10]

Curel spent most of each year in the country, either in Lorraine or in his château at Les Marmousets. He was a bachelor, without financial cares, so could easily accommodate himself to change of residence. He loved the solitude of the out-of-doors. Often he would construct his plays in his lonely wanderings. Once he had conceived a subject, he spent only about twenty or twenty-five days on a play. Between plays he indulged in physical exercises, so necessary to keep his intellectual powers at their best. He

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[8] Waxman, op. cit., p. 157.

[9] Adolphe Thalasso, Le Théâtre-Libre (Paris: Mercure de France, 1909) p. 104.

[10] Waxman, op. cit., pp. 157-158.

was indeed vain concerning his health; next to his writing and hunting, it was his chief interest.

The second of the author's plays to be presented, again by Antoine, was Les Fossiles. It is one of the few plays that he produced in Paris. It was with the performance of La Nouvelle Idole in 1899, though, that Curel acquired celebrity. The play had, in 1895, been published in the Revue de Paris. In 1914 it received the honor of being presented in the Comédie-Française. It is the play of Curel to which the term "masterpiece" can be best applied.

Curel was one of the writers who found in the newspapers the plots for many of his plays. Roger Le Brun wrote of him:[11]

> Curel part, dans ses conceptions, d'un fait dont il a eu connaissance incidemment, mais auquel, cependant, une certaine étrangeté dans le "cas" psychologique donne un relief tout particulier.

He adds that it is the participants in these stories that most interest Curel. He changes, deforms, transposes, until he has something quite different from that which gave him his idea.

Between the years 1905 and 1913 Curel wrote nothing. Some pretended that he was discouraged by the coldness of the public. But the reason he gave for this long silence was:[12]

> La vérité est que je traversais une période de stérilité et faisais le mort. . . Ma seule chance de trouver quelque chose est de me laisser vivre. . .

Having no particular responsibilities or worry, he could wait for ideas to

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[11] Roger Le Brun, F. de Curel. Biographie Critique (Paris: Librairie E. Sansot et Cie., 1905), p. 22.

[12] François de Curel, Théâtre Complet (Paris: Les Editions G. Crès et Cie., 1922), V, p. 167.

come to him. He was never forced to write down to his public. This retreat, then, produced truly favorable results in that his works came to be much more appreciated.

During the summer of 1913 the dramatist began again to write. He wanted to conquer a subject which twice he had already attempted. L'Amour brode, a reworking of Sauvé des Eaux, now became La Danse devant le miroir. Since writing L'Ame en Folie in 1919 he has retouched the majority of his plays. The second versions are sometimes better, and sometimes not so good; but there is continual striving toward perfection. In his théâtre complet, each work is preceded by a study on the formation and the development of the drama, on the retouching, on the variations determined by the progress of the directing idea. These prefaces help us to understand what meaning the author expected one to get from each work.

Curel had by this time won a place for himself in the field of literature. In May 1918 he replaced Paul Hervieu in the French Academy.

The author's best play after this time is La Terre Inhumaine. Some critics have classed it as far superior to any other drama depicting the sentiments aroused by the World War. It has been exceedingly successful, having had more than two hundred fifty representations including some in foreign countries. It is a play which could offend no nationality.

In Curel's last play, Orage mystique, he resorts to the supernatural in keeping with the new expressionistic tendency in the theatre.[13]

On April 26, 1928, Curel died, alone in his study, of cardiac syncope. He had recently been in an automobile accident and had never fully recovered.

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[13] Frank W. Chandler, Modern Continental Playwrights (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1931), p. 252.

The one word which seems best to define this man is "aristocrat." Force especially appealed to him. He admired the one who had the power and will to accomplish. He pitied the weak person but he could not love him. Curel had always been rich, but he prided himself that he was master, not servant, of his wealth. Because of his riches, though, he did not know the cares of the common man. As a result his leading characters are not of that class.

There stands out clearly in a study of this author's career in the theatre the difficulty with which he adapted himself to the dramatic form. There seem to be two causes for this. First, he was constantly preoccupied with abstract and difficult ideas. For the general public his plays are too argumentative; they are written in a style too remote from ordinary speech. They contain unusual people in unusual situations. He was interested chiefly in the mental life of his characters, who often arrive at decisions by short cuts that baffle an audience and tax even the most thoughtful readers.

Finally, Curel's construction of acts and scenes is often awkward and faulty. Criticisms by managers and dramatic critics were often used to advantage in the extensive revisions of his works. In his eager pursuit of ideas and in his development of character, he paid little heed to what was effective theatrically. From a technical point of view he is not a skilful playwright.

As a writer, though, Curel had his own important dramatic qualities. His style, both vivid and sober, is always stamped with individuality. Professor Dargan says that he has an "imaginative strangeness" all his own, and that if he often leaves reality he thereby comes the nearer to romance.[14]

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[14] William A. Nitze and E. Preston Dargan, A History of French Literature (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1922), p. 687.

His characters, although unusual and often symbolic, have enough of imperfection and incompleteness to seem real persons and not mere abstractions. They have self-determination and are free to work out their own fate.

Curel's works can not be strictly defined or classed. He belonged to no school of writers and as yet has had no followers. Perhaps to no other dramatist have critics attributed more varying characteristics. Barrett H. Clark and Antoine Benoist call him a psychologist;[15] Paul Blanchart terms him a philosopher;[16] Frank W. Chandler classes him as a moralist;[17] and H. A. Smith and L. R. Méras compare him to Marivaux, Musset, Corneille, Shakespeare, and Ibsen.[18] All agree that much of his prose has a truly lyric quality.

Curel's thought is of the highest type. He rejected all short-sighted solutions to the questions he raised; he never presumed to solve social problems. He left his audience or his reader free to make his own decision. The chapters which follow this are to study the inner life of his characters seen against a background of ideas and social problems.

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[15] Barrett H. Clark, A Study of the Modern Drama (New York: D. Appleton and Co., 1925), p. 271; Antoine Benoist, Le Théâtre d'aujourd'hui (Paris: Ancienne Librairie Lecène, Oudin et Cie., 1912), p. 192.

[16] Blanchart, op. cit., p. 26.

[17] Chandler, op. cit., pp. 142, 185.

[18] François de Curel, La Nouvelle Idole, Introduction by H. A. Smith and L. R. Méras (New York: The Century Co., 1924), xi.

CHAPTER II

SUMMARIES OF OUREL'S PLAYS

Name of play	Date first presented*	Place presented*
L'Envers d'une Sainte	Jan. 23, 1892	Théâtre-Libre
Les Fossiles	Nov. 29, 1892	Théâtre-Libre
L'Invitée	Jan. 19, 1893	Théâtre du Vaudeville
L'Amour brode	Dec. 23, 1893	Comédie Française
La Figurante	Mar. 5, 1896	Théâtre de la Renaissance
Le Repas du Lion	Nov. 26, 1897	Théâtre Antoine
La Nouvelle Idole	Mar. 11, 1899	Théâtre Antoine
La Fille sauvage	Feb. 17, 1902	Théâtre Antoine
Le Coup d'Aile	Jan. 10, 1906	Théâtre Antoine
La Danse devant le Miroir	Jan. 17, 1914	Nouvel-Ambigu
L'Ame en Folie	Dec. 23, 1919	Théâtre des Arts
La Comédie du Génie	Mar. 16, 1921	Théâtre des Arts
L'Ivresse du Sage	Dec. 6, 1922	Comédie-Française
La Terre Inhumaine	Dec. 13, 1922	Théâtre des Arts
La Vivante et le Moribond	Dec. 29, 1925	Théâtre de Monte-Carlo
Orage Mystique	Dec. 1, 1927	Théâtre des Arts

That Ourel had many interests one can readily understand by studying the names of his plays. This list follows the chronological order of their presentation.

There are but few characters in Ourel's plays. Most of them are analytical studies of either one or two individuals. Certain of his best plays will be dealt with at greater length in a later chapter.

The first play, L'Envers d'une Sainte, is the story of the struggle between passion and will in the life of Julie Remmudin. Julie had spent eighteen years in a convent, whither she had gone as a means of self-chastisement. She had attempted to murder the wife of her cousin, Henri, who had once been her fiancé. After her cousin's death, Julie returns. She is fully desirous of being a friend to Jeanne, her rival in love; but she learns that Jeanne has revealed her secret to Henri, the one whose love and

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* Taken from the title page of each drama.

respect she wanted more than all else in the world. Her old hatred flares up again and she is tempted to visit it upon Christine, Jeanne's daughter. Christine is engaged to be married; by drawing her from the world into a convent, Julie can hurt Jeanne more than in any other way. Julie relents, however, when she learns that Henri's last thoughts were of her, that he loved her always. Once more Julie resumes the veil. Thus one sees the other side of a woman who for many years has lived the life of a saintly persons.

In Les Fossiles Curel portrayed a noble family whose members live in the latter part of the nineteenth century when the nobility seemed unable to find in the new social system a place of service. Henri, Duke de Chantemelle, the head of this family, has had as his mistress Hélène Vatrin, daughter of his wife's schoolmate and companion of his daughter, Claire. Hélène, who has yielded through fear of him, later falls in love with the duke's son, Robert. In Paris a son is born to Hélène. As neither the duke nor Robert know of the other's relations with Hélène, each believes the child to be his. Robert marries Hélène that the child might carry on the family name. Robert does not learn his father's secret until there is a question of little Henri's future education. Realizing the truth, Robert declares that one of them must die. As he is already seriously ill with tuberculosis, he decides that it will be himself. To hasten his death he returns from Nice, where he has gone for his health, to the cold climate of his old home. The child is left in the care of Robert's wife and sister. Robert requests that the child be taught the virtue of an aristocracy builded upon character and service. Though the nobility has outlived its specific usefulness, it can at least leave the same impression of grandeur as did the great fossils of vanished ages.

L'Invitée and La Figurante, are both studies of feminine characters. In the former play Anne de Crécourt, who had forsaken her husband and small daughters, returns after an absence of sixteen years to be a guest in her husband's home. She has come merely because of curiosity and has asked that her daughters not be told who she is. She has no particular interest in them until one, who has discovered her true identity, calls her "mother." That seems to awaken in her an atrophied maternal instinct. She decides to take her children back with her, leaving her husband with his mistress.

Françoise de Bonneval is, in the second play, the figurante for her uncle's wife, Hélène de Monneville. Hélène is in love with Henri de Bonneval to whom she wishes to marry Françoise. Henri has political ambitions which would be endangered were his relations with Hélène known. Married to her niece, he can keep them secret. He does not see Hélène for three months after his marriage. During this time Françoise has led him to fall in love with her. But weakling that he is, he falls again under Hélène's power when he sees her again. He knows, though, that he never loved her as he loves his wife. The timely interference of Françoise's uncle, who takes his wife away with him to travel, leaves the field free for Françoise.

The relations of capital and labor form the background for a psychological analysis in Le Repas du Lion. Le Brun, in his biography of Curel, writes that of all works which have been given on the contemporary stage, this is perhaps the one most highly representative of mental anguish.[1] Much of it is retrospectively subjective, dealing with problems which have tormented the author himself. It is the story of the evolution of Jean

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[1] Roger Le Brun, F. de Curel. Biographie Critique (Paris: Librairie E. Sansot et Cie., 1908), p. 41.

de Sauzay, a child of the aristocracy, who has unwittingly caused the death of a drunken worker. Above the dead body, he promises to consecrate his life to the laborers. He becomes the leader in the movement for Christian Socialism. But his brother-in-law, a capitalist, leads him to doubt his motives and his methods. He comes to realize that his motives are selfish; he has worked only for applause. He decides that he can be of still greater service to the workers by becoming a great industrialist. It is at his old home, where he has been called to talk to the employees, that he tells of his decision. He explains why by using the illustration of the lion's feast. He says that a fierce lion, because it kills more prey, would leave more to be divided among the jackals than would a gentle lion. He compares the great industrialist to a fierce lion, the workers to the jackals. This comparison angers the workers because the jackals expend no energy in the lion's kill; the workers, however, are essential to the industrialist. Their anger provokes the assassination of their employer, Jean's brother-in-law. Jean then decides to prove the importance of the industrialist to the worker by assuming the management of the plants. Apparently he is highly successful. Under his leadership there develops in the great iron mills a spirit of harmony and cooperation. But, as his old abbé tells him, neither he nor any other man can judge his own success. God will do that.

For Dr. Albert Donnat, in La Nouvelle Idole, the science of medicine has become an idol. This devotion has led him to have an entirely praiseworthy desire to find a cure for cancer, but it makes of him finally both an executioner and a victim. Animated by the hope of a great discovery, Donnat has exploited the bodies of some of those under his care. He had used for experimental purposes only those who, because of disease, had at

must only a short time to live. In his eyes, to sacrifice the few to conserve for society millions of others is entirely defensible. But his faith in his science and his own egoism have made him too sure of himself. He has inoculated with the fatal cancer virus a young girl, Antoinette, who he thought had but a few months to live because of tuberculosis. Due to some force unknown to him, Antoinette is healed of her former disease. When the doctor learns what he has done, his despair seems unlimited. That his means of experimentation has in some way been suspected; that he faces possible scandal, dishonor, imprisonment, are as nothing to him when compared to the fact that he has greatly shortened the life of another person. Antoinette, however, cheerfully accepts the sacrifice he has imposed upon her. She had meant to give her life to humanity little by little; now she will give it all at once. As Donnat has inoculated himself also, he will have the field of both their agonies to observe. Antoinette's faith has inspired him to search for a supreme being. Although he does not yet believe in God, he says he can die as if he did.

In La Fille Sauvage Curel attempts to give "the whole spiritual history of humanity passing through the ages of superstition, religion, rationalistic doubt, and moral decadence."[2] Marie is a savage African girl who is captured by hunters and given by the barbarous king of that country to Paul Monsel, a young French student who is his guest. Paul brings Marie to France and places her in a convent. Here her instincts and superstitions are curbed by her education and the influence of Christianity. However, as she continues her learning she loses her religious faith. Paul explains to her that it is

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[2] H. A. Smith, Main Currents of Modern French Drama (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1925) p. 232.

the great men of history who have made the world what it is, and it is they who should be worshipped. She then sets up Paul as her idol. She comes to have a great passion for him, but he rejects her love. She learns, then, that Paul's plan has been to educate her to become the wife of an African king in the hope that this will make for closer relations between France and Africa, and that by her influence a part of Africa will be converted to Christianity and civilized. Marie marries this king but uses her power and influence, not for the good of France nor of her subjects, but for her own glory and prestige. She discards all signs of European civilization and becomes the savage that she formerly was, except that her power is increased by her western education.

The exotic is again suggested in Curel's next play, Le Coeur d'Aile. Michel Prinsen, the leading character, has added greatly to the colonial possessions of France by his exploits in the tropics. Being hailed in Paris as a great hero, he returns to conquer still more. He becomes a veritable despot over an empire of his own. This abuse of power causes the French government to send an expedition to arrest him. He fires upon his countrymen and the flag he once loved. He is captured by the natives in revolt and is so seriously wounded that he is left for dead. Despite his wounds he lives and makes his way back to France to obtain his brother's aid in regaining his lost power. He is so scarred that none save Bernard, his brother, recognizes him. This brother, who is engaged in a political campaign, plans to make him leave the country. Hélène, Michel's daughter, has been reared in a convent and is ignorant of her father's identity. Bernard now attempts to use her to rid him of her father. But Hélène conceives an admiration for her father. He is a "misunderstood superman" whose desire for glory has caused his down-

fall. His brother is now absorbed in the same desire for glory, so has no right to condemn him.

Perhaps the most baffling of the author's plays is La Danse devant le Miroir, a reworking of the theme of L'Amour brode. Barrett H. Clark[3] says that in the realm of French drama it is one of the most daring and searching analyses of the mind and heart of a young girl. Régine, a wealthy young woman whose parents are dead, is madly in love with Paul Bréan, who has lost all his money. Paul returns her love but feels that he has no right to ask her to marry him. Régine leads him to believe that she must marry to save herself from disgrace. Paul later discovers her ruse but acts the part expected of him. For some time after their marriage he seems to be quite happy. But he gradually comes to fear that at some time her eyes will not "mirror" him as the hero he wants her to think he is. This thought drives him to commit suicide while he yet is a hero for her. Both Paul and Régine are unusual people who can not be happy with anything that is at all commonplace; for them only the extreme, the extraordinary, the sublime would suffice.

In L'Ame en folie Curel compares human and animal love. The characters are a skeptical husband, Justin Riolle; his wife, Blanche, whose only concerns are her illnesses, her religion, and her housework; their actress niece, Rosa Romance; and her playwright admirer, Michel Fleutet. Rosa has fled to the Riolle home, supposedly to escape from Michel, but she is merely leading him on. When she finally yields to him, her aunt is very much shocked. To Justin, this is just the inevitable working out of instinct. In his hunting

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[3] Barrett H. Clark, Four Plays of the Free Theatre (Cincinnati: Stewart and Kidd, 1915), p. xxix.

and his observation and study of animals, he has developed theories of his own. One of them is that human love is merely animal love evolved to a spiritual level, restrained and directed by reason; it is "the soul in madness."

La Comédie du Génie reveals the mental anguish of Félix Dagrenat, a talented French dramatist who continually asks himself, "Ai-je du génie?" He strives to make the answer a positive one. The actress who inspired him to become a dramatist is later his leading lady and his mistress. His conduct shocks his provincial parents and the girl who has expected to marry him. This, however, does not disturb him; he is worried only because the masses do not like his dramas. He decides that if he had a son his ideas and emotions would be more nearly normal; he wants the child but not the ties of married life. The mother, a daughter of a farmer on his estate, dies at the child's birth. The boy, Bernard, grows up to become his father's rival in the field of drama. He wanted a son to give him genius and it is the son who takes it. In an ancient chapel in Switzerland, Félix learns from an old confessor that what he has lacked to have genius is love for humanity. Between the dramatist and the masses there should be established a collaboration founded on love. Without this love talent is not raised to the level of genius. This love Félix has not had. That is his condemnation.

Gurel's next play, L'Ivresse du Sage, has the same theme as L'Ame en Folie, that love in man and animal has much in common. Hortense Terminaux, who comes to visit her wealthy uncle, learns that she is to inherit his estate. She has fallen in love with Roger Parmelins, her professor of philosophy in Paris. Parmelins is undecided as to whether to marry her. He fears that her riches might interfere with his studies as much as would her former

poverty. His indecision loses Hortense for him. She is won by a country baron, Hubert Pioiet, who answers for Armelina the question on which he has been theorizing, "Why do we love?" We love, he says, in order that we may have children. The baron represents the intoxication of love; Armelina, the intoxication of ideas.

La Terre Inhumaine and La Victime et le Moribond are both plays reflecting the World War. La Terre Inhumaine, the earlier of the two, is by far the better. It portrays in one incident the brutalizing effect of the war. The action takes place in Lorraine at the beginning of the conflict. It is the story of the struggle between patriotism and love in the lives of a young French aviator and a woman of the German nobility. Paul Parisot, the aviator and spy for his country, comes unexpectedly one evening to visit his mother, who lives in invaded territory. That afternoon officials had brought Victoria, the German woman, to the Parisot home that she might remain there until she could meet her husband. She had already seen Paul's portrait so, despite the false name and the German uniform, she recognizes him. The two fall in love, yet each is prepared to kill the other as soon as the opportunity offers. The next morning Paul is still pondering whether to kill Victoria. His mother, fearing for his safety and fearing also a too great return of his love for Victoria, kills Victoria herself. She will be executed, but Paul will have gained the information for which he was sent. Here is revealed the savagery uncovered by the war; such is life in a land made inhuman by such conflict.

La Victime et le Moribond is one of Curel's weakest plays. It is an attempt to portray the relaxation of morals after the war. The leading character is Philippe de Pommerieux, an aristocrat who was a gallant soldier but

who became dissolute in peace. He becomes disconsolate because he feels that he has caused the death of his cousin by refusing to marry her. He plans to commit suicide at the tomb of the Unknown Soldier. This he lacks the courage to do so he returns to die at his country estate. He is saved from this end by a novice from a convent, la vivouse, who will withdraw from the religious life to marry and reform him.

The last of Curel's plays to be presented was Orage mystique. Here the supernatural is introduced. Clotilde, returning home at night from a rendezvous with a lover, finds herself locked out by her husband, Robert Pétrel, who has come back unexpectedly from a journey. The doctor, who happens to be passing, helps her get in. She has been seriously ill and her exposure in the storm that night causes her death. A year later another storm washes away a part of the cemetery. Clotilde's coffin is unearthed and is taken to a chapel to await its reburial. Her husband is very much agitated; he believes that she has come back to keep her promise to reappear on the anniversary of her death. He goes to the chapel and is there confronted by the specter of Clotilde in bridal attire. She accuses him of having caused her death by locking her out that night. As he denies this, her ghost is transformed into something very beautiful. He accepts her assertion of love for him and of her own innocence. To prove that she still exists, Clotilde breaks a twig above her head. She also tells him to question his former rival concerning her innocence. As soon as Clotilde has vanished, the rival appears in person and confirms what she has said. But Robert finds three twigs instead of one broken. Thus the reader is left in doubt both as to the reality of the apparition and Clotilde's innocence. The doctor believes that Robert has merely seen and heard what his imagination desired and dictated.

CHAPTER III

ANALYSES OF SELECTED CHARACTERS

Of Curel's fifteen plays, five are accorded a higher ranking than are the others. They are L'Envers d'une Sainte, Les Fossiles, Le Repas du Lion, La Nouvelle Idole, and La Fille sauvage. The purpose of this chapter is to make a somewhat detailed analysis of the dominant character or characters in each of these dramas.

The first of these works, L'Envers d'une Sainte, centers about Julie Renaudin. Julie had grown to young womanhood in the provincial atmosphere of a small French town. She had been happy, free from care, the first to laugh and enjoy herself. She had fallen deeply in love with Henri, her cousin and constant companion. When Henri, who had gone to Paris, returned with another woman, Jeanne, as his wife, Julie was furious with jealousy. This she attempted to conceal, but her nature was of such a passionate sort that she could not control herself for long. One day when Henri, Jeanne, and Julie were crossing a ravine on a narrow plank, Julie, with all the appearance of an accident, caused Jeanne to fall. Jeanne, the only one who understood, kept silent. Realizing the enormity of her sin of attempted murder, Julie entered a convent. Her decision was a means of self-chastisement as she did not feel even slightly called to such a life.

For eighteen years Julie had, in her own opinion and that of others, lived the life of a very holy person. She had been successful in putting from her mind all that touched upon evil. Repressed, it seemed completely, was all thought of the love she once had for her cousin Henri. She did all that she could to destroy and forget this feeling. She substituted for it a divine love and a deep interest in the girls under her care.

To disrupt Julie's cloistral mode of living comes the news that Henri is dead. Her self-inflicted punishment can now end. Up from subconsciousness comes all her old love. Her one obsession now becomes the question, "Has Henri died with a part of his heart reserved for her, or has his affection been wholly absorbed by his wife and daughter?"

Julie returns home, desiring to be a friend to the woman she had wronged. But this, she finds, is going to be difficult. It becomes almost impossible when she learns that Jeanne has revealed her secret to Henri. She wants more than ever to murder her. Realizing this, she goes at once to a confessor that she may be helped to overcome this feeling. Julie's love for Henri had been very passionate. During her convent life she had learned to keep below the level of consciousness an emotion as powerful as this, an emotion so strong that it had caused her to attempt murder. Repression at the convent had not been so difficult as it is at her old home. In her other surroundings there had been nothing to remind her of Henri; here every nook is replete with memories. To associate with these memories the fact that Henri knew her one base act drives her almost insane.

From Christine, Henri's daughter, Julie learns that he loved her to the last; he had wished that his daughter be entrusted to her care. This tends to soften Julie. Since Jeanne had failed, at least partly, to destroy her husband's earlier love, Julie could well afford to be just. Christine and she become the best of friends. But her jealousy is again evoked. Christine comes in one day with a little packet which she has recovered from the lake in front of their home. It is a portrait of Julie which she had given to Christine's father. So Henri had held her memory no dearer than that!

To Julie comes then another plan to wreck Jeanne's happiness. Julie has become for Christine the acme of perfection. By her influence Julie causes her to decide to forsake her fiancé to enter a convent. Separation from her daughter would almost kill Jeanne. It is a former pupil of Julie's who finally makes her realize the horror of her actions. This girl tells Julie that while she was at the convent all had been aware of her extreme jealousy. She would choose a favored few and shower them with a devotion which was admirable but also tyrannical. She wanted them to have no other friend except herself. Such had been her relations with Christine. This makes Julie see her true nature for the first time. Her sense of justice makes her determine to undo the wrong to Jeanne and Christine. Not realizing the cause for her actions, Julie had really not been hypocritical in her attitude toward Christine. She wants them to know this. She is rewarded for her confession when Jeanne tells her that it was she, not Henri, who had thrown her portrait in the lake.

Julie now decides to go back to the convent. There alone does she feel that she can keep under control a nature such as hers. She is truly religious and her desire to reform is real. Her murderous tendencies, however, she has not yet completely extinguished. Before leaving for the convent she crushes to death a little bird which the maid intended to put in a cage. She explains that death is more to be desired than imprisonment. She, too, would prefer death to the life she is forced to choose.

Having learned her weakness, Julie can more easily strive toward a change in her nature. She knows now that what is most needed is not a repression of her love but of her jealousy. One feels that although she seems yet unable to control herself, she now understands her true character and is grieved.

In Les Fossiles two characters are important, the Duke and his son, Robert. Throughout the play the Duke is moved by one force which overshadows all others. This is his intense love for and pride in his name, which makes his greatest desire that of prolonging the family line. To gain this end he would compel his son to marry a woman who had been the mistress of both of them. To keep the child in the Chantemelle home, to have him educated as would befit one of his station in life, the Duke reveals to Robert facts that make him deliberately shorten his life.

Much of the Duke's impassioned love of family name can be explained by his mode of living. Contrary to the wish of his wife he has buried himself and his family in the country. As he can not go to war or become a celebrated man of state as many of his ancestors had done, he has to content himself with hunting. He becomes a feudal being who lives and glories in the past. He does not understand, as does Robert, that the nobility is now a fossil, that the present has outgrown it. It is beyond him, too, to find a real place for it in the new scheme of society.

With only his name to live for, he places his pride in it before the happiness and individual honor of the members of his family. When he learns of Robert's relations with Hélène, he is both angry and jealous, but he is quick to see in this fact a means to fulfill his dearest dream. That Hélène is not Robert's social equal, that her having been his own mistress would make her unworthy to be Robert's wife, are as nothing to him in his overwhelming desire to prolong the race of Chantemelle. He will maintain a certain amount of secrecy so that Robert's marriage to Hélène will bring no public dishonor on the family name.

The Duke, to accomplish his plan, marshalls to the fore all his old spirit of dominance, his cunning, his knowledge of human nature. Matters

are simplified for him as Robert, ignorant of Hélène's relation to his father, has come to the same conclusion concerning a marriage. But the Duke must keep his son ignorant of his secret or Robert would want to kill him. That his wife strenuously objects means nothing to him as his word has always been as law for her. His daughter, Claire, alone has learned his secret. He first attempts to frighten her into obeying him but fails. Knowing that she, too, has a deep love for the family name and all that it exemplifies, he gains his point by telling her about the child, whose existence she had not even suspected. With Hélène the Duke uses other tactics. He plays upon her love for Robert and for her son; her wish for her son's financial and social welfare; her fear of Robert's learning of her relationship with his father if she refuses; her fear of the Duke himself. He tells her that her son means so much to him that to have the child he would kill.

The virtual murder of his son by the Duke results from his efforts to keep the child. Hélène, in her fear of Robert's family, asks that in his will he establish a separate home for her that she may rear her child as she wishes. When the Duke learns of this and of Robert's refusal to change his plans, in a terrible passion he tells him that the child is as much his as Robert's. It is this knowledge which brings about Robert's decision to hasten his own death.

After Robert's decision some of his father's inherent sense of honor seems to return. The Duke abdicates to his son the place as the head of the family; he knows that Robert has shown much more of nobleness than he so trusts him to reach a decision which will bring no public dishonor on the name of Chantemelle. Nor is that all the good in the Duke. He really loved his son. This one knows by the grief, despair, discouragement that he feels when he first learns of Robert's ill health. Again one must admire him when

he sends everyone from the room so that his wife might be alone with the dead body of her son. Sincere, too, is his appreciation of what Claire and Hélène have done to make happier Robert's last days. His fear of public opinion should Hélène go away alone with her son after Robert's death is dispelled by Claire's promise to her brother, for which he is again deeply indebted to his daughter.

Although having some of his father's traits, Robert is an individual with a keener intellect, a person attuned to that is finer in life. In him one finds a decidedly strong sense of honor, a great depth of moral courage, combined with a remarkable degree of dominance over self. This control is manifested in the cheerful attitude he maintains despite ill health and a resulting idleness. Inactivity would be all the more unbearable to him as he had developed a strong love of vigorous outdoor life.

Hélène's companionship made Robert's life much more pleasant. The setting and circumstances were all conducive to their love. Robert made her his mistress because he loved her; but due to his rearing, his social prejudice was so strong that he did not think of marrying her, even after the child was born, because her social standing was so far below his own. His pride in his name, which is at first the cause for his refusal to give it to the child, finally becomes the reason for his doing so. Added to this, he feels that Hélène is worthy of respect despite her weakness. He exacts the promise that she never be made to feel other than an equal to his mother and sister. His promise of a separate home for Hélène and her son show his love and consideration for her. This promise brings down upon him the whole torrent of his father's wrath. In spite of what his father reveals, Robert will not allow him to insult Hélène.

Love of family and honor is shown in Robert's decision to return north to hasten his death because of what he has learned concerning the child. He gives his life that his family might keep its outward show of honor. He meets death as he has life, with a calm control over himself.

After his death, Robert's will reveals many of his thoughts. He wrote that he was glad that he could die before it became impossible for him to refrain from vengeance against his father. Understanding what motivated those who had sinned against him, he could die with resentment against none. He exacted from Hélène and Claire the promise that they would devote their entire lives to the child. The child must be reared to respect his rank but must also have a personal worth, must be a modern man. He must understand that his name, transmitted to him by such tragic means, must be carried with an almost superhuman dignity. Robert realized that the nobility was no longer of any particular service to society; but he wanted his son, one of its last representatives, to leave the same impression of grandeur as the gigantic fossils of earlier ages.

Robert had led an unhappy life. He said that his century governed his brain, the past kept his heart. The aristocrat in him loved the forests, the tall trees which take what they want from the air and the soil and leave the rest for the smaller trees below, the other side of him loved the sea in which there is full equality. No matter where he went, there was always exile for one half of him. He wanted his son to escape from such a condition, to have a peace he had never known. This peace he felt he could have by being educated as a modern man. However one does not learn exactly what his idea of a modern man was.

Thus one sees in Robert an individual made more complex than his father by his participation in modern life. In him there is a combination of sexual,

paternal and family love; but dominating all of these are his sense of honor and an intellect which helped him to select the best from the past and present that it may be used in the future.

Le Repas du Lion is the story of the evolution of Jean de Nancy. From childhood he had known the freedom of a large country estate. Although an especially intelligent lad, he did not like the restrictions of school. He became so nervous and discontented he had to be brought home. Freedom, the out-of-doors, the forests of his native country, seemed essential to his well-being. He was very fond of all animals, especially of his dogs. This love of animals and of nature is shown by his saying that he would prefer the paradise of the Indian to that of the Christian. Jean was not a strong lad, but at home he seemed both tireless and fearless. He would stay with the hunters all day; return alone at night through the great park; would fight with a larger cousin who did not want to be a hero if any pain were attached to becoming one.

Jean was a highly emotional child, extremely sensitive, and always enthousiastic about all that he did. Seeing the wax figure of a child martyr had stirred him so that he had determined to become a foreign missionary when he was older. Arrogance and a desire to dominate also formed a part of his childish personality. Once when he was fighting, a guard had separated him from his antagonist. Very much angered, he had retorted to the guard, "J'suis l'comte de Miremont et vous n'avez pas le droit d'me toucher." (Le Repas du Lion, I, ii, 16.)

With the coming of industrialism Jean grows sullen and morose. The beauty, the peace and quiet of his home are wrecked by the introduction of

railroads, mines and mills. A beautiful little cascade which he has called Trou de la Fée is to be made into a sewer; a new railroad will pass through the very middle of his beloved forest. When the capitalist assures him of the wealth he will receive from the mines he only sighs, saying that he has to console him the perspective of an "exil doré."

Finally in desperation, to destroy the mines, Jean seizes upon the plan of opening the sluice-gate. The resultant death of a worker is a tragedy which changes most of his later life. The reason for Jean's oath to the workers is known only by the abbé and the guard, his brother.

Throughout the play one is made to feel the tenseness of Jean's inner struggle. From a carefree, arrogant lad, he becomes a man with a purpose. He takes upon himself the responsibility of caring for Mariette, the daughter of the man whose death he had caused. He no longer plays but spends his time studying so that he might soon fulfill his oath to devote his life to the workers.

Finally Jean takes another step toward keeping his promise. He decides that he can best serve the laboring class by becoming a Socialist worker. He becomes an eloquent speaker and wins much fame for himself. All his money he spends on his society of workers. Their unstinted praise is as nectar to him.

Dissatisfaction, however, causes Jean to question the value of what he is doing. Georges, his capitalist brother-in-law, helps him to learn that his heart is not in his work, that the only enjoyment he receives is the applause he wins. Although all the workers look up to him and believe that he is doing much to benefit them, he feels that there must be a way by which he can help them just as much and still not feel a conflict within himself. Born to be a ruler over people, as were the lords of the feudal ages, he has

attempted to become a servant of these same people. Georges's idea that each person has the same chance of helping humanity by working at that which he prefers as at anything else makes a profound impression upon Jean. If that is true, all his plans will be changed.

When Jean tries in vain to fuse his old and new ideas, it is to his native forest haunts that he goes to find peace of mind. He comes to realize that he has been the slave, not the master, of an idea. At Georges's plant he verifies the fact that it is not the crowd which creates, but an individual more intelligent and energetic than the others. A man of superior ability must inevitably get the best of the profits; but Jean now believes that such a person can best help others by helping himself. This he decides to do; he will become a man responsible for an industry, will open up fresh paths for human activity. From merely leading people to hope, he will now help them to live. He feels that he has conquered his independence so his joy is great. He confesses that against the workers he has a sort of grudge due to the almost superhuman existence he has lived because of them.

Jean's speech embodying his new ideas, with the illustration of the lion's feast, results in the assassination of Georges. Jean is then no longer the ransom of a dead body; the workers themselves have given him the right to his true vocation. As an industrialist he is a happier man, at least for a time. His success in this field seems still greater than in his first work as he has a real gift of commanding. In his plant there reigns a spirit of harmony and cooperation. He anticipates the just demands of his workers and grants them before they are asked. Although perhaps his employees do not love him, they esteem and respect him. He is proud of his title "lion."

But, at the age of sixty, Jean still questions himself. Has he kept to

the best of his ability the oath he had made to the workers? He thinks that he has; so does Robert Charrier, his old friend who is now a Socialist leader. But the old abbé, Robert's brother, says that man alone can not definitely decide such social questions. This brings the usual Curelian conclusion of an unsolved problem.

Jean de Sancy, as is typical of Curel's characters, is too different from the average person to have a popular appeal. His opinions do not flatter the masses. He is aristocratic, somewhat arrogant, and has a desire to dominate others. There is about him, however, much that is admirable. He is frank and sincere in all that he does. He is thoughtful of others as is shown by his care of Mariette and later of his sister and her children after Georges's death. His philosophic turn of mind keeps him in constant search for truth, with a desire to do what is right. If he has failed none will be more grieved than he.

There burns in Albert Donnat, of La Nouvelle Idole, a fierce and unconquerable thirst for knowledge. The force which motivates him some might call ambition. It is also a sincere desire to aid suffering humanity. To him all that he has done is made right by the grandeur of his final intention, that of relieving thousands from the curse of cancer.

But Donnat's faith in his science and his own egoism have made him too sure of himself. He had thought that he could tell almost to the hour when tuberculosis would claim Antoinette as its own. That one error is the cause of a mental anguish impossible in a soul less great. His wife tells him that he is a murderer. This he admits but says he sees it for the first time. Since he does not believe in an after-life, he tells her that to take

away, though it be by error, even one minute from an existence which lies in wait only for nothingness appears to him the greatest of crimes. That he has risked his own life day after day in caring for all classes and types of people can not condone this one horrible mistake.

There comes to the doctor now a question which he thought he had answered for himself. Is science the only means toward progress? Until now he had thought that it was. The results of his own experiment, however, are making him doubt. He is beginning to believe that the greatest scientists will sometimes search longingly for a being higher than themselves. The great principle of modern science is that for every function there corresponds an object which is adapted to it. Then does not this formidable need of surviving which emanates from the interaction of human organs necessarily suppose an after-life? His imagination, his heart, his entire being tells him that this is so.

Continually Donnat ponders his state of mind. There is such a contradiction between what he things and what he feels. Why should a scientist, an unbeliever, who scorns the masses, give his life for them? He can not understand. He evinces an utter disgust with his colleagues who criticize him. Some, he says, walk with heads high because they have had the good fortune of not having their experiments uncovered; others have a pure conscience because their brains are sterile. If he is a murderer, so are all innovators, writers as well as scientists. Those who crush out old beliefs often bring untold anguish to thousands. This, he says, is the inevitable price of progress. But these arguments no longer convince him that what he has done is right. His science and his reason tell him that it is. They constantly destroy and deny a Supreme Being who would condemn such actions; his heart persists in recreating Him.

The tragedy that Donnat had inflicted upon Antoinette has so overwhelmed him that he almost commits suicide immediately. But with the revolver on his temple, all the horror of nothingness appears to him. He experiences an almost inexpressible agony at the thought of parting without knowing the solution of the problem on which he has worked so long. His wife had told him that he had the right to offer only one life, his own, to la nouvelle idole. This he decides to do, but he is afraid that he will die before knowing the outcome of his experiment.

Donnat's despair is made less great when he learns that Antoinette is in sympathy with all he has done. She is glad to be able to aid humanity in this way. She is, Donnat tells her, truly of his own race.

When Louise, Donnat's wife, realizes the significance of her husband's sacrifice, a love which she thought was dead is rekindled. Knowledge of her true affection still further lightens the load in Donnat's heart.

As is usual in Curel's plays, there is no one-sided conclusion. It is his opinion that human nature must neglect no proffered means of elevating itself. "Tendre vers Dieu par la foi, vers la vérité par la science, vers la beauté par l'amour,"[1] is his own conclusion for this drama.

In Marie, the fille sauvage, one can study the entire history of civilization. In her earliest state she is a creature little more than a beast. Her dominating passion is at first that of self-preservation and race-preservation. She struggles by twisting, scratching and biting to free herself

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[1] François de Curel, Théâtre complet (Paris: Albin Michel, éditeur, n.d.), III, p. 148.

from her captors. While in her savage state she had given full expression to her sex impulses. On the boat back to France, before she has received any influence from civilization, she pursues the sailors and forces their attention. She is not immoral but amoral.

Marie becomes, at the convent, seemingly a very pious person. She has a keen mind so soon gains from her new environment ideas and attitudes that it has taken ages to develop. But her mind changes more quickly than her instincts. When, two years later, Paul comes to see her, he is surprised to find that she seems timid. However, at the first sign of gentleness from him, she throws herself upon him, showing her desire for love. This so disgusts him that he repulses her violently. Three knocks sound at the chapel door. Marie thinks that it is God rebuking her; Paul lets her believe it. This incident is later to have a peculiar effect upon her.

Three years from this time, Jean Cervier, an actor friend of Paul, tempts Marie with illicit love. He breaks down her main defense by telling her that the three knocks were a signal and merely happened to come at that time. She is on the verge of yielding but conquers her impulse. These years of a deepening religious nature and her desire to please Paul have done much to change her. She no longer places on love merely a physical significance but has raised it to a spiritual level. This time she sounds the three knocks herself. The knocks bring Paul, of whom Marie begs that he never again leave her with Jean. She fears that the next time the savage in her will be the more powerful. This meeting Paul has purposely arranged to test Marie. To him it proves the firmness of her character, and he tells her that she may well be proud.

That same evening Paul unintentionally becomes the agent who destroys Marie's faith in religion. Marie then enters upon the third phase of civ-

ilization, that of rationalistic doubt. She rejects religion as merely an hypothesis and accepts reason as her guide. Paul has told her that it is the great men of history who have made the world what it is, so it is they who should be worshipped. As a result she sets up Paul as her idol.

Paul becomes Marie's private tutor. An unusual degree of intelligence and her association with a person of Paul's type keep her on a high moral plane. In this close companionship, Marie comes to have a deep spiritual love for him. Her admiration is almost without limit; he is that toward which she strives. Although he is free from religious beliefs, there is united with his violent curiosities as a scientist the passionate aspirations of a mystic. It is his life which nourishes her own.

Even though she admires Paul, Marie's reason makes her develop ideas of her own. She has come to believe that the physical aspect of sex is not as base as she has been made to believe. Why should not each instinct, exercised moderately, be allowed to add to her happiness? With this in mind, she offers herself to Paul. He tells her then that he has been educating her to become the wife of the African king. But she shows Paul how she has been educated to be a lover, not a queen. Religion made her a lover of Christ; reason made her a lover of all great men; her emotion has made her fall in love with Paul. But this does not change his decision. She accuses him of having experimented on her for his own personal glory. However she says she does not blame him since egoism is natural to human nature.

Marie decides to marry the African king but to use her power and influence, not for the good of France or of her future subjects, but for her own glory and prestige. She, too, has an ego to satisfy, but there is a fierce undercurrent of revenge. Paul has taken from her first her savage freedom, then her religion and her love. She will take the pay from life.

Before leaving France, she again meets Jean Cervier and this time it is she who offers herself to him. Moral decadence has already begun.

Back in her native land, Marie goes farther down the moral ladder. Knowing the difference between right and wrong, she deliberately chooses the latter. Here she attempts to content herself with being not the wife of the king, but one of thirteen. She enters into illicit relation with the soldiers of her guard, and uses the lure of her beauty and body to keep the king under her control. She puts from her mind all thoughts of religion. Her increased mental ability she uses only to strengthen her own power. Paul witnesses her last act which is that of a savage. The closing scene of the play portrays the death of a Christian missionary by her order.

CHAPTER IV

A COMPARISON OF CHARACTERS

The purpose of the present chapter is to make a comparison of the characters in Curel's plays. The individuals studied can be grouped only in a most general classification, that of dominance either by reason or instinct. This grouping will be made in the latter part of the chapter.

There is often a point of decided resemblance between some two of the characters, but in all other traits these same two may be very different. This fact has helped to determine the organization of the chapter. The characters discussed in the preceding chapter furnish a basis for this study. Julie Reneudin of L'Envers d'une Sainte is considered first. She is compared to other characters as to her attitude toward love, the change in her manner of life, her jealousy, religious nature, and her desire to expiate her crime. These comparisons with Julie include a study of other major characters: Jean de Sancy, Albert Donnat, and Marie, the fille sauvage. Additional comparisons of Jean with other characters deal with his devotion to ideas and his aristocratic nature and attitudes. A discussion of Robert is included in the treatment of Jean. Donnat is considered still further with regard to his ambition and his deception by his idol. The individual comparisons are completed with a study of Marie, emphasizing her degree of civilization and her religious ideas.

In Julie, Curel portrayed a woman passionately in love who, as a means of self-punishment, secluded herself in a convent. During the summer after the presentation of this play, he decided to depict a woman in intellect and in passion an equal to the first, but to have his new character

distracted by a worldly existence.[1] Thus Anne de Crecourt of L'Invitée was created. Both women were at first very deeply in love. Julie, because of her crime, attempted to repress her love while at the convent. She was determined to make her religion and the girls in her care fill all her thought and time. Anne, too, renounced the man of her choice but because she no longer loved him. She was bored by home ties and longed for her former lack of responsibility. Her next years were wasted in vain coquetry, not of an immoral sort, however.

After about the same period of time both Julie and Anne return to their old homes. Julie comes back because she knows the man she had loved is dead; Anne returns merely because of curiosity. All that is needed to bring back Julie's old emotion is the sight of familiar places and the memories connected with them. Here in this environment her love seems not at all affected by eighteen years of repression at the convent. In the case of Anne, though, her love for her husband seems completely dead. As a guest in her old home she seems not even to care for her children until one of them, learning who she is, calls her 'mother.' Her desire to take her daughters back with her is probably due only in part to her maternal instinct. Her years of wasted time have left her more shallow, but now she feels a void which her two children might fill. Anne has been continually meeting other men who interest her. Julie has not, so her memories still cluster around Henri. Her religious life has left her just as deeply emotional as she was before, whereas Anne's manner of living has changed her. Thus one sees two quite different plays originating from the same idea.

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[1] François de Curel, Théâtre complet (Paris: Albin Michel, éditeur, n.d.), III, p. 7.

Another of Ourel's characters who loves as passionately as Julie is Régine of La Danse devant le Miroir. She feigns dishonor for a time that she might marry the man of her choice. She wants to hold the most sacred spot in her lover's heart, to be exactly what he wants her to be. She is glad when, after her marriage, she can reveal the fact that her disgrace was only pretended. Julie, on the other hand, had actually committed a dishonorable act. She had wanted Henri, of all people, never to hear of it. When she learns that he has been told, she is tempted to murder the one who has revealed her secret. Both Julie and Régine had wanted their love to be kept as beautiful as possible. So also had Louise Donnat, who thought that her husband's work had crowded her out of his life. She is supremely happy when she learns that this is not so.

Julie and Marie, the fille sauvage, also offer a comparison. Both are forced to change their methods of living. Julie's force comes from within, that of Marie largely from the outside. It is Julie herself who decides to go to the convent because of her crime. Later she learns that it is her innate jealousy which has caused her so much sorrow. Truly wanting to better her nature, she goes back to the convent to have its helpful influence. There only does she feel she can keep herself under control. Marie, on the other hand, is taken in all her savagery to be placed in an environment which is quite highly civilized and very religious. From force of surroundings her superstitions are dispelled, her behavior patterns changed, and her intellect developed. Later her environment causes her to lose her religious faith. In each case some one else chooses her environment for her. But Julie, on her own initiative, selects the place most conducive to the change she wishes to make in her nature. Both women have loved deeply; both are disappointed in

love. Julie emerges finally a much better woman, while Marie returned to a savage state.

Julie's jealousy is a trait which can be seen, to a lesser degree, in the lives of Hélène and Françoise of La Figurante. Both love the same man, who first loves Hélène and later Françoise. Françoise does not betray her jealousy until after her marriage. Then she does all in her power to keep Henri's old love for Hélène from returning. Hélène would never have suggested the marriage had she known that Françoise loved Henri. When she learns that she has lost her lover's affection, she has nothing but ill-will for her niece.

Despite her jealousy, Julie is truly a religious person. She means to do what is right. Still more religious are Antoinette of La Nouvelle Idole and Alice de Segré, la vivouse. Both had entered a convent because they felt that thus they could accomplish the most good. Antoinette had expected to give her life bit by bit, but she willingly gives it all at one time. It matters not to her since in either way she can aid a suffering people. Alice, who had been a nurse during the World War, later withdraws from her religious order to marry Philippe. She feels that to reform him would be a worthy task.

Claire, Robert de Chantemelle's sister, can be likened to Antoinette in her willingness to sacrifice herself. However, Claire's sacrifice, that of devoting her life to the little Henri, comes as a result of her deep love for and pride in her family name.

Thus one sees in these feminine characters a combination of sexual, family, and spiritual love. Each seems to hesitate at nothing in her efforts to accomplish her desired goal. Family love and sexual love often are both selfish and jealous but they, as well as the spiritual love, have elements which are truly beautiful.

Among Curel's characters are four who have committed acts which are crimes. These crimes are the results of quite different causes. Julie had attempted to murder her rival in love because of her own extreme jealousy. In an effort to avenge himself against encroaching industrialism, Jean de Sancy of Le Repas du Lion had unwittingly caused the death of a worker. The desire to find a cure for cancer had led Albert Donnat to inoculate Antoinette with cancer virus. These crimes seem more easily pardoned, perhaps, than does that of Michel Prinsen, the soldier in Le Coup d'Aile who fires on his countrymen and his flag. An over-developed desire for glory had made him want to rule an empire of his own. Here, Curel wrote,[2] he attempted to make the crime as odious as possible; that of Donnat he made a crime sympathique. Elsewhere Curel wrote[3] of Donnat that he dishonored himself gloriously, that he was a criminal who came with his head high.

Each of these four characters wishes to expiate his crime. Their punishment in each case is voluntarily inflicted by themselves. Julie goes to a convent; Jean devotes his life to the workers; Donnat experiments on himself in the interest of his cause; while Michel, under an assumed name, becomes again a soldier for his country. In the case of the first three, that which they imposed upon themselves is entirely contrary to their inclinations. Julie much prefers the freedom outside the convent; Jean, with his aristocratic heritage and his desire to dominate, always feels himself above the class he has pledged himself to aid; while Donnat, his own death approaching, is grieved lest he may never know the full significance of his experiment.

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[2] Curel, Théâtre complet (Paris: Les Editions G. Crès et Cie., 1922), V, p. 8.

[3] Curel, Théâtre complet (Paris: Albin Michel, éditeur, n.d.), III, pp. 140-41.

Jean and Donnat are both tormented by the idea of whether they did the right thing. Both sincerely want to help their fellowmen, but they are never certain that they have chosen the best means. They are both devoted to ideas. So are Paul Moncel, tutor of the fille sauvage; Roger Parmelins, philosopher of L'Ivresse du Sage; and Dr. Tubal of Orage mystique. Paul's experiment with Marie would have suggested itself to and been carried out by only such a man as he. He is interested both in the theory and in the execution of his ideas. Like him in this is Dr. Tubal, who attempts to explain Robert Pétrel's actions before and after he sees his wife's vision. Roger is more interested in theory. Not having as keen an intellect as Paul, he does not always understand how to use his ideas. His pondering too long over the question of love causes him to lose the woman of his choice. Jean and Donnat are more like Paul and Dr. Tubal. Each puts his theories into practice with the purpose of aiding some one. Whether what they do is the best, one can be sure that they really try. If they fail, they will be more grieved than would those who are not followers of ideas.

Jean is truly aristocratic. He has much in common with Robert de Chantemelle. Both have a deep love for family name and home, for the forests and animal life of their country estates. Both desire to fit into the modern scheme of society. They live at a time when the nobility seems to have passed its usefulness. Each realizes, however, that members of the nobility can find a niche for themselves in this new era. Each is imbued with a sense of responsibility to his class and to his fellowmen. Robert, to maintain the family honor, did not live long enough to put his ideas into practice. Albert-Emile Sorel wondered if Henri, Robert's son, would become an

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[4] Albert-Emile Sorel, Essais de Psychologie dramatique (Paris: E. Sanoot et Cie., 1911), p. 203.

individual like Jean.

Philippe de Pommerieux, *le moribond*, is a noble who offers a contrast to Jean and Robert. Philippe is of the generation who fought the World War, probably the generation of Robert's son. He went to the war with ideals as high as those of Robert and Jean, but he returns morally degraded. He can not fit into his old environment; he longs for excitement. It is only with the help of Alice, *la vivaise*, that he can rebuild his character. One feels that he will emerge as worthy a member of his class as Jean and Robert.

Although not nobles, Paul Pariset of *La Terre Inhumaine* and Michel Prinson of *Le Coup d'Aile* are others whose lives are torn by war. The World War changed Paul from a boy who could not bear to see a wild animal killed to a man who could and did take human life with apparently little thought. His brutality is shown by the murder of an old neighbor, that his own whereabouts might not be learned. For his country he would kill even the woman he loves lest she reveal to the enemy that he is a spy. Victoria, who also loves him, would kill to help her country. Paul's mother, hitherto a very gentle and kindly woman, finally kills Victoria to shield her son.

Michel, back from a successful campaign in Africa, had received the plaudits of the Parisian throngs. The excitement of battle, with the prestige he has gained, strengthened his already intense desire for glory. With the empire he has builded at war with his native land, he insults the flag he had once so loved. Thus comes his downfall.

One sees in these last three characters the influence of over-stimulation, of a marked change in environment. Similar circumstances have produced different effects on three different types of individuals.

Albert Donnat is also ambitious, but not for glory as is Michel. His greatest desire is to know, the particular information at this time being

a cure for cancer. Other experiments had preceded this; could he have lived, others would have followed. His experiment can be compared to that of Paul Moncel. Both experimented on human beings, Donnat on the body and Paul on the mind. Both are deeply interested in the results.

Another ambitious experimenter is Félix Dagrenat, the dramatist of La Comédie du Génie. His one longing is to have genius. To help acquire it he has an illegitimate son that he may develop his paternal instincts. But his experiment defeats itself as it is his son who has the genius. What Félix has lacked is a genuine love for humanity.

Donnat has this love for his fellowmen but his experiment, too, fails. His idol, Science, has deceived him. He has thought that it was the only means of progress. Science has made him too sure of himself and in this way has brought disaster to him. What follows is a blind groping for something higher.

Marie also has been deceived, has several times found herself the plaything of a different type of illusion. The incident of the three knocks has led her to believe in miracles. This has been the rock on which she founded her religious faith. However, she is not left stranded as Paul furnishes her with the theory of rationalism. This theory, her environment, and her own development cause her to fall in love with Paul, who she believes returns this feeling. Again she learns her error; but this time the substitute is of her own choosing and works to the detriment of all concerned.

In this play, La Fille Sauvage, one has the opportunity of studying the gradual development of civilization as well as its extremes. Marie in her original state is completely a savage. Paul represents the highest level to which civilization has climbed. Marie, in one life span, goes through the

stages for which Paul's forefathers have required thousands of years. Marie's degree of intelligence is high, but it is too much to expect that her instincts and emotions will change and develop as rapidly as her ideas. This being so, she is not equal to the crisis in her love. Paul, with centuries of civilization back of him, has developed a moral stamina which she does not have. Such a background has kept him the type he is despite his rationalism. He still possesses a mysticism which he has not attempted to destroy. It is to such a level in faith that Donnat will probably arrive.

There is a decided difference in Marie and Antoinette. Marie, at first a savage, becomes soon a person much more worldly than Antoinette. Marie passes quickly from faith to reason. Antoinette retains always her religious beliefs, which seem to help her understand much that would baffle an educated person.

Both Antoinette and Louise Donnat portray the traditional rôle of woman. She is to be some one to help and understand man, some one to whom he can bring his joys and sorrows. She need not be well educated; usually her understanding is largely intuitive. Hélène Froment, Michel Prinsoon's daughter, and Alise, la yiveuse, are both of this type. Although very young, Hélène seems the only one in the family who understands her father. Understanding his weakness, his desire for fame, she sympathizes rather than condemns. This is also true of Alice, the yiveuse. Louise Donnat and Claire de Chantemelle are more highly intellectual but they have the same understanding of human nature and the same desire to help.

Antoinette and Hélène, especially, present a decided contrast to such women as Odile de Puyréal, the worldly young woman of La Yiveuse et le Moribond; Anna de Crécourt; Victoria of La Terre Inhumaine; Armande, the actress of La Comédie du Génie; and Odile de Prévoir, one of Julie's pupils

at the convent. These women, while not always shallow, have mingled more in the world and their interests center largely in themselves.

One finds that most of Gurel's characters fall into two groups, those dominated largely by reason and those ruled by emotions. To the first class belong Albert Donnat, Paul Monsel, Roger Parmelins, Dr. Tubal, Félix Dagrenat, and Justin Rielle of L'Ame en Folie. In Jean de Sancy, Robert and Claire de Chantemelle, Marie, Paul Pariset and Victoria of La Terre Inhumaine, and Michel Prinson, intellect and emotion seem to have fairly equal sway. Emotions réign in the lives of Julie Renaudin, Jeanne and her daughter Christine; Anna de Grécourt; the Duke de Chantemelle and Hélène Vatrin; Louise Donnat and Antoinette; Jean Gervier, the actor in La Fille Sauvage; Hortense and Hubert de Piolet of L'Ivresse du Sang; Blanche, Rosa, and Michel Fleutet of L'Ame en Folie; Régine and Paul Bréan of La Danse devant le Miroir; Hélène, Michel's daughter; Alice and Philippe of La Vivante et le Moribond; and Clotilde and Robert Pétrel of Orage mystique. But as is true in life, here no character is dominated wholly by one or the other power.

CHAPTER V

CONCLUSION

From even a first reading of the works of François de Curel, one can readily understand that it was in the characters and not in the questions raised that he was primarily interested. Waxman says that Curel never seemed to consider man in relation to society, that he was mainly interested in the influence of man's deeds upon himself.[1] Ideas were for him only a means of studying the storms that they raise in souls. In La Nouvelle Idole and in Le Repas du Lion, as well as in other plays, important social problems form the background for the plot; but the reader soon learns, however, that it was the struggles of Albert Donnat and Jean de Sancy which occupied the writer.

Not only was Curel's chief interest in human beings but in those individuals that either nature or circumstances have placed above the level of the average person. He sought out or invented extraordinary and abnormal situations into which he placed characters who were just as unusual. This is exemplified in the leading character or characters in each of his dramas. The individuals whom he studied are often supermen. Such are Albert Donnat; Jean de Sancy and his brother-in-law, Georges; Robert de Chantemelle of Les Fossiles; Paul Moncel and Marie of La Fille Sauvage; Julie Renaudin of L'Envers d'une Sainte; Michel Prinson of Le Coup d'Aile; and Bernard, son of Félix Dagrenat of La Comédie du Génie. It is in the portrayal of souls, proud, scrupulous, subtle, aristocratic in the largest sense of the term, that Curel excelled.

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[1] S. M. Waxman, Antoine and the Théâtre Libre (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1926), p. 172.

Curel tended to represent all his characters from within. He searched each of his creatures for strange and novel motives and then proceeded to analyze them. Each thought and action is carefully studied, often by the introspective criticism of the character himself, but their cause is rarely given. This is clearly seen in Donnat, the doctor of La Nouvelle Idole. The author sometimes revealed in his characters forces of which they are totally unaware, the most striking illustration of this being the jealousy of Julie Renaudin. There is also a constant diversity between instinct and intellect. In some cases this conflict is incorporated in the struggles of a single individual as with Marie, la fille sauvage; with Donnat and Paul Moncel in the question of science and religion or mysticism; with Jean de Sancy in his problem of how he can best serve the laborer; and with Robert de Chantemelle in his attitudes toward aristocracy and democracy. In others it is between two or more characters in the same play. This is true of Roger Parmelins and Hubert Piolet of L'Ivresse du Sage; of Justin Riolle as opposed to his wife, his niece and her lover in the play L'Ame en Folie; and of Dr. Tubal and Robert Pétrel of Orage mystique. These questions and others are not solved by either the character or his creator. Curel contented himself with having awakened in the reader or spectator the desire to reflect, the need to think.

His interpretation of feminine character did not add to Curel's popularity. His women have too much logic, are too coldly positive, have too little sentiment to appeal to the masses. Julie Renaudin, Claire de Chantemelle, the savage Marie, Victoria of La Terre Inhumaine are far from being the average feminine type.

Whether the character is a man or a woman, Curel seemed always to

evince a strong belief in the rightness of the superior being and the dominant personality. For the individual who enjoys reflection and meditation, this author's works open a vast field of pleasure and interest.

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