

HUMAN SUFFERING IN SELECTED EARLY WORKS
OF ALPHONSE DAUDET

A Thesis

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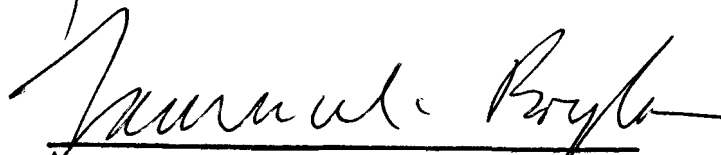
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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Considerable human suffering is found in the works of Alphonse Daudet. Although this is not typical of every Daudet character, those characters who do suffer from poverty, humiliation, illness, rejection, separation, or loss of loved ones, are created with emotion, understanding, imagination, realism, and remarkable insight.

It was not difficult for Daudet to create a character suffering from poverty because he was poor. He never knew riches. His father's business went bankrupt when he was very young, and he was forced to go to work. Nor was it difficult for him to create a character suffering from humiliation because he knew humiliation almost from birth. His stature and his dress were frequently ridiculed by his peers.

As for the creation of a character suffering from an illness, Daudet knew this type of suffering well. During his life he drank to excess, and his health was undermined by venereal disease which eventually took his life. Even to create a rejected character in his writing was no problem for Daudet. Most biographies of his life indicate that there was not a close relationship between Alphonse and his father Vincent. The young Alphonse felt deeply his father's rejection.

Separation from family and loss of loved ones

Alphonse knew well. Early in life he had to leave home to find employment, and these were sad and lonely days for him. Also, while still a young man, his brother Henri died rather suddenly in seminary school. This deeply disturbed him.

Daudet knew his suffering characters quite well because he borrowed many of them from real life. He was an exceptional observer of life and people. In a letter which he wrote to Jules Lemaitre he revealed his writing technique:

Comme les peintures conservent avec soin des albums de croquis, ou des silhouettes, des attitudes, un raccourci, un mouvement de bras ont été notés sur le vif, je collectionne depuis vingt ans une multitude de petits cahiers, sur lesquels les remarques, les pensées n'ont parfois qu'une ligne serrée, de quoi se rappeler un geste, une intonation, développés, agrandis plus tard pour l'harmonie de l'oeuvre importante.¹

At times readers of Daudet's novels are puzzled as to what school of writing he represented. He is most generally considered a naturalist because many of his characters resemble those of Zola. Through a discussion of their environment, their heredity, and their upbringing they come to life. Some readers consider him a realist, and still others an impressionist:

¹Antoine Adam, Georges Lerminier, and Edouard Morot-Sir, Littérature française, II (Paris: Librairie Larousse, 1968), p. 183.

Son amour de la vie se traduit constamment dans l'art avec lequel il fixe une impression ou une sensation: romancier réaliste, il est aussi un romancier impressionniste.²

The organization of this study includes a biography of Daudet's life, showing, as much as possible, the influence that his continuous suffering had on his writing and on the development of certain characters. Many childhood experiences which provided material for episodes in his novels are also discussed. In the next chapter, types of suffering and characters involved are examined in detail. Hopefully, through this examination, the reader will develop an empathy toward the author's misfortunes. The last chapter of this study is a discussion of conclusions concerning human suffering in his works.

The works for this study are as follows: Le Petit Chose (1868), a semi-autobiographical work; Lettres de mon moulin (1869), a collection of short stories of Provence; Contes du lundi (1874), a collection of emotional short stories treating the Franco-Prussian War; Fromont jeune et Risler aîné (1874), a novel about the business world and its unsuccessful actors; and Le Nabab (1877), a novel in two volumes portraying the world of high finance. These works span a very important period of ten years near the beginning

²Ibid., p. 184.

of the writer's career. Oddly enough, the writings of Daudet's later years, when he had matured as a writer, have not been as popular with readers as his first successes.

CHAPTER II

THE LIFE OF ALPHONSE DAUDET

The writer, Marie Alphonse Daudet, often called by readers the "Charles Dickens of France", was born the thirteenth of May, 1840, in Nîmes, France, in Provence:

Alphonse Daudet devait remarquer plus tard qu'en ajoutant les chiffres du nombre 1840, année de sa naissance on obtenait le chiffre 13; et, comme il était superstitieux, il attribuait à ce fait ce qu'il appelait son "manque de chance".³

He was the fifth child born to Marie Adeline Reynaud Daudet and her husband, Vincent, in the eight years from 1832 to 1840, but only the third child to survive. The couple had seventeen children in all, most of whom died young. In fact, thirteen had already died when Alphonse was born.

Alphonse's health was not good. He was short in stature and very lean, and his eyes were poor from birth. In truth,

De très bonne heure, sa myopie exceptionnelle, (par la suite les verres de ses lunettes de travail et de son monocle étaient aussi concaves que des cupules), dut l'obliger à une constante transposition qui eut sans doute une grande influence sur son esprit, et développa exceptionnellement son odorat et son ouïe⁴

³Marcel Bruyère, La Jeunesse d'Alphonse Daudet (Rennes: Imprimeries Réunies, 1955), p. 37.

⁴Lucien Daudet, Vie d'Alphonse Daudet (Paris: Librairie Gallimard, 1941), p. 18.

Daudet grew up in an unusual household. From birth he probably experienced the traumas of rejection, isolation, and deprivation of love. His parents were in the silk business in Nîmes, and things were not going well business-wise at that time, nor for that matter, during the years prior to Alphonse's birth. He was terrified by his father who had a very violent, inflamed, exaggerated, and at times, thundering nature. Speaking of his father, Alphonse said, "J'ai passé ma vie à étouffer mon père au-dedans de moi, je le sentais se réveiller à chaque instant avec ses colères, ses manies" ⁵

The young Alphonse's associations with his mother were unusual owing to her melancholy state. She was a serious person, extremely pious and imaginative. She read avidly, and no doubt, without her knowing it, first interested her son in the world of books.

Alphonse was too young to receive any attention from his older brother Henri, eight years his senior. Not even the second son, Ernest, born in 1837, was able to attend to his brother's needs because he was a very sickly child. He required intensive care from Madame Daudet, and, until the age of nine or ten, he cried most of the time. Therefore, Alphonse was obliged to spend the earliest years

⁵Ibid., p. 18.

of his life in a kind of emotional solitude. Many of the characters in Daudet's works reflect this abnormal childhood in which he was not physically mistreated particularly by his parents, but in which he was deprived of their warm affection that his nature so obviously craved.

At the age of three or four, Alphonse was sent to a nursery in the environs of Nîmes. There was a pack of wild dogs on the loose near the city at that time, and the children were watched carefully. Several people within the city had been bitten before the dogs were found and killed. A few days thereafter, horrible inhuman cries from old people, women, and children were heard all around. Rabies was taking its toll. Nothing those days could be done to help the dying victims. This had a profound impact upon Alphonse:

Le petit Alphonse est hanté par leurs tortures, il en souffre d'autant plus qu'on ne lui explique pas comment ni par qui ils sont torturés, et son imagination le torture aussi et il pense à l'Enfer dont parle sa nourrice. Il essaye de se représenter les souffrances de ces malheureux, il voudrait les soulager, il se sent mourir de pitié pour eux. Jamais il ne les oubliera, et, pour toujours, il gardera l'horreur sacrée des chiens.⁶

The Daudet family was ruined financially during the Revolution of 1848. In September of that year they moved to Lyons. They took with them their three sons, as well as

⁶Ibid., p. 14.

little Anna, born just three months earlier. Alphonse had grown very attached to his father's silk factory in Nîmes, and this move to Lyons represented for him almost a "dépaysement". It was an event of deep and lasting impact, and he was already wary of becoming attached to people and places.⁷

Shortly after the Daudet family moved to Lyons the oldest son, Henri, died. He had been ill for some time, but no one believed him in danger. Madame Daudet was called to his side. She and her son Ernest took a carriage to the seminary where Henri was attending school. They arrived too late. Alphonse and Anna were left at home with their father when:

. . . bientôt une dépêche arriva, remise sur le pas de la porte par le facteur: l'enfant, qui avait déjà le sens du malheur, comprit tout de suite ce qu'annonçait la dépêche, il l'ouvrit en cachette de son père et lut: "Il est mort, priez pour lui."⁸

The loss of his brother Henri disturbed him greatly. But in announcing the death to his father, the two grew a little closer to one another.

His formal education continued at the lycée in Lyons. He attended classes there from 1850 to 1856. Kunitz and

⁷Murray Sachs, The Career of Alphonse Daudet (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1965), p. 17.

⁸Daudet, op. cit., p. 27.

Colby suggest that he was "an indifferent, though precociously sensual, student, already drinking to excess."⁹

Alphonse was not particularly happy at the lycée. Since his parents were poor, he had to wear a simple working-class blouse to school. The children teased him incessantly. Also, his school books were second hand, and many of the pages were missing. The other children sported new books, and this troubled him, too. Nevertheless, it was during this period of time that he composed many of the early poems for his collection Les Amoureuses. Again, the financial straits of the family were an obstacle to his success, and Alphonse was not permitted to finish his baccalaureate work at the lycée.

In the year 1857, at the age of seventeen, Alphonse was forced to go to work. His parents had lost all their money. He took a job as "maître d'études" at the school in Alès. He held this position for six unhappy months. He was bullied by the masters at the school and by the pupils as well. He was still very short in stature, smaller than many of the pupils. Daudet left little correspondance about this stay in Alès. He may have even attempted suicide there.¹⁰ At any rate, the six months culminated in his

⁹Stanley J. Kunitz and Vineta Colby (eds.), European Authors 1000-1900: A Biographical Dictionary of European Literature (New York: H. W. Wilson Company, 1967), p. 213.

¹⁰Ibid., p. 213.

dismissal. This stay in Alès provided the theme for Le Petit Chose written later in 1868.

Ernest, now the older brother, was living and working in Paris. He invited Alphonse to spend the winter with him. Alphonse was not yet eighteen when he left Lyons. He went to Paris hoping to make a name for himself in literature. There he frequented literary circles, and he got acquainted with many of the budding authors of the time. Ernest did all he could to help his brother in his writing career, but success did not come right away. A volume of verse entitled Les Amoureuses was published in 1858, but it had little appeal. Daudet chose to dedicate this work to his mistress Marie Rieu. His relationship with her was a long and troubled one.

In Paris, the Daudet boys changed considerably. Having to leave home and find work at an early age left its

On se représente assez bien les deux frères d'après leurs photographies de cette année-là. Ernest qui n'a que vingt ans en paraît trente. Les traits tirés, la bouche triste, les yeux caves, il a certainement beaucoup souffert, lui aussi. Plus tard, le visage amène et reposé de cet homme si "comme il faut" et essentiellement "Second Empire" ne reflétait rien de ce temps-là. Quant à Alphonse, qui a dix-sept ans et demi, il en paraît vingt. Ses longs cheveux, très plats, à peine bouclés, encadrent un visage d'une régularité charmante, mais plus d'un mort que d'un vivant.¹¹

¹¹Daudet, op. cit., p. 35.

The winter of 1859 did see a friendship established between the budding poet Frédéric Mistral, who had achieved a modicum of fame with the publication of his Provençal poem "Mireille", and the not-so-budding Alphonse Daudet. Speaking of Mistral and his "Mireille", Daudet said:

Je l'ai vu pour la première fois en avril 1859, ici, dans Paris en plein retentissement de l'apparition de "Mireille" Connu seulement d'un petit cercle de jeunes fous comme moi, je menais tapage avec eux dans un établissement de ce gai Quartier Latin. Là se retrouvaient quelques acteurs, peintres, sculpteurs, poètes, débutants dans les lettres, et je me rappelle que Pierre Véron arriva un jour, tout ému en nous disant qu'il venait de quitter Taxile Delord, en proie à un enthousiasme indescriptible et pleurant parce qu'il venait de lire le poème de "Mireille".¹²

This association with Mistral convinced Daudet to write in the Provençal vein. Why not? He knew the Midi. He had lived there. He would write using Provence as the setting for his works. Mistral made him see the artistic possibilities of his southern background.

A real opportunity came along in 1860 for Daudet. He became the third secretary to the Duke of Morny who was the half brother of Napoléon III. This post afforded him much time to write and it opened the doors to high society. He developed new friends, many of whom served as models for his future novels. The post also permitted him to travel in

¹²Jacques-Henry Bornecque, Les Années d'apprentissage d'Alphonse Daudet (Paris: Librairie Nizet, 1951), p. 171.

Corsica, Sardinia, Algeria, and Provence where he frequently visited his friend Mistral. The Duke of Morny encouraged the arts, and he assured Daudet security and prestige.

This new position Daudet found quite advantageous to his career, but it was also physically exhausting. He spent the winter of 1861-1862 in Algeria to recuperate. There he contracted syphilis which was to make the last twenty-five years of his life a period of endless physical agony.

Daudet continued as secretary to the Duke of Morny until the Duke's death in 1865. During this time he wrote numerous short stories; he attempted writing for the theater; and he wrote continuously for Parisian journals.

In 1867, he married Julia Rosalie Céleste Allard who was seven years younger than he. She had already established herself as a poet. This marriage helped to stabilize Daudet's changeable nature and provided the calm and the purpose necessary for the fullest expression of his talents.

Alphonse and Julia had three children: Léon, born in 1867 shortly after their marriage, who was to become a writer; Lucien, born in 1883, who was to become a writer, too; and Edmée, born in 1886. The Daudet family lived in Champrosay, in Ile-de-France, not far from Paris.

Daudet's talent as a writer became more evident through the medium of his "chroniques" which were published

during the years of 1866 to 1869 in various Parisian journals. These Chroniques provençales were basically the chapters of his Lettres de mon moulin published in 1869. These little tales evoke the charm and legends of Provence. The influence of Mistral is clearly evident in this work.

While Daudet was busily writing his "chroniques", his semi-autobiographical work, Le Petit Chose, appeared in 1868. The work contains many details of his early childhood and of his unhappy experience as a "maître d'études" at Alès. The story is a very close autobiography until the Paris years where it departs from the facts of Daudet's life.

Tartarin de Tarascon appeared in 1872. This is a lighthearted comedy about a man named Tartarin who is symbolic of the people of the Midi. Daudet, through Tartarin, satirizes the Southerners who are famous for their boasting and lying. This novel met with so much success that Daudet wrote a trilogy adding to Tartarin de Tarascon, Tartarin sur les Alpes in 1885, and Port-Tarascon in 1890. These two additional Tartarin novels did not have the appeal of the original which today is considered a classic.

The character Tartarin still endures. Politicians and writers are often called "Tartarins". Whenever Daudet heard someone called a "Tartarin", he was very proud, like a

father applauding his son and wanting to tell everyone, "That's my boy!"¹³

In 1872, along with Tartarin de Tarascon, appeared his drama L'Arlésienne. It was based on a story from Lettres de mon moulin. Bizet wrote the music for it, and Daudet provided the lyrics. The play met with little success, and it is generally considered a failure.

Short stories were Daudet's real forte. In 1873 he published Contes du lundi, a series of stories treating the Franco-Prussian War. Daudet had enlisted in the army, but during the commune of 1871 he left Paris and the service.

As for Daudet's writing style at this time:

By 1868 all the ingredients of character and craft were assembled in Daudet, and had become sufficiently developed to yield, in a remarkably rapid burst, Le Petit Chose, Les Lettres de mon moulin, Tartarin de Tarascon, Contes du lundi, and L'Arlésienne. These works, all appearing in the short span of five years, are not only his first mature successes, they are also among his most enduring contributions to literature. Thus the rather long and, at times, floundering years of apprenticeship culminated at last in the sudden flowering of an artist whose works are among those select few which constitute the permanent literary heritage of his nation.¹⁴

¹³Brander Matthews, "Alphonse Daudet," The Historical Novel and Other Essays (Detroit: Gale Research Company, 1969), p. 144.

¹⁴Sachs, op. cit., p. 49.

After the Franco-Prussian War, Daudet changed his manner and searched for his subjects in contemporary life. With the year 1874 came a novel about the world of business entitled Fromont jeune et Risler aîné. This novel is considered to be his first naturalistic venture. It won him an award from the Académie Française. Jack, a lengthy work of pity, anger, and irony, was published in 1876. Daudet wrote it to capitalize on the success of Fromont jeune et Risler aîné. It presents a woman torn between physical and maternal love.

Le Nabab, a two-volume novel, was published in 1877. In this work Daudet successfully conveys the atmosphere of the reign of Napoléon III. The novel shows how a modern city like Paris can morally and physically destroy its inhabitants. Thus, serving as a history of the times, it fulfills Daudet's definition of a novel. Daudet held that a novel should be "the history of people who will never have any history".¹⁵

The year 1879 saw the publication of Les Rois en exil, a work continuing the image of Paris as a destroyer of human values; 1881 brought Numa Roumestan, a novel recording the backstage life of politicians; and 1883 saw the appearance of L'Évangéliste, an attack on religious fanaticism.

¹⁵Jacques-Henry Bornecque, "Alphonse Daudet," Encyclopaedia Britannica (1970), VII, 90.

By the time of the publication of Sapho in 1884, in which Daudet utilized personal experience to treat sexuality and social manners, his body was failing him miserably. The venereal disease he had contracted in Algeria during the winter of 1861 to 1862 was eating away at his spinal cord. La Doulou, published in 1931, represents Daudet's attempt to lessen his pain by investigating it:

As his limbs failed him more and more miserably, as his increasing pains demanded increased doses of chloral and morphine, as he came to realize that his body could never regain the health that it had lost, his will concentrated desperately upon retaining the health of his mind.¹⁶

In spite of an aching back, he continued to write. In 1886, La Belle-Nivernaise, a children's story, was published, and in 1888 came L'Immortel, a very dim portrait of Parisian life.

When critics complained that his style was too cruel, Daudet immediately changed. After 1890 he proclaimed himself a "marchand de bonheur" in his art. He set about to devote his few remaining years to the cause of human happiness.

La Petite Paroisse was published in 1895, the same year Daudet visited London and Venice. This work resembles a sermon on jealousy. Owing to the willingness of the main character to forgive, there is a happy ending, unusual for a Daudet novel.

¹⁶"Daudet's Last Years," The Saturday Review of Literature, July 28, 1934, p. 24.

Daudet's last novel, Soutien de famille, was not printed until 1898. This novel explores a family after the death of the father. Again, there is a happy ending.

Daudet's style had greatly matured, and, as a result:

. . . il nous a donné quelques-uns des plus touchants, des plus séduisants romans que nous ayons. Tout ce qui est dans son oeuvre impression personnelle et vécue, non pas seulement chose vue, mais chose sentie, ayant fait vibrer son âme douloureusement ou délicieusement, tout cela est excellent: il a été supérieur dans la description de tout ce qui intéressait sa sympathie. L'impersonnalité du savant n'a jamais été son fait.¹⁷

Daudet's death, sudden in the end, followed thirteen years of painful illness. He died December 16, 1897, in Champrosay while giving a lecture on interplanetary travel when his spinal column snapped and he fell to the stage. The body lies in Père Lachaise Cemetery in Paris.

Thus, the works of Alphonse Daudet contain suffering characters. But what makes him a great writer is not his ability to create a pathetic character, but his ability to show sin and its consequences and a pity for all who undergo them.

¹⁷Gustave Lanson, Histoire de la littérature française (Paris: Librairie Hachette, 1916), p. 1083.

CHAPTER III

THE SUFFERINGS OF CHARACTERS IN SELECTED WORKS OF ALPHONSE DAUDET

Five of Daudet's works are examined within this chapter. These works, although written over a span of only ten years, offer the widest possible range of differences in composition and characterization.

Le Petit Chose and Lettres de mon moulin show the influence of Provence. The characters in these works are charmingly drawn, with more than sufficient tenderness. Contes du lundi adds an emotional side to the Franco-Prussian War. The characters here are very pathetic in nature. Lastly, Fromont jeune et Risler aîné and Le Nabab, two Zola-type novels, give the reader an in-depth study of characterization by development of environment, heredity, and action. These characters are perhaps the most pathetic of all.

This chapter is divided into six parts. Part one treats suffering caused by poverty. Part two explores the humiliations of certain characters. Suffering caused by illness is studied in part three. Part four analyzes rejection and resultant suffering. Separation and suffering, as well as loss of loved ones and suffering, are examined in parts five and six respectively.

1. Suffering Caused by Poverty

Le Petit Chose¹⁸ is the story of a boy named Daniel Eyssette, his brother Jacques, and Daniel's friend Rouget. The story begins in Nîmes, France. The plot is basically the following:

In the courtyards of his father's abandoned factory Daniel and Rouget play Robinson Crusoe and his servant, Friday. The factory becomes Daniel's desert isle, in a sense. He grows very attached to it.

One day Rouget's father sends his son to the country to work. Daniel never sees him again. Shortly thereafter, the Eyssette family moves to Lyons, where they try to start a new life. They have lost everything in the Revolution of 1848.

In Lyons, Daniel goes to school. He is a sight for the other children in his working-class blouse with his ragged books in hand. The teacher, never able to remember his name, calls him "le petit chose", meaning, "little what's his name".

Later Madame Eyssette and Jacques are called away because the eldest son, "l'abbé", is ill. Daniel is

¹⁸Alphonse Daudet, Le Petit Chose (Paris: Fasquelle Editeurs, 1961), p. 22. Reference to each work of Daudet will be made only once in the footnotes. Thereafter, the title and the page number will occur in the body of the thesis after the quotation.

left with his father, whom he fears. A telegram arrives with the message of the death of "l'abbé". Daniel recalls the sad moment when he reveals this to his father.

Jacques tries his hand at poetry, but he is laughed at by the family and called an "âne" by M. Eyssette. Daniel feels compassion for his brother.

At this point in the story, the family, in serious financial trouble, is obliged to split up. Madame Eyssette goes to the Midi to live with her Uncle Baptiste; Jacques stays in Lyons where he has a small job; M. Eyssette finds a job as a traveling salesman for a wine-producing firm; and poor Daniel must seek employment as a "maître d'études" in Sarlande.

After much concern over his size, he is hired, but the job is more than he can take. He is afraid of M. Viot, his immediate supervisor, and he is seriously reprimanded for asking a boy from an aristocratic family to leave his classroom. The principal relieves him of his duties. To seek revenge, Daniel throws M. Viot's keys into a well.

Jacques, who is now working in Paris, invites his brother to come live with him. Daniel travels there by third-class coach. At this stage in the story the incidents cease to be autobiographical in nature and enter the realm of fiction. There is a reason for this. Le Petit Chose

was written by Daudet after he moved to Paris, therefore, he was not able to include incidents from this period of his life which he had not yet lived.¹⁹

This part of the story finds Jacques caring for Daniel who is trying to become a writer. Daniel calls his brother, who is trying to be a mother to him, "ma mère Jacques". They manage to live in Paris on a meager budget. They both fall in love with a girl named Camille, who is the daughter of a porcelain manufacturer. Camille chooses Daniel.

Shortly after an affair with an actress named Irma Borel, Jacques develops consumption and dies. Daniel does not inform the family, but chooses to attend the funeral alone. He, in turn, contracts typhoid fever and almost dies. Eventually he recuperates and renounces his career as a writer. He marries Camille and goes into the porcelain business with his father-in-law. Thus, the story ends.

The degree of poverty of the Eyssette family is revealed very cleverly when Daniel starts to school in Lyons. He refers to himself as a gone or "child from the streets". His school clothes are contrasted with those of

¹⁹The reader might be interested in comparing the events in Le Petit Chose up to this point with the facts of Daudet's life until his Parisian years. See chapter II, pp. 5-10.

the other pupils to further magnify the differences:

Ce qui me frappa d'abord, à mon arrivée au collège, c'est que j'étais le seul avec une blouse. A Lyons, les fils de riches ne portent pas de blouses: il n'y a que les enfants de la rue, les gones comme on dit. Moi, j'en avais une, une petite blouse à carreaux qui datait de la fabrique; j'avais une blouse . . . (Le Petit Chose, p. 22).

The repetition of the word "blouse" is suggestive of the child's torment when the other students point at him and draw out the word "blouse".

Not only his clothes, but also his books, are an indication of his poverty:

Les autres avaient de beaux cartables en cuir jaune, des encriers de buis qui sentaient bon, des cahiers cartonnés, des livres neufs avec beaucoup de notes dans le bas; moi, mes livres étaient de vieux bouquins achetés sur les quais, moisiss, fanés, sentant le rance; les couvertures étaient toujours en lambeaux, quelquefois il manquait des pages (Le Petit Chose, pp. 22-23).

Daniel understands that because he wears a "blouse" and because he is called "le petit chose" by his teacher, ". . . il faut travailler deux fois plus que les autres pour être leur égal . . ." (Le Petit Chose, p. 23). The word "égal" is important to note because it underscores the inequality the poor child feels owing to his appearance. He knows that the only way he can hope to win the respect of his peers is to surpass them in achievement.

The Eyssette family makes the move from Nîmes to Lyons only to improve their financial condition. But after

six years of hard work, M. Eyssette is unable to accomplish his goal. In a family gathering he reveals his next plan, one he does not particularly relish. He takes full responsibility for the failure, and he explains:

Je n'ai réussi qu'à nous enfoncer jusqu'au cou dans les dettes et dans la misère . . . A présent, c'est fini, nous sommes embourbés . . . Pour sortir de là, nous n'avons qu'un parti à prendre, maintenant que vous voilà grandis: vendre le peu qui nous reste et chercher notre vie chacun de notre côté (Le Petit Chose, p. 37).

This explanation does not come easily for a man who is the domineering force in the family. The agony and sense of personal failure he feels in having to make this announcement are revealed when Jacques interrupts him (something M. Eyssette never did tolerate), but ". . . il était tellement ému lui-même qu'il ne se fâcha pas" (Le Petit Chose, p. 37).

After a short and unsuccessful experience as "maître d'études" in Sarlande, Daniel goes to Paris to stay with Jacques. He travels there by third-class coach. The trip takes two days. Daniel says, "Comme je n'avais pas d'argent ni de provisions, je ne mangeai rien de toute la route" (Le Petit Chose, p. 156). All around him people are eating. But his hunger is just a small part of his total suffering. The extent of his poverty is further revealed:

Pourtant ce n'est pas la faim dont je souffris le plus en ce terrible voyage. J'étais parti de Sarlande sans souliers, n'ayant aux pieds que de

petits caoutchoucs fort minces, qui me servaient là-bas pour faire ma ronde dans le dortoir. Très jolie, le caoutchouc; mais l'hiver, en troisième classe . . . Dieu! que j'ai eu froid! C'était à en pleurer. La nuit, quand tout le monde dormait, je prenais doucement mes pieds entre mes mains et je les tenais des heures entières pour essayer de les réchauffer (Le Petit Chose, p. 156).

Daniel finds his poverty greatly magnified in Paris. His long hair, short breeches, rubber boots, blue stockings, and funny gait bring many stares his way. People even laugh at him. This bothers him much:

Ce qui m'embarrassait beaucoup aussi, c'était l'oeil inquisiteur des sergents de ville. A tous les coins de rue, ce diable d'oeil silencieux se braquait sur moi curieusement; et, quand j'avais passé je le sentais encore qui me suivait de loin et me brûlait dans le dos. Au fond, j'étais un peu inquiet (Le Petit Chose, p. 179).

The suffering Daniel experiences from poverty is significant in forming his character. His determination to be a success in life causes him to abandon a fruitless writing career when a business venture comes his way. He is financed by his father-in-law, and they open a porcelain and crystal shop together. The reader is left to assume that all goes well. Thus, in a sense, Daniel Eyssette is an Horatio Alger character, going from rags and the suffering of poverty, to riches, good clothes, and happiness.

One of Daudet's best pictures of a character suffering from poverty, and more sophisticated than the portraits of Le Petit Chose, is found in the work Contes

du lundi²⁰, in the story "Avec trois cent mille francs que m'a promis Girardin!..." In this little account the author impresses upon the reader the diversity of peoples found in Paris. There are those with abrupt gestures, those who are preoccupied and appear deaf and blind, those with tearfilled faces who are bereaved, etc. But the one person who moves him most he describes as:

. . . un pauvre diable étriqué dans un paletot trop mince qui faisait paraître ses enjambées plus longues et exagérait férocement tous ses gestes. Courbé en deux, tourmenté comme un arbre en plein vent, cet homme s'en allait très vite. De temps en temps, sa main plongeait dans une de ses poches de derrière et y cassait un petit pain qu'il dévorait furtivement, comme honteux de manger dans la rue (Contes du lundi, p. 222).

The author feels so much compassion for this wretched soul that he follows him to see where he goes and what he does. The poor man turns around and bumps into the author, who, from that moment, feels he knows him. He calls him a "brasseur d'affaires" or a "man with many irons in the fire". The tragic thing about this man is that he has been at the top and has plummeted to the bottom almost overnight. He feels compelled to lie in his own behalf, being unable to accept his lot like the other unfortunate Parisian faces. He states in his falsely joyous voice that

²⁰Alphonse Daudet, Contes du lundi (Paris: Fasquelle Editeurs, 1952).

business is going well and that he has an important deal in the offing. He goes on to add, in a triumphant air, "Et vous savez, c'est une affaire sûre . . . je commence avec trois cent mille francs que m'a promis Girardin!" (Contes du lundi, p. 223)

Daudet writes that there is no Girardin. The name is merely one the little man pulls out of the air. Since this miserable wretch has not reconciled himself with his fate, his life is, and will continue to be, a torment.

Daudet ends this sad little portrait with:

Au bout de cinq minutes, je l'avais oublié, mais le soir, rentré chez moi, quand je secouai avec la poussière des rues toutes les tristesses de la journée, je revis cette figure tourmentée et pâle, le petit pain d'un sou, et le geste qui soulignait ces paroles fastueuses: "Avec trois cent mille francs que m'a promis Girardin . . ." (Contes du lundi, pp. 224-25).

Daniel Eyssette may make it to the top to stay, but this little man has been there and has fallen. In a sense, he is similar to the "Nabab" discussed in section two. The only difference is that his plummet does not result in death.

2. Suffering Caused by Humiliation

One of Daudet's most humiliated characters appears in Le Nabab²¹, a study of Second Empire society. The main

²¹Alphonse Daudet, Le Nabab, I and II (Paris: Fasquelle Editeurs, 1949).

character, Bernard Jansoulet, is called the "Nabab", meaning "a rich stranger". He is the son of Provençal parents. He works at odd jobs until the age of thirty when he goes to Tunis to seek his fortune.

The novel begins with Jansoulet back in France at the age of sixty. He is a wealthy man, with several million dollars still to be realized in Africa. He has changed, though, and now he is a vulgar character, but still somewhat likeable. He remains very loyal to Provence. He disburses vast sums of money in order to climb the social ladder, and he asks no questions about where his money is going. He is rather naïve because he feels that the world will be as delighted with his wealth as he is. Having this attitude, he becomes easy prey for flatterers and swindlers.

The Nabab establishes himself in Paris where he hopes to enter the political arena. One of the Nabab's former associates of his Tunis days, now a Parisian banker, enters into a plot to involve Jansoulet in a shady company promotional scheme. While he does this, he also makes it impossible for the Nabab to obtain his remaining money from Tunis.

In the meantime, Jansoulet is elected Deputy from Corsica. Owing to libellous stories about his private life, which are spread by his enemies, the election is annulled. His parasitic friends now flee from him before his disgrace and ruination.

The Nabab's end is pathetic. At a theater, which he has chiefly financed himself, he is scorned and neglected by his own followers. He tries hard to defy them, but his downfall in society is too heavy a blow to take. He dies of an apoplectic seizure:

Bernard Jansoulet, étendu au milieu de ces épaves, son linge fendu sur la poitrine, à la fois sanglant et blême, était bien un naufragé de la vie, meurtri et rejeté à la côte avec les débris lamentables de son luxe artificiel, dispersé et broyé par le tourbillon parisien (Le Nabab, pp. 245-46).

The reader feels very sorry for poor Bernard Jansoulet. This feeling is all part of Daudet's technique:

Le Nabab is a novel of realism which does not shrink from the precise and detailed observation of ugliness and evil, but which adopts a point of view constantly sympathetic to the victims.²²

In short, Jansoulet is humiliated by his friends for trying to buy power and prestige with money. He purchases a miserable life and a horrible death. Lucien Daudet sums this up quite well:

Dans Le Nabab, Alphonse Daudet attache une grande importance au contraste qu'il met en lumière entre les milieux où le luxe, la jouissance, la néfaste puissance de l'or, rendent les hommes aussi féroces que misérables, et les milieux où la vie simple, faite d'humbles tâches, de travaux obscurs, répand des jolies réelles, les seules réelles.²³

²²Sachs, op. cit., p. 106.

²³L. Daudet, op. cit., p. 133.

M. Joyeuse is an accountant at Hemerlingue and Son, the firm handling the accounts of Bernard Jansoulet. His humiliation, although not as extreme as the Nabab's, is occasioned by an unfortunate remark made at the office.

Joyeuse and his four daughters live in a tenant house in a remote quarter of Paris. They are not rich, chiefly owing to the deceased Madame Joyeuse's ideas of greatness and society. She had put the family in debt by her wild spending.

The four daughters are an inspiration to their father. He is a good provider, and he thinks only of their welfare. Every day the daughters see him off to work with echoed cries, merry laughter, and calls clearly ringing down the staircase. On his way to the office, Joyeuse lets his mind wander until he conjures up some terrible image of one of his daughters being molested in some way. He intervenes to save the day. His thoughts during these periods of reverie are always rendered verbally, thus making him appear eccentric in the eyes of the passers-by.

One morning, on the way to work, Joyeuse is thinking about the Yuletide season and how he is going to spend the Christmas bonus M. Hemerlingue always gives his employees. When he arrives at the firm, he is summoned to M. Hemerlingue's office, where he is relieved of his services at the end of the month for having criticized the operations of

the firm in the Tunis market in front of the other office workers. The announcement stupefies him:

Un flot de sang monta à la figure du comptable, redescendit, revint encore, apportant, chaque fois, un sifflement confus dans ses oreilles, à son cerveau un tumulte de pensées et d'images (Le Nabab, p. 93).

The humiliation of losing his job at this season of the year is more than he can bear. He wonders how he can tell his daughters about his being fired. They are all expecting Christmas gifts and a merry holiday season. He decides to pretend that he is still going to work every morning, and then to spend the days looking for employment:

On se figure le supplice de M. Joyeuse, obligé d'inventer des épisodes, des anecdotes sur le misérable qui l'avait si féroceement congédié après dix ans de bons services (Le Nabab, p. 96).

Poor M. Joyeuse, tormented by his inability to find work, is convinced that he must tell his daughters the truth. He is humiliated to such a degree that words do not come.

He is saved, and all his suffering ceases to be when there is a knock on the door and in comes a man named Paul de Géry, who desires bookkeeping lessons for a new job he has acquired. He states that M. Joyeuse has been recommended by a mutual friend. He is willing to pay dearly for Joyeuse's services. Once again, M. Joyeuse is joyous.

In a different vein, Jacques Eyssette is cruelly humiliated in Le Petit Chose. The incident is humorous,

although the psychological effect of humiliation upon a small child can never be estimated.

The family is seated at the table one evening, when Madame Eyssette notices there is no water in the pitcher. Jacques offers to go fetch some. M. Eyssette shrugs his shoulders and says, "Si c'est Jacques qui y va, la cruche est cassée, c'est sûr" (Le Petit Chose, p. 18).

Madame Eyssette advises her son to be careful, but M. Eyssette says there is no use, Jacques will break it anyway. Jacques wants to know why his father wants him to break the pitcher. M. Eyssette states that he does not want Jacques to break it, but he knows he will. Jacques leaves the room with an "I'll-show-you" attitude. Five minutes pass. Ten minutes pass. M. Eyssette gets up from the table and goes to the door, but:

Il n'a pas loin à aller; Jacques est debout sur le palier, devant la porte, les mains vides, silencieux, pétrifié. En voyant M. Eyssette, il pâlit, et d'une voix navrante et faible, oh! si faible: "Je l'ai cassée", dit-il . . . Il l'avait cassée! . . . (Le Petit Chose, p. 19).

Similarly, Daniel Eyssette is greatly humiliated by a cutting remark when he applies for a job as "maître d'études". He is much smaller than most of the students and even younger than a few. When the concierge introduces him to the principal, the principal remarks, "Mais c'est un enfant! Que veut-on que je fasse d'un enfant!" (Le Petit Chose, p. 50)

Later, when Daniel gets the job, he has trouble with the son of a very respected and wealthy man in the community. He finds it necessary to remove the lad from his class as a disciplinary measure. This is just the beginning of a very humiliating period in his life. There is a hearing, and Daniel is treated very unfairly. He even loses his job at the end of the school term. The remaining weeks of teaching are unbearable. Daniel says, "J'étais très malheureux. Les maîtres, mes collègues, se moquaient de moi" (Le Petit Chose, p. 100).

There are four touching descriptions of suffering by humiliation in Lettres de mon moulin.²⁴ The first is found in the story "Le Secret de Maître Cornille".

Gaffer Cornille, a sixty-year-old miller, operates a wind-powered flour mill near Tarascon. He does a respectable business until the steam engine mills take over. The humiliation of losing work is too much for the old man. He calls steam "une invention du diable", and wind, "la respiration du bon Dieu" (Lettres de mon moulin, p. 19). His mill continues to run, and he is seen on the road at night delivering flour with his donkey.

One day, while Cornille is gone from his mill, his secret is discovered. The sacks contain plaster. The poor

²⁴Alphonse Daudet, Lettres de mon moulin (Paris: Librairie Hachette, 1951).

man, humiliated by his loss of customers, wants people to believe his slow gristmill is still being patronized.

The secret out, Gaffer Cornille's humiliation is intensified:

Devant la porte, maître Cornille, assis sur un sac de plâtre, pleurait, la tête dans ses mains. Il venait de s'apercevoir, en rentrant, que pendant son absence on avait pénétré chez lui et surpris son triste secret (Lettres de mon moulin, p. 24).

The story does have a happy ending. The people of the community, seeing what the flour business means to the old man, patronize his mill. Gaffer Cornille wins over mechanization.

The second example, more permanent in nature, is found in "Les Deux Auberges". This is the story of two inns, one on one side of the street and one on the other, in the little village of Saint-Vincent. One is extremely busy, loud, and full of customers. It is operated by a beautiful woman from Arles. The other is empty, quiet, and drab. It is operated by a sad woman who has recently lost her two children.

The sad woman stands at her window all day watching customers come and go at the other inn and listening to the merriment. Her husband, disenchanted with his wife, sings at the inn of the woman from Arles.

The humiliation of this poor woman is twofold. First, she feels inadequate as a wife because she can no longer

attract her husband. Secondly, she feels like a failure as a mother, owing to the loss of her two children. Her suffering touches the heart.

The third example, humiliation which could have catastrophic consequences, is found in the story "La Diligence de Beaucaire". Daudet tells this story as a passenger on the Beaucaire coach. There are also four other people riding the coach: a herdsman from Camargue, a baker from Beaucaire, the baker's son-in-law, and a knife-grinder.

The herdsman and the baker get into a boisterous argument over the Holy Virgin. The baker turns to the quiet knife-grinder and starts to tease him about his wife. The knife-grinder admonishes the baker to hold his tongue.

The baker continues to dig. He tells that the knife-grinder's wife elopes every six months, and that she is a queer marriage partner. He adds that she has just recently eloped with a Spaniard who sells chocolate. He states that the knife-grinder stays at home all alone and weeps. Again, the knife-grinder advises the baker to hold his tongue.

The baker continues his torment by adding that the comedy repeats itself. The knife-grinder's wife comes back, is forgiven, and then elopes again. He lists several men

she has eloped with: an officer, a Rhône bargeman, a musician, etc. For a third time the knife-grinder warns the baker to hold his tongue. This time his voice is full of agony.

The Beaucaire coach comes to a stop and the passengers descend. As Daudet gets off, he looks under the cap of the knife-grinder and discovers that he is crying. The knife-grinder tells him to take a good look, because if he ever hears of something terrible happening in Beaucaire, he will know who did it.

Daudet, in order to show the extent of the poor knife-grinder's humiliation, ends the story thus:

Son visage restait inanimé et vide, avec de petits yeux tristes. Ces yeux étaient pleins de larmes, mais il y avait une haine dans sa voix. La haine est la colère des faibles! . . . Si j'étais sa femme, je prendrais garde (Lettres de mon moulin, p. 15).

The fourth example, and perhaps the most tragic of all, is found in the story "L'Arlésienne". Here the main character is humiliated to such a degree that he takes his own life.

The story is about a twenty-year-old lad named Jan Estève. He is very gentle, well built, very handsome, and well mannered. Many women make eyes at him. Jan, though, has thoughts for only one--a little woman from Arles.

Jan's parents frown upon the liaison, stating that the girl is flighty, and that her parents are not local

people. But Jan is determined to have his "Arlésienne". He tells his parents he will die if he cannot marry her.

One Sunday evening the family is seated at the table, and a toast is drunk to her honor. Suddenly M. Estève is called to the gate where someone wishes to speak with him.

The man at the gate reveals to M. Estève that the "Arlésienne" is a jade who has been his mistress for two years. He has letters to prove it. He adds that her parents promised her to him, but Jan started courting her, and she will have nothing to do with him now.

That same evening, M. Estève takes his son out into the fields, where he tells him the bitter truth about the woman from Arles. After that:

Jan ne parla plus de l'Arlésienne. Il l'aimait toujours cependant, et même plus que jamais. Seulement il était trop fier pour rien dire; c'est ce qui le tua, le pauvre enfant! . . . (Lettres de mon moulin, p. 52).

From that day on, Jan pretends to be cheerful, but the horrible truth about the woman he loves is more than he can bear. Not being able to live with himself any more, he runs to the loft of the house and bolts the door behind him. His mother, sensing that her son is deeply troubled, jumps out of bed and gropes for the latch. It is too late. A window opens, and the sound of a body falling onto the flagstones of the yard is heard.

Perhaps Daudet's most pathetic portrait is revealed in the last paragraph of this story:

C'était, dans la cour, devant la table de pierre couverte de rosée et de sang, la mère qui se lamentait, avec son enfant mort sur ses bras (Lettres de mon moulin, p. 54).

Jan's humiliation is felt so deeply, that his death, somewhat like Bernard Jansoulet's, is brought on by an unbearable burden of shame.

M. Hamel's humiliation is of a still different type. It appears in the first story of Contes du lundi, entitled "La Dernière Classe". This story takes place in Alsace at the time of the German occupation, during the Franco-Prussian War.

M. Hamel is a teacher who has taught in the same school for forty years. He is quite demanding, but excellent and respected.

One day he is forced to make this announcement:

Mes enfants, c'est la dernière fois que je vous fais la classe. L'ordre est venu de Berlin de ne plus enseigner que l'allemand dans les écoles de l'Alsace et de la Lorraine . . . Le nouveau maître arrive demain. Aujourd'hui, c'est votre dernière leçon de français. Je vous prie d'être bien attentifs (Contes du lundi, p. 11).

The students progress on to their French lesson, during which M. Hamel dwells on the beauties of the French language. Next, there is a penmanship lesson, in which the students practice writing "France" and "Alsace".

Noon comes and the final dismissal. M. Hamel wants to say something, but he chokes on his words. He merely writes on the board "Vive la France!" Then:

. . . il resta là, la tête appuyée au mur, et, sans parler, avec sa main, il . . . faisait signe: "C'est fini . . . allez-vous-en" (Contes du lundi, p. 18).

M. Hamel's suffering is occasioned by more than just the mere loss of employment. The humiliation of "dépaysement" is what chokes him up. His last effort is to develop in his students an appreciation of France and of the French language. He is, in a sense, a grown-up Alphonse Daudet. Daudet experienced a similar humiliation when he was forced to leave Nîmes to move to Lyons. He felt "dépayisé" by the move.²⁵ This characterization of M. Hamel is one of Daudet's most charming because M. Hamel is Daudet.

The humiliation of "dépaysement" also causes Judge Dollinger to suffer in the story, "La Vision du juge de Colmar", in Contes du lundi. The only difference is that Dollinger's humiliation is a "dépaysement" in reverse.

Dollinger is an Alsatian judge. He administers justice fairly in the village of Colmar. The Germans take control of Alsace, and Dollinger thinks that he will be replaced. Such is not the case. He is asked to remain in

²⁵See biography, p. 8.

his present capacity and render justice in the name of His Majesty Emperor William.

One day the judge has a vision of himself seated on top of a mountain as the Alsatians pass by, and ". . . en passant devant lui, chaque visage se détourne avec une terrible expression de colère et de dégoût . . . (Contes du lundi, p. 29). His next vision is of his own funeral. He sees that none of his friends or relatives are present to mourn him, just Germans. They are laughing and enjoying his funeral while all the Alsatians are leaving the country. Poor Judge Dollinger "pleure de honte, écrasé sous un ridicule éternel . . . (Contes du lundi, p. 32).

While M. Hamel is humiliated because he is forced to leave Alsace where he has taught for forty years, Judge Dollinger is humiliated because he stays in Alsace to administer justice. The thought of people laughing at him brings on his suffering. He senses "dépaysement" from his own people who no longer consider him Alsatian.

3. Suffering Caused by Illness

Many of Daudet's characters suffer from illnesses. Many times the sicknesses of these characters cause other characters to suffer. The story "Arthur", in Contes du lundi, is a prime example of this.

Arthur is an alcoholic. He lives with his family near the Champs-Élysées in the passage of the Douze-Maisons. He is a factory worker who is paid by his employer every Saturday. The neighborhood he resides in is relatively quiet except early Sunday morning when Arthur comes home.

His wife always has dinner prepared for his hopeful arrival on Saturday night at six o'clock. Arthur does not come home, so she and the children eat. She puts them to bed, and she awaits her husband's return.

Arthur drinks until he has spent practically his whole week's wages. He does save a few small coins, thinking of his thirst on Monday.

The walk home helps him to build up the courage to face his wife. He stops along the way to yell at the neighbor ladies, who curse at him in return.

When he gets home, the battle begins. His wife is unable to make purchases at the bakery without money. She shakes her husband until the few remaining coins fall to the floor. Arthur then finds it necessary to assert his masculinity, and he beats his wife. The entire neighborhood hears the battle. The children awaken and cry from fear.

This is a weekly occurrence with poor Arthur. He is to be pitied because of his illness, but his wife and children, who suffer as a result of his illness, are equally pathetic.

One of the most touching scenes of suffering caused by illness appears in chapter fifteen of Le Petit Chose, just after Jacques Eyssette has a very disappointing relationship with the ruinous actress Irma Borel. Daniel returns home from the Ouly Institution where he works, only to find a doctor leaving the apartment house. Immediately he senses that something is very wrong. When he left the apartment that morning, Jacques has stayed in bed complaining of fatigue.

Daniel speaks to the doctor. He asks the doctor if he came to see his brother and if his brother is very ill. The doctor very bluntly reveals the shocking truth: "S'il est malade! je crois bien . . . Il ne passera pas la nuit" (Le Petit Chose, p. 331).

This sudden announcement, plus the glimpse of the horribly pale form of his brother dying from consumption, are responsible for Daniel's breakdown. He tries to approach Jacques with a smiling face, but:

. . . ayant vu ma mère Jacques étendu sans rémission à cette place où . . . il devait mourir, mon courage m'abandonna; ce masque de gaieté contrainte, qu'on se colle au visage pour rassurer les mirobonds, ne put pas tenir sur mes joues, et je vins tomber à genoux près du canapé, en versant un torrent de larmes (Le Petit Chose, p. 333).

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In Le Nabab, Bernard Jansoulet's physician, the marvelous Dr. Jenkins, knows what suffering from illness is. Therefore, he invents a pill, or "perle" to treat his patients who are so terribly ill. They take these pills and regard them as a glimmer of hope. Daudet describes Jenkin's patients thus:

Ce n'était pas à vrai dire des malades, ces clients du docteur irlandais. On n'en aurait pas voulu dans un hospice. Leurs organes n'ayant pas même la force d'une secousse, le siège de leur mal ne se trouvait nulle part, et le médecin penché sur eux aurait cherché en vain la palpitation d'une souffrance dans ces corps que l'inertie, le silence de la mort habitaient déjà. C'étaient des épuisés, des exténués, des anémiques, brûlés par une vie absurde, mais la trouvant si bonne encore qu'ils s'acharnaient à la prolonger. Et les perles Jenkins devenaient fameuses, justement pour ce coup de fouet donné aux existences surmenées (Le Nabab, p. 15).

Dr. Jenkins represents a wish on Daudet's part for a panacea for his own ills. It was natural for Daudet to write about people who were afflicted or who were in need. He understood illness and resultant suffering, and to create a character of this type was for him merely a self-projection.

4. Suffering Caused by Rejection

The character, Guillaume Risler, suffers because of rejection. His problems unfold in the novel Fromont jeune et Risler aîné.²⁶

²⁶Alphonse Daudet, Fromont jeune et Risler aîné (Paris: Fasquelle Editeurs, 1953).

Guillaume is from Alsace. He lives in Paris with his younger brother Frantz in a tenement house near the Fromont Wallpaper Factory, where he works as a designer. Delobelle, a broken-down actor, and his invalid daughter, Désirée, who worships Frantz in secret, also live there. Mr. and Mrs. Chèbe and their daughter Sidonie live in the same house, too.

Sidonie is a pretty girl, but very greedy and selfish. The Fromonts have made her a companion for their daughter Claire. Sidonie is promised to Frantz Risler, but her ambition is to marry Georges Fromont, Claire's cousin, who will eventually inherit the Fromont Wallpaper Factory.

Soon Fromont "ainé" dies. His will reads that Georges is to become head of the firm, but only if he marries Claire. Guillaume Risler is rewarded for his years of service with a partnership. Sidonie breaks with Frantz and declares that she is, and has always been, in love with Guillaume. They marry. Frantz, in desperation, goes to the colonies.

Guillaume and his wife, Sidonie, as well as Georges Fromont and his wife, Claire, now all live in the same house. But Sidonie becomes very envious of Claire, and she works daily to attract Georges. She is so successful that soon everyone knows of their love affair except Guillaume, who remains devoted to her and unsuspecting. He is involved with

a new invention which is to revolutionize the wallpaper industry. Not even sweet-natured Claire is suspicious of the goings-on.

Suddenly Frantz returns from the colonies and discovers what is happening. Sidonie, still able to charm Frantz, soon has him under her spell. Eventually Guillaume awakens to the intrigue between Georges and his wife. By this time, though, the firm is going bankrupt.

In a fit of stubborn rage, Guillaume turns his wife out and sets to work to get the firm back in the black. He thinks that the future will be less a problem if Frantz will come back from the colonies to live with him. When the truth that Frantz has tried to persuade Sidonie to abscond with him is revealed to Guillaume in a shattering letter, he cannot believe it. He hangs himself at the end of the novel.

Chiefly owing to his brother's rejection, Guillaume takes his own life. The revelation of Sidonie's infidelity and the news of her liaison with Georges merely infuriate him. There had always been a close relationship between Guillaume and Frantz until the marriage. Guillaume assumed that Frantz was still in the colonies. The news of the entanglement of Sidonie with Frantz removes all purpose from Guillaume's life. Thus, the suicide, pitiful in the end,

frees Guillaume from the whims of Sidonie and the treason of his brother Frantz. Guillaume Risler, like Bernard Jansoulet, can no longer face the world.

The reader senses Daudet's pity for Guillaume and for people like him. The compassion that Daudet had for his suffering characters in many of his novels comes through to the reader:

C'était pour donner satisfaction à sa pitié que dans presque tous ses romans il y a le personnage chargé de représenter, de supporter la souffrance humaine.²⁷

Delobelle, the "has-been" actor in Fromont jeune et Risler aîné, is a character Daudet chose to bear human suffering. He is to be pitied as well as blamed. His is a marvelous portrayal of a "raté" type, i.e., a character who fails to obtain what he sets out to gain.

Delobelle's wish is to buy an abandoned theater and go into business. His constant refrain is: "Je n'ai pas le droit de renoncer au théâtre." He is very pretentious and egotistical. He counts on Guillaume Risler to finance him in this venture, but Guillaume never says yes, he merely stalls.

Delobelle is a failure in life who refuses to become anything else. He chooses to live with his idea of starting a theater which never gets started.

²⁷L. Daudet, op. cit., p. 108.

Later in the novel, his daughter Désirée is crippled and on her deathbed. Delobelle goes to see her. Désirée tries to tell her father to give up his stupid idea, but she lacks the courage to say it: "Je crois que vous feriez bien . . . je crois que vous feriez bien de renoncer . . ."
 (Fromont jeune et Risler aîné, p. 215). She stops, seeing the effect of her words: a desperation in her father's face, a theatrical reversal of the hand, an emission of tears, and a swelling of the eyelids:

Le malheureux commençait à comprendre . . . Ainsi, des deux seules admirations qui lui fussent restées fidèles, une encore se détournait de sa gloire. Sa fille ne croyait plus en lui! Ce n'était pas possible (Fromont jeune et Risler aîné, p. 215).

Désirée never finishes. She is at the end of her strength and her life. She manages to murmur two or three times ". . . de renoncer . . . de renoncer . . ." (Fromont jeune et Risler aîné, p. 216), then her head falls back on the pillow and she dies, without daring to tell her father what he is to renounce.

Delobelle senses a rejection on the part of his daughter, because she dies not believing in him. He is to renounce something, but he is too naïve to know what. There is a grim note in his characterization:

He is not merely the butt of laughter, he is an object of blame. Daudet is at pains to show us that Delobelle's behavior directly causes

suffering to others. We may laugh at him, but the laughter is bitter, for the social consequences of the personality are bitter.²⁸

In Daudet's portrayal of Delobelle, the sparkle of his irony, found in his earlier works, is missing. Nevertheless, Delobelle is one of Daudet's most triumphant characterizations. He resembles a Zola character in his make-up. He is a product of his heredity and his environment.

Désirée Delobelle rejects her father, but Christian Lory is just the opposite. He is rejected by his father for being a coward. "Le Mauvais Zouave", in Contes du lundi, contains his story.

Christian is in the Algerian Infantry. His father, Georges Lory, who is a blacksmith, has served seven very courageous years in the "Chasseurs de France", or the French Cavalry. Therefore, he has definite ideas about how soldiers should fight and about how one should serve one's country. He cannot stand cowardice in anyone.

One day, the father notices some soldiers who have fled the military service. They are treated with dignity and respect. This greatly infuriates him. He tells his wife that if Christian is ever guilty of such an infamous act as desertion, he will pass his saber through his son's body. In a fit of anger, Georges leaves the house.

Little does he know that Christian has deserted and is waiting for his father to leave the house so that he can speak to his mother. Their conversation is interrupted by the father's return. Christian hides behind the stove. The moment Georges enters the room he knows his son is there because he spots the red tarboosh on the table. Removing his saber from the wall, he begins his pursuit. Madame Lory throws herself between them to stop the seeming murder of her son.

The next day, all is not back to normal. The boy awakens after a sleep filled with nightmares. He is about to put on his soldier uniform, when his father throws his smithing clothes at him. The boy feels:

. . . un grand désir d'avoir le pardon de son père; mais, en levant les yeux, il rencontre toujours un regard inexorable (Contes du lundi, p. 69).

Georges Lory puts on his son's uniform and prepares to leave. His parting remark is: "Tu dois cinq ans à la France, je vais les payer pour toi" (Contes du lundi, p. 69).

What makes Christian Lory's suffering by rejection so tragic is that never once is he given a chance to explain why he has deserted. Maybe he knows that an explanation would be to no avail. He chooses to suffer rather than to explain.

5. Suffering Caused by Separation

Contes du lundi contains a masterpiece in the little story "Les Mères: souvenir du siège". A mother's love for her son, and the suffering she experiences when he goes to war, are well expressed.

The story opens with the parents of a young soldier following a path to the top of Mt. Valérien where their son is staying in the citadel. He is stationed with the Third Battalion of the Army. The couple has acquired the necessary special permit from the Army to visit their son. The mother is very excited over the trip, since she has not seen her boy for three months, and she takes him a basket of food.

They are permitted to enter the citadel where their son can meet them. They wait for quite a while before he appears. The mother showers him with kisses and has just enough time to say hello. A bugle then interrupts their joy, and the boy must leave for sentinel duty. The poor woman is left speechless as her son departs.

Very dejected, she and her husband make their way back down the path to their home. Daudet writes:

Elle marchait à ses côtés, la tête basse, les bras au corps. Mais par moments, sur ses épaules étroites, je croyais voir son châle frissonner convulsivement (Contes du lundi, p. 51).

Contes du lundi prepares the way for some of Daudet's greatest literature which he wrote after the Franco-Prussian War:

Les émotions et les souffrances de la guerre enrichirent sa pensée, mûrirent son talent. C'est seulement après la guerre qu'il écrivit ses grands romans.²⁹

One of these great novels that Lanson and Tuffrau are alluding to is Fromont jeune et Risler aîné. No single character suffers more from separation than the poor Désirée. She is in love with Frantz Risler who goes away to the colonies. She hopes that some day she will be his wife.

When Frantz comes back, he falls prey to the clutches of the flirtatious Sidonie. Désirée then attempts suicide by jumping into the Seine. She is saved, only to die later of pneumonia.

During her entire life she feels she is destined to love Frantz, but her entire lifetime finds her separated from him. Circumstances just do not favor their romance. Her suffering is indeed tragic. Again, the resemblance to Zola's characterization is evident.

²⁹Gustave Lanson and P. Tuffrau, Manuel d'histoire de la littérature française (Boston: D. C. Heath and Company, 1946), p. 690.

6. Suffering Caused by Loss of Loved Ones

Lastly, there is no type of suffering which tugs more at the hearts of readers than the suffering of a character bereaved over death.

Le Petit Chose is rich in little tugging tableaux of this type. When Daniel receives the telegram of his brother's death and must make the announcement to his father, the resulting heartache is concisely worded by Daudet:

. . . la dépêche glissa de mes doigts, . . . je tombai dans ses bras en sanglotant, et . . . nous pleurâmes longuement, éperdus, dans les bras l'un de l'autre . . . (Le Petit Chose, pp. 30-31).

It suffices for Daudet to offer a description of Madame Eyssette's appearance after her return from Lyons to indicate the extent of her suffering:

Pauvre mère, depuis ce jour elle ne voulut plus sourire. Ses robes furent toujours noires, son visage toujours désolé. Dans ses vêtements comme dans son coeur, elle prit le grand deuil, et ne le quitta jamais . . . (Le Petit Chose, p. 32).

Later in the novel Jacques dies of consumption. The death is very sudden, and Daniel does not have sufficient time to adjust to the loss. The little portrait of Daniel holding the lifeless hand of his brother has a choking effect upon the reader:

. . . un prêtre que je ne connaissais pas priait d'une voix forte, dans le bruit du vent . . . Moi, je ne priais pas; je ne pleurais pas non plus . . . Je n'avais qu'une idée, une idée fixe, c'était de réchauffer la main de mon bien-aimé que je tenais étroitement serrée dans les miennes. Hélas! plus le matin approchait, plus cette main devenait lourde et de glace . . . (Le Petit Chose, p. 337).

Lettres de mon moulin contains a touching little prose ballad entitled "La Mort du dauphin". This charming story finds the dauphin on his deathbed. The entire realm is troubled by his terminal illness. The king is locked up alone in his room at the end of the castle where he can cry without being seen. As for the queen:

. . . c'est autre chose Assise au chevet du petit dauphin, elle a son beau visage baigné de larmes, et sanglote bien haut devant tous, comme ferait une drapière (Lettres de mon moulin, p. 125).

What makes the ballad so sorrowful is the naïveté of the dauphin who does not understand why everyone is so sad. He has no concept of death. At one point, he suggests that the castle be surrounded by guards to prevent the entrance of death. At another point, he suggests that his little friend Beppo be allowed to die in his place, if he gives him a lot of money. He turns to the queen mother and asks her if she truly believes he is going to die. The queen, her internal suffering too much to contain, bursts into sobs.

In this touching prose ballad, as in many of his brilliant compositions, Daudet combines the sadness of

death with the tenderness of love. Léon Daudet makes this comment on his father's style:

Alphonse Daudet evoked the atmosphere of love and death with the same brilliance and in the same now ardent, now veiled rhythm as Virgil, Mistral, and all the great Latins.³⁰

In Lettres de mon moulin, as well as in Le Petit Chose, there is a warm intimacy with the characters. Contes du lundi changes the style, and Daudet's warmth gives way to the development of a more mature character, suffering in a more sophisticated world. With Fromont jeune et Risler aîné and Le Nabab, the characters are very pathetic, very calculated, and very controlled. Their sufferings are more complex in nature. But, regardless of these differences, the atmosphere of love and death is present in all five works.

³⁰Léon Daudet, "My Father Alphonse," The Living Age, CCCXXXIX (December, 1930), p. 392.

CHAPTER IV

CONCLUSIONS

Marie Alphonse Daudet, an author whose life was a continuum of human suffering, died at the age of fifty-seven. In these fifty-seven years he wrote over three dozen works, many somewhat similar in ways, but all more different than they are alike. In these works there is a progressive development of a more complex character living in a more complex world. Many of these characters do not suffer at all. Several do from poverty, humiliation, illness, rejection, separation, and loss of loved ones.

In Daudet's lifetime he knew what it was like to suffer. He experienced acute myopia, rejection from his father, and isolation from his family. The loss of his older brother had a profound impact upon him, as did the torment from fellow students at the lycée in Lyons.

Having to find work at the age of seventeen, as well as the unpleasantness of the employment he found, only intensified his already somber existence. His move to Paris, his resultant poverty there, and his troubled relationship with his mistress Marie Rieu, were to have an influence upon his writing, too. But the syphilis he contracted during the winter of 1861-1862 had perhaps the most profound impact upon his career, because the last twenty-five years of his life were unbearably painful.

His writings became bitter with the increased pain. When critics brought this to his attention, Daudet proclaimed himself a "marchand de bonheur", and he wrote his remaining works with less human suffering. Interestingly enough, they all have happy endings.

The progressive development of more complex characterizations is most evident in the five works examined in this thesis: Le Petit Chose (1868), Lettres de mon moulin (1869), Contes du lundi (1874), Fromont jeune et Risler aîné (1874), and Le Nabab (1877). These works span a ten-year period at the beginning of Daudet's writing career.

The first work, Le Petit Chose, finds the main character, Daniel Eyssette (who represents Alphonse Daudet), suffering from poverty, humiliation, and loss of his brother Jacques. The reader finds Daniel's characterization a tender one, but it is lacking in depth.

The development of Jacques Eyssette (who represents Ernest Daudet) is sad. The reader is sorry he has to die so suddenly. But somehow, owing to a lack of in-depth development by Daudet, both Jacques and Daniel seem a little unreal. They remain characters, and do not enter the realm of "real-people" portrayals.

Lettres de mon moulin finds characterizations involving more psychology. There is Gaffer Cornille, who is humiliated by the loss of work and the revelation of his secret; the knife-grinder, who is humiliated by the baker over the infidelity of his wife; Jan Estève, who is humiliated to the point of committing suicide, when his future wife turns out to be some one else's mistress; the charming little dauphin who is dying without an understanding of what death is; and the woman at the inn, who is humiliated by her inability to attract her husband and her failure as a mother. These stories, though tragic and sad, still do not provide an in-depth treatment of character development. There is a certain artificiality which comes across to the reader.

With the Franco-Prussian War of 1870-1871, and the resulting emotions and sufferings Daudet experienced in Paris during the siege, his talent as a writer matured. He chose to borrow his subjects from everyday life. Along came Contes du lundi.

This collection of short stories sees the development of the pathetic character suffering in a more realistic fashion. Who can forget poor M. Hamel, the Alsatian school teacher, who is "dépaycé" by the Germans. The real Daudet can be seen in M. Hamel's portrayal. There is Judge

Dollinger, who suffers from humiliation because he chooses to stay in German-occupied Alsace while his friends are leaving. There is the poor mother separated from her son by war, who attempts to see him in the citadel. There is Christian Lory, who deserts the Algerian Infantry, only to be rejected by his father, who cannot tolerate cowardice. There is the little man, who has plummeted to the bottom in the business world, but who refuses to accept his fate. He continues to live with the dream of rebuilding his empire some day. Lastly, there is Arthur the alcoholic, who spends his weekly paycheck on liquor and causes his entire family to suffer from his illness.

In Fromont jeune et Risler aîné, the main character, Guillaume Risler, chooses to hang himself rather than to live a rejected life, when he discovers that his brother, Frantz, and his wife, Sidonie, are planning to ruin him. His portrayal evokes pathos in the reader, because the reader sees the realistic events of the plot all unfold before his eyes. He feels that Guillaume is actually borrowed from real life.

The poor Désirée Delobelle, condemned to a life of secret worship of Frantz Risler and to a romance that just does not materialize, is indeed one of Daudet's finest creations. Saddened by her fate, she attempts suicide, but

even that is foiled. Her end is a sad one. Crippled and suffering from pneumonia, she dies trying to tell her father to give up his crazy plan of starting a theater.

The work Fromont jeune et Risler aîné appeared in serial form in a Parisian newspaper, and several readers wrote to Daudet asking him to spare Désirée's life. The power of Daudet's character development is perfectly shown by this public outcry.

No one can deny that the depiction of the character Delobelle is a masterful one. Everyone has known of a person who has plans of "setting the world aflame", but who "never produces a spark". Such is Delobelle. How really and truly pathetic he is!

Lastly, Le Nabab, Daudet's two-volume novel, finds the main character, Bernard Jansoulet, a self-made man, plotted against and ruined by his own friends. The humiliation brings about his death by apoplexy. This is a brilliant portrayal by Daudet. The novel is filled with events to capture one's sympathy.

The reader sympathizes with M. Joyeuse, who loses his job for making a casual remark at the office. His plight is so sad because he and his four daughters are financially unstable even while he is employed. The unemployment only serves to intensify his already pathetic

condition. Interestingly, in Joyeuse's case, there is a happy ending, and he again finds employment.

Daudet has a gift of story-telling, a power of character-drawing, a grasp of emotional situations, a faculty of analysis, a feeling for form, a sense of style, and an unfailing and humane interest in his fellow men. Perhaps it is this intense interest in his peers which makes him such a charming author.

At any rate, throughout his career Daudet was constantly aware of ideas and public concerns. He responded to them directly in his writing. His life ended by being a sort of mirror of the times. The life of his day is reflected in his works, both in the kind of life writers and artists then led, and in the nature of the daily existence of the ordinary people as well. If one wishes to develop some appreciation of what daily life for the average person was like in France between 1860 and 1890, there is no better way to the acquisition of this knowledge than the study of the works of Alphonse Daudet. The quality of life of that era is evident on every page.

Daudet has lately fallen out of favor with readers who consider him mediocre. True, he does not rank with Flaubert, Zola, Hugo, and other contemporaries, but he is a master of the short story and a master of character

portraits, which does make him akin to the great French short story master Guy de Maupassant.

Hopefully the reader of this thesis has seen the differences in character development in these five works of Daudet. His greatness as an author lies therewithin. In only fifty-seven years, Alphonse Daudet created characters who are now considered classic. What greater accomplishment can be credited to any author?

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