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Personal identity in the theatre of Gabriel Marcel
and Jean-Paul Sartre

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ABBREVIATIONS

The following abbreviations have been adopted in the thesis for the plays which have been selected for detailed textual analysis:

Plays by Marcel

<u>La Chapelle ardente</u>	CA
<u>Un Homme de Dieu</u>	HD
<u>Le Monde cassé</u>	MC
<u>Le Dard</u>	D
<u>L'Émissaire</u>	E
<u>Le Signe de la Croix</u>	SC
<u>Rome n'est plus dans Rome</u>	RR

Plays by Sartre

<u>Les Mouches</u>	M
<u>Huis clos</u>	HC
<u>Les Mains sales</u>	MS
<u>Le Diable et le Bon Dieu</u>	DD
<u>Kean</u>	K
<u>Nekrassov</u>	N
<u>Les Séquestrés d'Altona</u>	SA
<u>Les Troyennes</u>	T

Details of the exact edition used for each play are given in the footnotes.

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INTRODUCTION

The subject of this thesis is the theme of personal identity in the theatre of Gabriel Marcel and Jean-Paul Sartre, a theme which is central not only to their plays, but to their philosophical work too as well as to Sartre's novels and political texts. In short, it is central to their whole philosophy of life and thus gives a valuable insight into the deep, personal beliefs and convictions of two men who have occupied an important place in the intellectual life of twentieth century France. At the same time, Marcel, with his profoundly religious sensibility and adherence to the Christian faith, and Sartre, with his unwavering atheism and gradual rallying to the cause of Marxism, provide two very different and challenging approaches to this theme.

The concept of personal identity implies either the possibility or the desire for man, as an individual, to attain a state in which he experiences a deeply meaningful and enriching relationship with himself and with the outside world. Such a state is dynamic and not static, that is to say it stems from an experience which can be lived but not conceptualised (where this implies abstraction from the temporal ebb and flow of human existence). It therefore presupposes a certain impermanence, or at least the need for constant vigilance and self-renewal on the part of the individual, while, conversely, he is faced with the possibility of failing to attain such a state and with the threat of a situation in which he may become submerged in a large, collective, anonymous group or unit, or in which he appears either to himself or to other people as a mere object or function devoid of any autonomy, individuality or mystery. In such a situation, he continues to have an identity, but it is one which is completely depersonalised, and which therefore implies a level of existence alien to the truly human or spiritual qualities and aspirations of man. This, in fact, is what is understood in this

thesis by a state of alienation, - one in which the individual is estranged from his real self, whether this be the result of his own inner blindness or of hostile social forces. The study of the theme of personal identity in the plays of Marcel and Sartre will therefore enable us to study two different types of situation: those which lead the individual to a state of partial or total alienation, and those which lead to partial or total (but not necessarily permanent) fulfilment or realisation.

Both Marcel and Sartre have had a significant part to play in the development of existentialism in France. This philosophical movement has aroused considerable interest in Europe and North America, especially in the years which immediately followed the end of the Second World War and which saw Sartre's sudden emergence as a figure of world-wide notoriety. A great number of critical works have been written on the philosophy of Marcel and Sartre, and their analysis of the individual's place in the world and of those situations or experiences which enable him to attain the highest level of personal existence has been exhaustively described and evaluated.¹ Most of the comparisons of Marcel and Sartre as philosophers are, however, made in books which deal generally with existentialism and which therefore take into account nineteenth century predecessors like Kierkegaard or Nietzsche, or contemporary German philosophers like Jaspers and Heidegger. The only book which, to our knowledge, concentrates specifically on the development of existentialism in France and on the philosophy of Marcel and Sartre in particular is that by F.Kingston.² This book, however, presents the disadvantage of

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1. See, for example, the two books written on Marcel and Sartre in the series "Philosophes de tous les temps": J.Parain-Vial, Gabriel Marcel, et les niveaux de l'expérience, Paris, Seghers, 1966, and C.Audry, Sartre, et la Réalité humaine, Paris, Seghers, 1966.
 2. French Existentialism: A Christian Critique, Toronto, University of Toronto Press, 1961.

focussing attention on Sartre's early philosophy and of thus failing to take into account his movement towards Marxism, a movement which Sartre himself did not try to justify philosophically until the late 1950's.³

It is, however, with Marcel and Sartre as dramatists that this thesis is concerned. The interest in Sartre's plays is considerable and his dramatic work is discussed in a great number of books dealing with the modern theatre. Marcel's dramatic work, on the other hand, has received very little attention especially in relation to the number of articles and books written about his philosophy. A general survey of Marcel's theatre appears in Un Philosophe itinérant: Gabriel Marcel by M.-M. Davy,⁴ but the author does not analyse any of the plays in detail and claims that Marcel's conversion in 1929 has not significantly added to his dramatic work,⁵ a claim which, as this thesis will attempt to show, is quite unfounded. A more satisfactory account of Marcel's theatre is to be found in E. Sottiaux's Gabriel Marcel, philosophe et dramaturge.^{*} This work contains a detailed analysis of two of Marcel's plays, - both of which are also studied in this thesis, - but in view of the fact that Marcel has written over twenty plays, E. Sottiaux's discussion of his dramatic work is invariably considerably limited. In particular, he is unable to give a "vue d'ensemble" of Marcel's plays and of any significant change or evolution in his treatment of the theme of personal identity. The only major critical work to date which deals fully with Marcel's theatre is J. Chenu's Le théâtre de Gabriel Marcel et sa signification métaphysique.⁶ There are however,

3. An article on the relationship between existentialism and Marxism was written by Sartre for a Polish review in 1957 and was reproduced the same year with considerable modifications in Les Temps modernes, no.139, septembre, pp.338-417 and no.140, octobre, pp.658-698, under the title "Questions de méthode".

4. Paris, Flammarion, 1959.

5. Un Philosophe itinérant: Gabriel Marcel, p.98.

6. Paris, Aubier, 1948.

* Louvain, E. Nauwelaerts and Paris, Béatrice-Nauwelaerts, 1956.

two significant limitations to this work. First of all, several of Marcel's most important plays, composed during and after the Second World War and reflecting the author's growing concern for the social and political instability and unrest of the modern world, were written after its publication. Secondly, J.Chenu's critical approach, as the title of his study indicates, makes no attempt to evaluate Marcel's plays as drama, to consider or discuss their impact in performance, or to study in any real detail Marcel's dramatic theories. Although, therefore, J.Chenu deals extensively with the theme of personal identity in his study of Marcel's theatre, his work omits several plays which show an important evolution in Marcel's thought and in his treatment of this theme, while his analyses, deep and penetrating in themselves, do not tell us anything about Marcel as a dramatist.

In the last fifteen years there has been a growing interest in Marcel's work both as a philosopher and as a dramatist in American universities. During this time four theses have dealt exclusively with the plays of Marcel,⁷ one of them being concerned specifically with dramatic style and this appears to be the first significant attempt to study in depth this aspect of Marcel's theatre. Unfortunately, however, none of these theses have yet been published. As is to be expected, there is a far greater number of essays or articles dealing with Marcel's plays than books or theses. A large proportion of these, however, concentrate on isolated plays and do not therefore provide any account of Marcel's theatre as a whole. Two notable exceptions are G.Fessard's analysis of the role of mystery in Marcel's

7. H.Lazaron, Gabriel Marcel, the dramatist, (see Dissertation Abstracts, XX,no.2, August, 1959,p.671), A. Farragher, The nature of man's relationships as exemplified in the plays of Gabriel Marcel, (see Diss.Abs.,XX, no.11, May,1960 pp.4394-5), Z.Ralston, Gabriel Marcel's paradoxical expression of mystery. A stylistic study of "La Soif", (see French Vii Bibliography, no.15,1963, p.1660), and N.Cooper, A study of the theatre of Gabriel Marcel, (see Diss.Abs., XXVI, no.12, June, 1966, p.7313).

dramatic work⁸ and J.Dubois-Dumée's examination of the themes of solitude and communion.⁹ Neither of these studies, however, deals with the plays written during and after the Second World War, and hence an important period in the work of the dramatist is omitted. Some account of these plays is attempted by J.-H. Roy,¹⁰ but his critical approach to Marcel is deeply coloured by his own very different moral and political standpoint, and his claim that all Marcel's main characters "se soucient avant tout d'avoir une belle âme"¹¹ is, as this thesis will attempt to show, totally misleading and unacceptable. J.-H. Roy's objections to the content of Marcel's plays are matched by M.Beigbeder's severe assessment of their form and viability as works of drama.¹² The latter's criticism is not, however, coloured by obvious ideological differences, and does, in fact, advance a well reasoned case to explain the relative failure of Marcel as a dramatist. The fact that Marcel's theatre has met with very little commercial success is not of primary importance as far as a study of the theme of personal identity is concerned, but it is not something which should be overlooked, and the thesis therefore discusses this lack of success and M.Beigbeder's explanation for it.

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8. First published as "L'oeuvre dramatique de Gabriel Marcel" in Études, vol.1, 1938, pp.738-60 and vol.2, 1938, pp.40-66, this study was later entitled "Théâtre et Mystère" and incorporated as a preface to Marcel's dramatic work in La Soif, Paris, Desclée de Brouwer, 1938.
 9. "Solitude et communion dans le théâtre de Gabriel Marcel" in Existentialisme chrétien: Gabriel Marcel, (ed. E.Gilson), Paris, Plon, 1947.
 10. "Le théâtre de Gabriel Marcel" in Les Temps modernes, no.48, octobre, 1949, pp.751-8.
 11. Ibid., p.757.
 12. "Théâtre philosophique?" in Esprit, no.160, octobre, 1949, pp.552-80. The second of these articles was devoted to the plays of Sartre: "Théâtre philosophique? II: Sartre." in Esprit, no.162, décembre, 1949, pp.924-942.

Although Sartre's theatre is referred to and discussed in a great number of general works, it has given rise to relatively few detailed critical surveys. The best introduction to Sartre's theatre is given by F. Jeanson in Sartre par lui-même.¹³ Here the critic, a close friend of Sartre, provides the reader not only with a penetrating analysis of individual plays but, more importantly from the point of view of this thesis, traces the gradual evolution in Sartre's thought as it is expressed in his dramatic work, showing how the theme of personal identity assumes increasing political significance in the plays written after the Second World War. F. Jeanson's book was, however, first published in 1955 and since this time Sartre has written two further plays and an adaptation. Sartre par lui-même has been re-edited to take into account Sartre's later autobiographical and philosophical work, but the two plays which, as this thesis will attempt to demonstrate, occupy an important place in the final period of Sartre's dramatic work, are not discussed. An otherwise excellent study of Sartre's theatre is therefore, like J. Chenu's account of Marcel's plays, marred by its incompleteness. A far more recent study of Sartre's theatre is that of P. Verstraeten,¹⁴ whose book contains a detailed analysis of Sartre's last full-length play, Les Séquestrés d'Altona.¹⁵ In many ways, however, this is a much less satisfying work for students of Sartre and certainly for the general reader than that of F. Jeanson. First of all, P. Verstraeten's study of violence and ethics is highly selective. He explains that, having set out to present us with "le schème formel d'une morale qui

13. Paris, Éditions du Seuil, 1955.

14. Violence et éthique. Esquisse d'une critique de la morale dialectique à partir du théâtre politique de Sartre, Paris, Gallimard, 1972.

15. Paris, Gallimard, 1960.

se veut engagée, et que le théâtre de Sartre nous a appris à saisir dans sa radicalité plénière...nous n'envisagions que les pièces profilant une réponse positive au problème de la violence...."¹⁶ In fact, only four of Sartre's plays (and a scenario, L'Engrenage)¹⁷ are actually discussed, and the omission of Huis clos¹⁸ and of Sartre's comic works, although justified for the purposes of P.Verstraeten's particular critical approach, leaves the reader with a partial and limited view of his theatre as a whole. Secondly, there is the very considerable difficulty of comprehending fully the language and concepts of P.Verstraeten's highly specialised and technical thematic study.

The most complete study in English of Sartre's theatre is provided by the American critic, D. McCall.¹⁹ She has opted against a chronological approach to the plays "in favour of one that springs from thematic continuity and technical similarities",²⁰ claiming, for example, that the play which best helps us to understand Les Séquestrés d'Altona is not Nekrassov²¹ (its nearest chronologically) but Huis clos. This is, however, a highly contestable point of view. Indeed, it is the aim of this thesis to show that Huis clos belongs very much to the early period of Sartre's dramatic work, and that Les Séquestrés d'Altona should be closely related to the two works which precede it, Nekrassov and Kean,²² plays which D.McCall merely classifies with La Putain respectueuse²³ among the "comic interludes". Similarly, to link Les Mains sales²⁴ with Morts sans sépulture²⁵ as

16. Violence et éthique, p.10.

17. Paris, Nagel, 1948.

18. In Théâtre, Paris, Gallimard, 1947.

19. The Theatre of Jean-Paul Sartre, New York, Columbia University Press, 1969.

20. Ibid., p.vii.

21. Paris, Gallimard, 1956.

22. Paris, Gallimard, 1954.

23. In Théâtre.

24. Paris, Gallimard, 1948.

25. In Théâtre.

examples of "action and realism" masks the relevance of the former as a work showing Sartre's progress from the individualism of his early plays to a position of greater political maturity. In short, D.McCall's survey of Sartre's theatre gives no real insight into the gradual evolution in the author's approach to man and his place in society. The same failing is apparent in M.-D.Boros' study of the theme of sequestration in Sartre's novels and plays,²⁶ although the theme itself implies a state of alienation and loss of personal identity and is therefore very close to the one chosen for this thesis.

The best known English critic of Sartre is P.Thody. He is the author of two general works on Sartre,²⁷ and has composed a critical edition of Les Séquestrés d'Altona²⁸ as well as writing an essay on Sartre's theatre for a recently compiled symposium on modern French drama.²⁹ P.Thody contests F.Jeanson's belief that there is a clear progression in Sartre's work towards a coherent left-wing philosophy of political action, and, on this specific issue, the thesis upholds the interpretation of F.Jeanson, the analysis of Les Mains sales being of major importance in this respect. Another English critic, K.Gore, has written a short study of Sartre's first important play³⁰ as well as an article on his theatre as a whole.³¹ This article provides a good general survey of the plays although the author does seem to

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26. Un Séquestré: l'homme sartrien. Étude du thème de la séquestration dans l'oeuvre littéraire de Jean-Paul Sartre, Paris, Nizet, 1968.
 27. Jean-Paul Sartre: A Literary and Political Study, London, Hamish Hamilton, 1960, and Sartre: A Biographical Introduction, London, Studio Vista, 1971.
 28. Les Séquestrés d'Altona, London, University of London Press, 1965.
 29. "Sartre" in Forces in Modern French Drama, (ed.J.Fletcher), London, University of London Press, 1972.
 30. Sartre: "La Nausée" and "Les Mouches", London, Arnold, 1970.
 31. "The Theatre of Sartre: 1940-65" in Books Abroad, no.2, spring, 1967, pp.133-49.

underestimate their political implications. This is not, however, the case with L.Goldmann whose essay on Sartre's theatre³² is of particular importance not only in situating the plays in relation to the author's life and to his other works, but also in drawing attention to the recurring conflict of individual and collective freedom, ethics and "praxis". This conflict is, in fact, vital to a full understanding of the political evolution of Sartre's thought.

Whereas left-wing critics like F.Jeanson and P.Verstraeten are sympathetic to the ideas expressed in Sartre's plays, and insist on their social and political implication - Revolution -, P.Thody who clearly has little faith in the politics of the extreme left emphasises Sartre's failure to identify whole-heartedly with any revolutionary party or movement, and underlines the corresponding pessimism of plays like Les Mains sales and Les Séquestrés d'Altona. This divergence of critical opinion reflects the controversial nature of Sartre's dramatic work and is a reminder that several of his plays have been so surrounded in controversy that their meaning has often been distorted by a wave of angry and impassioned accusations. Huis clos, for example, is certainly not the gloomy and pessimistic indictment of human relationships which it has often been taken to be,³³ and Garcin's cry of "l'enfer, c'est les Autres!"³⁴ is probably one of the best known and least understood lines in Sartre's work. With Les Mains sales and Le Diable et le Bon Dieu,³⁵ two of Sartre's most important political plays, the reaction was particularly severe, in the first instance in the Communist press, and in the second instance from Christian quarters.³⁶

32. "Problèmes philosophiques et politiques dans le théâtre de Jean-Paul Sartre" in Structures mentales et création culturelle, Paris, Éditions Anthropos, 1970, pp.209-264.

33. See above, chapter 5.

34. Théâtre, p.167.

35. Paris, Gallimard, 1951.

36. See above, chapter 6.

Les Mains Sales thus came to be seen by many as an anti-Communist play - an interpretation which is, in fact, totally unacceptable - while Le Diable et le Bon Dieu was much spoken about for its apparently scandalous scenes and blasphemous tone, and hence its basic political message was considerably obscured. In all three cases, there has been a very marked failure on the part of many critics to approach Sartre's work dispassionately: ideological objections have been voiced without any real attempt to come to grips with the basic subject of the play and the beliefs and intentions which underly it.

To sum up, therefore, it is clear that Marcel's theatre has been examined and discussed in far less detail and depth than his philosophy proper, while the present critical work on the plays needs expanding to take into account his dramatic work and theories as a whole. There is, on the other hand, a substantial amount of critical work devoted to Sartre's theatre, much of it offering diverse and conflicting points of view. Neither D.McCall nor P.Thody has dealt adequately with the political evolution of Sartre's plays and its effect on the theme of personal identity, while the two major French critical studies of Sartre's theatre, those of F.Jeanson and P.Verstraeten, deal thoroughly but incompletely with this theme, F.Jeanson omitting from his study the final period of Sartre's dramatic work and P.Verstraeten selecting for analysis only four of Sartre's eleven plays and adaptations. Although Marcel and Sartre have been linked and discussed together as philosophers, there has been no significant attempt to compare them as dramatists. N.Cooper's thesis on the theatre on Marcel³⁷ does contain a chapter on Sartre, but her study is, on the whole, rather superficial and certainly far from

37. A study of the theatre of Gabriel Marcel, The University of Texas, 1965.

exhaustive. M.Beigbeder has tried to assess and evaluate the plays of Marcel and Sartre as drama, and R.Speaight has briefly compared the style and tone of their plays,³⁸ but neither of these articles touches on the theme of personal identity.

The basic critical method adopted in this thesis is that which P.-H. Simon has defined as the "critique de signification",³⁹ an analysis of a writer's works which tries to discover "ce qu'elles veulent nous apprendre sur l'homme, sur le monde, sur nous-mêmes, généralement sur la conscience qu'une société, à un moment donné, prend de ses problèmes, de ses inquiétudes, de sa foi, de son espoir".⁴⁰ Although the thesis is limited to the study of one particular theme, the theme is one which gives a broad, encompassing view of the fundamental beliefs and preoccupations of the two writers. In adopting this "critique de signification", four important points have been borne in mind. First of all, no meaningful assessment of the plays of Marcel and Sartre is likely to be achieved by approaching their work from one particular ideological standpoint. A Christian critique is obviously more favourable to Marcel than to Sartre, while the converse is true of a Marxist critique. To study Marcel and Sartre together and to achieve a real understanding and fair evaluation of their dramatic work, it is essential that the critic be able to enter into and see from within each writer's vision of life as it is expressed through his plays. Secondly, to trace the progression and evolution of the theme of personal identity in the plays of Marcel and Sartre, it is necessary to follow a strictly chronological approach, drawing attention to the changes in their presentation and treatment of this theme while also underlining the basic continuity and consistency of

38. "Philosophy in the French Theatre Today" in The Listener, 19th February, 1953, pp.308-9.

39. Théâtre et Destin, Paris, Armand Colin, 1959, p.8.

40. Ibid.

their work. Thirdly, since this thesis is specifically concerned with Marcel and Sartre as dramatists, their plays must remain the constant point of reference in any discussion of the particular meaning to be attributed to certain situations or experiences. In fact, the basic premiss of the thesis is that the plays of Marcel and Sartre are authentic works of drama and therefore self-explanatory in terms of the theme chosen for this study. In this respect, we uphold the point of view of P.-A. Touchard who writes: "Une oeuvre d'art est une chose qui a un milieu, un commencement et une fin. Elle boucle la boucle, et s'il faut s'en référer pour la comprendre à d'autres ouvrages, c'est qu'elle est imparfaite."⁴¹ This does not, of course, mean that the plays of Marcel and Sartre will be studied in total isolation from their life and work in general - after all, any work of art, however complete, is always the creation of a particular artist in a particular age - but references to their philosophical or political texts will only be made where they help to throw light on a general aspect of the writer's beliefs relevant to the discussion of the theme of personal identity. The dramatic authenticity or self-sufficiency of a play is not contested if it is related on this general level to other texts written during the same period; but its dramatic authenticity is contested if these texts are used to elucidate and clarify its basic meaning. Finally, in studying the plays of Marcel and Sartre, it should not be overlooked that a play is written, first and foremost, to be performed and that no final assessment of any of their dramatic work can therefore be made without some consideration of its theatrical impact. In this respect, particular attention will be given in the study of the plays to the theatre reviews written at the time of their creation or revival.

41. Dionysos: Apologie pour le théâtre, Paris, Éditions du Seuil, 1949, (2nd edition), p.177.

Although the thesis attempts to give a "vue d'ensemble" of the theatre of Marcel and Sartre, not all the plays have been analysed in depth. In fact, in discussing the work of each of the dramatists, only seven full-length plays have been chosen for detailed textual analysis, and this obviously means a far greater degree of selectivity for Marcel than for Sartre, the former having written over twenty plays, more than twice the number written by the latter. The seven plays chosen for the discussion of Marcel's dramatic work are those which are thought to reflect most clearly its development and evolution, particularly as it affects the theme of personal identity. In the detailed discussion of Sartre's theatre there are three omissions: Bariona,⁴² Morts sans sépulture and La Putain respectueuse. The first of these plays is an experimental work which has never been performed professionally and whose main appeal and interest is limited to the special circumstances in which it was written and performed. Morts sans sépulture and La Putain respectueuse, on the other hand, have a far wider appeal and are clearly the work of a mature dramatist; in fact, La Putain respectueuse is a fine example of Sartre's satirical verve and arguably his best comedy. But, despite their importance, neither of these plays adds significantly to the discussion of the theme of personal identity in the early period of Sartre's dramatic work.

The thesis begins with a brief account of existentialism, since it is as representatives of this philosophical movement that Marcel and Sartre are chiefly known, discusses the place and importance of drama in the work of the two men, and compares and contrasts their basic attitude to the theatre as a medium of artistic impression. The main part of the thesis comprises six chapters and is devoted to a

42. In Les Écrits de Sartre, Paris, Gallimard, 1970, pp.565-633.

close examination of individual plays. For chronological reasons, the three chapters on Marcel precede the three chapters on Sartre, but the approach to the work of the two dramatists is very similar since, in both cases, it is divided into three periods. Each of the three chapters represents a different period in their work and a different stage in their treatment of the theme of personal identity, and these three periods reflect their increasing concern at the social and political development of the modern world. The final chapter brings together the main issues and points of interest raised in the body of the thesis, comparing the two dramatists' understanding and presentation of the individual's search for personal identity in a world ravaged by oppressive and divisive forces, before finally assessing the value and effect of their plays as theatre.

CHAPTER 1

Existentialism and the theatre of Marcel and Sartre

It is probably as French representatives of two opposing branches of existentialism that Gabriel Marcel and Jean-Paul Sartre are most immediately and most widely known in the academic world. This is in part due to Sartre who, in his lecture "L'Existentialisme est un humanisme" given at the Club Maintenant in 1945, aligned himself with Heidegger as a representative of atheistic existentialism and described Marcel and Jaspers as Christian existentialists.¹ It was, however, Marcel who first coined the word "existentialisme"², and he later lent considerable weight to the somewhat summary distinction made between himself and Sartre by consenting to the publication of a book on his work entitled Existentialisme chrétien³. In popular circles, existentialism had come to mean little more than an attitude of revolt and non-conformism devoid of any serious philosophical basis. Indeed, Marcel himself recalls one encounter with a lady who, on hearing the subject of existentialism raised, had said to him: "L'existentialisme, monsieur, c'est affreux! J'ai une amie dont le fils est devenu existentialiste, il vit dans une cuisine avec une négresse!"⁴ It would not, however, be unfair to suggest that, although existentialism does not give rise to such gross and comic distortions in academic circles, the word is rather glibly used as a convenient means of categorising writers and philosophers like Marcel and Sartre without any real understanding of the fundamental issues and problems which it raises.

1. See L'Existentialisme est un humanisme, Paris, Nagel, 1946, pp. 16-17.

2. See La Force de l'âge, Paris, Gallimard, 1960, p. 562.

3. Paris, Plon, 1947.

4. En chemin, vers quel éveil?, Paris, Gallimard, 1971, p. 229.

It is important to note that existentialism is not a product of the immediate post-war years in France, nor indeed is it exclusively represented by twentieth century thinkers. In his introduction to the subject of existentialism, the French philosopher Emmanuel Mounier points not only to important nineteenth century precursors of the movement like Kierkegaard and Nietzsche, but traces existentialism back to Pascal and St. Augustine, and shows that it also has close affinities with one of the earliest of all Western philosophers, namely Socrates⁵. Seen in this very general light, existentialism can be qualified as a return to the concrete experiences of each individual, a search for deep, personal truth as opposed to the abstract truths of the impersonal philosophical system. Existentialism is therefore intended to arouse the individual from all that may submerge his awareness of the fundamental uncertainty, ambiguity and precariousness of his existence - that is to say the comforting protection of habit and routine, of a quiet, unthinking, somnolent way of life. And since it encourages the individual to think for himself and to uphold his own personal beliefs, it can also be seen as a reaction against conformity and orthodoxy where such attitudes lead to mass uniformity and a loss of personal identity. As such, existentialism is clearly a movement which, as H. Blackham observes, "goes back to the beginning of philosophy and appeals to all men to awaken from their dogmatic slumbers and discover what it means to be a human being"⁶. This theme of the awakening is central to all existentialist philosophies and it emphasises the difference between

5. See Introduction aux existentialismes, Paris, Gallimard, 1962, p. 9 et seq.

6. Six Existentialist Thinkers, London, Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1961, p. 152.

life as it is lived and experienced by the individual and life as an object of universal thought. Personal existence is a unique, sometimes overwhelming, and certainly intensely dramatic experience. This is the real subject of existentialism and explains its opposition to systems of thought constructed around abstract, impersonal truths. A particularly significant comment on this basic opposition is made by Simone de Beauvoir. She recalls the comfort and consolation which she had enjoyed when reading Hegel in the Bibliothèque nationale in Paris in 1940. "Mais dès que je me retrouvais dans la rue, dans ma vie, hors du système, sous un vrai ciel," she adds, "le système ne me servait plus de rien: c'était, sous couleur d'infini, les consolations de la mort qu'il m'avait offertes; et je souhaitais encore vivre au milieu d'hommes vivants."⁷ Simone de Beauvoir's remarks lend weight to the suggestion that existentialism is a misleading and inappropriate description of a philosophy which describes from within rather than classifying from without, and which accords more importance to the particular than to the general: in other words, we are really confronted not with an "-ism" but with a philosophy of personal existence.

Although many people probably continue to think of Sartre as the author of existentialism in its modern form in France, his work in this field is clearly preceded by that of Marcel. The latter's Journal métaphysique⁸, published at a time when Sartre was preparing to sit his agrégation in philosophy, is generally recognised to be the first clear example of modern French existentialism. In fact, most of Marcel's major

7. Pour une morale de l'ambiguïté, Paris, Gallimard, 1947, pp. 221-2.

8. Paris, Gallimard, 1927.

philosophical work had been written before the publication of Sartre's L'Être et le Néant⁹ in 1943. The main influence on Sartre came from the German phenomenologists Husserl and Heidegger, but he had also been aware of, and influenced by some of Marcel's research, notably his analysis of the notion of situation and the distinction he had established in philosophy between a mystery and a problem¹⁰. A philosophical comparison between the two seems, however, to be completely ruled out by Marcel. "On me situe par rapport à Sartre," he declared in an interview in 1953. "Rien n'est plus faux. Sartre n'est même pas mon contraire: il est trop différent de moi pour qu'on puisse me l'opposer."¹¹ Some years later when asked once again to qualify his position in relation to Sartre, Marcel's reaction was blunt and severe. Although recognising the richness and originality of much of Sartre's work, Marcel saw in his political and philosophical views "les enseignements les plus pernicioeux, les conseils les plus toxiques qui aient jamais été prodigués à la jeunesse par un corrupteur patenté"¹². This exceedingly harsh judgement should not, however, obscure the fact that, despite many conflicting and divergent beliefs, there is in the philosophical method of Marcel and Sartre some important common ground.

9. Paris, Gallimard.

10. See M. Merleau-Ponty, "La Philosophie de l'existence" in Dialogue, no. 3, 1966, pp. 312-14.

11. Le Figaro littéraire, 3.1.1953.

12. Les Nouvelles littéraires, 29.10.1964.

First of all, in keeping with the basic methodology of existentialism, their work eschews abstract, theoretical problems: for them, metaphysics is not, as Sartre himself puts it, "une discussion stérile sur des notions abstraites qui échappent à l'expérience, c'est un effort vivant pour embrasser du dedans la condition humaine dans sa totalité"¹³. If Marcel is a convinced Christian and Sartre a convinced atheist, their respective convictions, - the fruit of their metaphysical search for truth, - are existential and not intellectual; or, in other words, Christianity and atheism are, for Marcel and Sartre, not stands that can logically be proved and demonstrated, but deeply personal choices. Both describe the philosophical method as euristic and see the philosopher not as an onlooker or spectator, but as a man actively involved in the world around him, sharing in the struggles and aspirations of his fellow beings and fully committed to the urgent moral and political issues of his time. Secondly, in common with more recent trends in existentialism, both accord great value to the use of phenomenology in describing and analysing basic human situations¹⁴, while the notion of human situation or being in situation is one which is central to their ontology. Finally, on a more general level, their philosophical research and investigations have both evolved within the context and framework of a solidly established view of the world. Marcel sees the Christian truths as the inspiration and light

13. Situations, 11, Paris, Gallimard, 1948, p. 251.

14. For an account of the phenomenological method of Marcel and Sartre, see I. Alexander, "The Phenomenological Philosophy in France" in Sartre, A Collection of Critical Essays, (ed. M. Warnock), New York, Anchor Books, 1971, pp. 63-101.

which have guided him in his philosophical enquiry, while Sartre considers his form of existentialism an ideology understandable only when situated in relation to Marxism (which he believes to be "l'humus de toute pensée particulière et l'horizon de toute culture"¹⁵). Between the first part of Marcel's Journal métaphysique, which was written in the months preceding the outbreak of the First World War and which gives no real evidence of fundamentally Christian preoccupations, and a work like Le Mystère de l'être¹⁶, written and published after Marcel's conversion to Catholicism, there is, of course, a vast gulf. Similarly Sartre's L'Être et le Néant, conceived for the most part before the outbreak of the Second World War and seemingly totally unrelated to the tenets of Marxism, is very different in content and tone from the Critique de la raison dialectique. It is interesting to note the evolution in the work of both philosophers and the part that their involvement in a major war has played in the gradual concretisation of their thought. But neither Marcel nor Sartre has sacrificed existentialism - which is first and foremost a study of the individual and the particular - to an authority which relies on uniformity of outlook and a passive acceptance of dogma. Indeed, Sartre, although a Marxist, is exceedingly critical of much Marxist criticism and propaganda where the individual becomes an insignificant number devoid of any freedom or autonomy in a world of impersonal, mechanistic forces, and has constantly drawn attention to the inadequacy of a Communist Party which is inflexible and dogmatic. Marcel, although far less critical of the Church, is, however, fully aware of the dangers of its possible institutionalisation and abuse of power, and unhesitatingly opposes any

15. Critique de la raison dialectique, Paris, Gallimard, 1960, p. 17.

16. Paris, Aubier, 1951.

aspect of the Church's teaching (notably the idea, expressed in the Old Testament, of an angry, revengeful God) which he considers to be a distortion of basic Christian truths.

There is one further aspect of the work of Marcel and Sartre which naturally invites comparison: namely its scope and diversity. Not only have both made a considerable contribution to contemporary philosophy, they have also written frankly and critically about the political and social problems facing Western Europe and occupy an important place in the arts. Marcel has written more than twenty plays and is also well known as a literary critic. From 1923 to 1938 he wrote regularly for L'Europe nouvelle, and in 1927 he took over from his friend Charles du Bos the direction of Feux croisés, a series introducing the works of foreign writers for the first time in translation to the French public. After the Second World War, Marcel became the leading drama critic of Les Nouvelles littéraires, his weekly reviews appearing almost without interruption from 1945 to 1968. Marcel also has a great love for music, especially for musical improvisation, and has composed music to accompany the verse of poets like Valéry and Supervielle. Sartre, too, apart from his position as philosopher, novelist and dramatist, is an eminent, perceptive, and far-ranging critic, and articles on writers or artists as varied as Faulkner, Giacometti, Calder, Mallarmé and Kierkegaard are to be found in the nine volumes of Situations. Few, if any, contemporary philosophers - and certainly no French philosopher since the eighteenth century - can lay claim to a life's work as rich and as varied as that of Marcel and Sartre.

Although, however, the philosopher is readily accepted as a critic both in the arts and in social and political matters, his work as a novelist or dramatist is generally viewed with far greater suspicion.

It is often assumed that, for such a person, literature is no more than a convenient tool with which to vulgarise philosophical ideas which, in their "pure" form, remain accessible only to a small intellectual élite. But before the philosopher is accused of trying to cram his novel or play full of ideas, it is as well to remember that all literature expresses ideas or a philosophy of some kind. "Une chose me fait toujours rire", comments Sartre: "on semble oublier que tout homme qui écrit un roman le fait pour donner sa conception de la vie. Est-ce que toute littérature, à toute époque, ne s'est pas référée aux idées philosophiques du temps?"¹⁷ The problem is not, in fact, whether the writer is a specialist philosopher, but whether he has successfully integrated his ideas or vision of life into an acceptable and harmonious literary or dramatic form. This is an aesthetic question with which all writers are confronted, and there is no basic reason why Marcel and Sartre should be at more of a disadvantage when tackling it than, say, Claudel or Montherlant. The distrust of the specialist philosopher in literature is, however, even more unjustified when the philosophy in question is existentialism since there is nothing remotely abstract or speculative about the problems it raises. In fact, for the existentialist, ideas matter only in as much as they relate to or elucidate concrete situations or experiences. These experiences, however, which must be lived and felt before they can be articulated on the plane of discursive thought often defy rationalisation or conceptualisation, and in such cases they are probably expressed far more adequately and effectively in a literary as opposed to a philosophical form. This is the point made by Simone de Beauvoir in her comments on the relationship between existentialism and the novel:

17. Les Nouvelles littéraires, 1.2.1951.

"Il ne s'agit pas ici pour l'écrivain d'exploiter sur un plan littéraire des vérités préalablement établies sur le plan philosophique, mais bien de manifester un aspect de l'expérience métaphysique qui ne peut se manifester autrement; son caractère subjectif, singulier, dramatique, et aussi son ambiguïté, puisque la réalité n'est pas définie comme saisissable par la seule intelligence, aucune description intellectuelle n'en saurait donner une expression adéquate. Il faut tenter de la présenter dans son intégrité, telle qu'elle se dévoile dans la relation vivante qui est action et sentiment avant de se faire pensée."¹⁸

Clearly the novel is only a particular means of expressing such a situation or experience and does not exclude other literary or even non-literary forms (music or painting, for example): but although the mode of expression may vary, the basic point of departure remains the same. Marcel, for example, speaks of the initial inspiration and conception of his play L'Iconoclaste¹⁹ in strikingly similar terms to those used by Simone de Beauvoir. "Ce serait une erreur complète de voir dans L'Iconoclaste l'illustration particulière d'un thème préalablement posé en termes abstraits," he declares; "en réalité, il y a à l'origine de ce drame une certaine situation moins imaginée que sentie, que vécue à la fois sous toutes ses faces."²⁰ Moreover, if existentialism is centred upon existence or experience and not a product of pure thought, there is no reason why, in the treatment of this subject, the philosophical treatise or essay should have priority over artistic modes of expression. The work

18. "Littérature et métaphysique" in Les Temps modernes, no. 7, avril, 1946, p. 1161.

19. In Percées vers un ailleurs, Paris, Fayard, 1973.

20. "Remarques sur L'Iconoclaste" in La Revue hebdomadaire, janvier, 1923, pp. 492-3.

of Marcel and Sartre is best seen as a reflection upon the fundamental problems of human existence or experience, a reflection which finds expression for both of them in the realm of philosophy and the theatre, as well as, in the case of Marcel, in musical improvisation, and, in the case of Sartre, in the novel. For Marcel and Sartre these modes of expression are inter-related and complementary; whereas, for example, the theatre has the advantage of presenting a situation as it is lived or felt far more effectively than the treatise or essay, the latter has the advantage of being able to compare and contrast different situations, draw conclusions and generally unify the reflections to which the experience of one's situation in the world gives rise. Marcel and Sartre are not alone among twentieth century philosophers and writers in this respect. Apart from Simone de Beauvoir who has expressed herself mainly through essays and the novel (but also once through the theatre with Les Bouches inutiles²¹), there is also Albert Camus whose experience of the absurd in the late 1930's found expression on three complementary levels: through Le Mythe de Sisyphe²², L'Étranger²³ and Caligula²⁴. Camus' notes also make it clear that, despite the three years that separate the publication of Le Mythe de Sisyphe and L'Étranger (1942) from that of Caligula (1945), the three works were under preparation at the same time.²⁵ It is, however, important to point out that the diverse and far-ranging work of Marcel and

21. Paris, Gallimard, 1945.

22. In Essais, Paris, Gallimard, bibliothèque de la Pléiade, 1965.

23. & 24. In Théâtre, récits, nouvelles, Paris, Gallimard, bibliothèque de la Pléiade, 1962.

25. See Carnets (1935-1942), Paris, Gallimard, 1962, p. 112.

Sartre should not be seen as a representative expression of modern existentialism since Heidegger, Jaspers and Merleau-Ponty, who have all had a significant part to play in this movement, have at no time attempted to express themselves through literature or any other art form.

Since it stems from concrete, personal experiences and situations, existentialism is particularly suited to dramatic expression. P. Brook, for example, maintains that the essence of good drama is visual rather than intellectual for what remains in the mind long after the performance has ended are not ideas but situations. "When years later I think of a striking theatrical experience, " he writes, "I find a kernel engraved on my memory: two tramps under a tree, an old woman dragging a cart, a sergeant dancing, three people on a sofa in hell - or occasionally a trace deeper than any imagery."²⁶ The visual image evoked by plays like En attendant Godot²⁷ or Huis clos is not, of course, devoid of ideas: the image or situation is a necessary shell within which ideas are effectively concentrated and without which they are dispersed and diluted. It would, on the other hand, be quite misleading to suggest that the situations which form the point of departure of existentialist philosophies invariably provide striking images ideally suited for the stage. The best plays of Marcel and Sartre are simply those in which, as in Huis clos, the existential and scenic aspects of the situation unite to create a powerful theatrical experience and a lasting visual impression.

26. The Empty Space, London, MacGibbon & Kee, 1968, p. 136.

27. Paris, Éditions de Minuit, 1952.

The theatre of Marcel and Sartre raises two important questions: what place does it occupy in their work as a whole and what in particular attracted them to this form of artistic expression? For Marcel, the theatre has often proved to be a tool of prospection and a more fruitful approach to reality than the philosophical essay. This is certainly the case in his early work up to 1929, the date of his conversion to Catholicism. During this time he had written more than ten plays whereas his only major philosophical contribution had been the Journal métaphysique. More significantly, some of the plays, in particular Le Palais de sable²⁸ and L'Iconoclaste, were clearly in advance of the theoretical ideas and propositions found at that time in the Journal métaphysique. Marcel the dramatist found himself thinking against and correcting the ideas of Marcel the philosopher. "Ici ... il semble qu'il ait été donné à la pensée dramatique de critiquer au nom d'une appréhension plus profonde de la réalité," he wrote later, "les vues partielles auxquelles on accède lorsque l'on considère la vie d'un point de vue limité."²⁹ After 1929, however, there is a far greater balance in Marcel's philosophical and dramatic writing, the two tending to complement each other, rather than one taking precedence over the other. A good example of this is provided by the joint publication of Marcel's play Le Monde cassé and his meditation on the ontological mystery³⁰. In the preface to this work, Marcel speaks

28. In Le Seuil invisible, Paris, Grasset, 1914.

29. "Théâtre et philosophie. Leur rapports dans mon oeuvre," in Recherches et Débats du centre catholique des intellectuels français, no. 2, octobre, 1952, p. 32.

30. Le Monde cassé, Paris, Desclée de Brouwer, 1933.

of his philosophy and drama as "deux versants d'une même hauteur"³¹, thus ascribing equal importance to both. Ultimately, however, he finds that the concrete approaches to mystery provided through the theatre are more satisfying than the "énonciations abstraites dont l'intelligence pure est obligée de se contenter"³², but this mystery which Marcel believes to be the essence of reality is sensed and expressed best of all through music. "Je crois pouvoir dire sans hésitation," he declares, "que c'est la musique, et la musique presque seule qui a été pour moi le témoignage irrécusable d'une réalité seconde où il me semblait bien que tout ce qui demeure épars et inachevé au niveau du visible trouvait son achèvement."³³

The early philosophical and dramatic work of Sartre is far more demonstrative and assertive than that of Marcel, and Sartre seems from the outset to have found in L'Être et le Néant, a surer point of reference for the expression of his ideas than had Marcel in the Journal métaphysique. Thus Sartre considers that his play Huis clos proceeds from L'Être et le Néant, not as a crude transposition of the ideas expounded therein, but as a work clearly reflecting "une imagination, une sensibilité et une pensée que la conception puis l'écriture de L'Être et le Néant avaient unies, intégrées, structurées d'une certaine façon"³⁴. But L'Être et

31. Le Monde cassé, p. 8.

32. Présence et Immortalité, Paris, Flammarion, 1959, p. 18.

33. La Dignité humaine, Paris, Aubier, 1964, p. 39.

34. M. Chapsal, Les Écrivains en personne, Paris, Julliard, 1960.

le Néant, however clear and systematic, and however important the part which its writing had played in the formation of Sartre's outlook and in the formulation of his ideas, does not hold the key to all his early dramatic work. As with Marcel, Sartre's theatre has at times shown itself to be in advance of his philosophy, notably with Bariona and Les Mouches³⁵ where the concern with political freedom is one important issue which plays a significant part in the later development of his work although it is not raised in L'Être et le Néant. Indeed, in these two plays Sartre the dramatist is clearly modifying, if not refuting the philosopher's assertion that, since "toutes les activités sont équivalentes"³⁶, there is no basic difference between solitary drunkenness and political action. After the Liberation, Sartre's work became progressively more political, and plays like Les Mains salées, Le Diable et le Bon Dieu and Nekrassov reflect and complement the questions and preoccupations of Saint Genet, comédien et martyr³⁷ and of political essays like "Matérialisme et Révolution"³⁸ and "Les communistes et la paix"³⁹. On the whole, however, Sartre attaches far less importance to his novels and plays than does Marcel to his theatre, but he does recognise the limitations of a purely

35. In Théâtre.

36. L'Être et le Néant, p. 721.

37. Paris, Gallimard, 1952.

38. In Situations, III, Paris, Gallimard, 1949.

39. In Situations, VI, Paris, Gallimard, 1964.

philosophical expression of reality since this tends to depend on a well defined method and thus generalise at the expense of the individual and particular. It is here, of course, that literature has its part to play, but Sartre differs from Marcel in believing that it is the novel and not the theatre which is best equipped to deal with individual cases. The theatre, for Sartre, comes somewhere between philosophy and the novel, retaining the concreteness of the latter and the broad, encompassing vision of the former. In other words, the characters created by the dramatist, far less individualised than those in a novel, reflect the general issues and problems that concern society as a whole at a given time.

The reasons why Marcel and Sartre have been drawn to the theatre (despite the importance he attaches to the novel, Sartre abandoned his work in this field as early as 1949, since which time he has written five plays, the last in 1965) are not immediately apparent. Assessing Sartre's dual role as philosopher and dramatist, H. Gouhier observes: "La philosophie de Sartre est dramatique, elle est la vision d'un homme dramatiquement engagé dans le monde, elle est une protestation contre les métaphysiques qui escamotent le drame de l'existence. C'est donc dans la mesure où il est philosophe que Sartre est dramaturge."⁴⁰ At a conference on the work and thought of Marcel held recently at Cerisy-la-Salle⁴¹, H. Gouhier established a similar link between the dramatic nature of Marcel's thought and its natural counterpart in the theatre. In both instances, the critic appears to be confusing two similar but

40. "Intrigue et action: de B. Shaw à J.-P. Sartre" in La Table ronde, no. 143, novembre, 1959, p. 178.

41. August, 24-31, 1973.

distinct qualities - the dramatic and the theatrical. A man whose vision of life is dramatic, that is to say whose philosophy is centred around the uncertainties, dilemmas and contradictions of human experience, is not necessarily a dramatist in the making, for a successful dramatist is one whose vision of life is not only dramatic but, more important, one which is accompanied with all the visual and scenic effects that are an essential part of the theatrical experience. In fact, what H. Gouhier has failed to explain is why Marcel and Sartre have devoted more time to the theatre than to music or the novel, both of which provide suitable and effective artistic expression for a dramatic philosophy of life.

Marcel's interest in the theatre began as a child. "Enfant, mes parents m'emmenaient une fois par an à l'Odéon ou à la Comédie Française: fêtes inoubliables," he recalls. "Mais j'étais surtout fils unique et, triste de vivre sans frère ou soeur, je pris l'habitude de peupler ma solitude d'êtres imaginaires avec qui j'entretenais des dialogues sans fin."⁴² Marcel's sensitivity as a child is also revealed in the deep, lasting impression made on him by any conflict or dispute within the family, and this in turn predisposed him towards a form of expression in which dialogue would play a central note. Later Marcel came to realise that human existence could only be grasped and conveyed where the individuals involved in a particular situation speak to one another; this was not, he felt, something that could be achieved through description, however precise and detailed the analysis of character and behaviour. On the other hand, if, as Marcel says, he experienced "un goût immodéré, non pas tellement pour le spectacle théâtral en tant que tel, mais pour le dialogue,

42. Les Nouvelles littéraires, 14.2.1946.

pour la forme dialoguée ..."⁴³, one may question the specifically theatrical qualities of the dialogue so conceived. A novelist, for example, can use dialogue with striking effect to evoke a dramatic confrontation of characters; but Marcel's dialogue is specifically theatrical in conception (but not necessarily in effect) because of the absolute priority which he accords to the physical presence of the speaker. A good example of this is provided by Marcel's description of the staging of his play Le Dard⁴⁴ in 1935: he recalls that the performance had had such a considerable impact on him that he had immediately refuted a friend's suggestion that the performance of the play was as good as (and therefore, by implication, added nothing to) the reading of it⁴⁵. Marcel feels that his dialogue is inadequate and incomplete in a purely textual form, and is only fully realised in performance. Another significant example of Marcel's feeling for theatrical presence and presentation is shown by his reaction to Camus' stage adaptation of Les Possédés⁴⁶, a work which he personally finds to have been more moving and effective as a play than in its original form⁴⁷. If there is a link between Marcel's philosophical writing and the physical presence to which he feels drawn in the theatre, it is not in the overall dramatic conception of the former, but in certain specific aspects of it, notably his reflections on man as an incarnate being.

43. "Théâtre et philosophie. Leurs rapports dans mon oeuvre." in Recherches et Débats, no. 2, octobre, 1952, p. 21.

44. In Le secret est dans les îles, Paris, Plon, 1967.

45. See En chemin, vers quel éveil?, p. 128 .

46. In Théâtre, récits, nouvelles.

47. Conference at Cerisy-la-Salle.

It is not, however, simply the presence of the actors which explains the superiority of the theatre over the novel in Marcel's eyes; there is also his horror of the author's intervention, a danger to which he feels the novelist is constantly exposed, whereas the dramatist who "feels" for each of his characters (who are not, that is to say, mere puppets in his hands) does not intrude into the drama that he writes. This last point emphasises Marcel's own total commitment to authentic artistic creativity. This creativity, where the dramatist respects the autonomy of the characters whom he initially conceived, is a subject to which Marcel constantly returns in his reflections on the theatre. He makes an important distinction between creative and intrusive presence, likening the authentic dramatist and his work to God and the universe, since in both cases the author or creator remains constantly present without in any way manipulating the actions of his subjects. The range and scope of these actions in Marcel's theatre are, however, limited by the author's experience of, and attitude to life in general. It would, for example, be ludicrous to imagine that any kind of aggressive atheism or fervent revolutionary politics could form the central subject of Marcel's plays, just as the concern with the mystery of life is something totally alien to Sartre. The problems and difficulties of dramatic creation are ones about which Marcel is well qualified to write since, between 1912 and 1960, he has written over twenty plays. He speaks of the need to hear within himself the voice of his characters before he can begin writing the play, and considers that the real test of the dramatist's creativity is reflected in the character's density and resistance to manipulation. "En réalité, je sais que je suis en face d'un personnage authentique," writes Marcel, "à partir du moment où celui-ci cesse de se laisser faire et d'être pour moi comme une matière plastique."⁴⁸ Marcel gives as an

48. "Finalité essentielle de l'oeuvre dramatique" in La Revue théâtrale, no. 3, octobre-novembre, 1946, p. 292.

example the difficulty he experienced in completing his play Le Chemin de crête⁴⁹: he found that Ariane Leprieur, the central character, "resisted" his initial plan for the dénouement and that, for a certain period of time, he was obliged to put his play on one side. Only later did another dénouement suggest itself to him, one which was demanded from within by the central character and not, as before, arbitrarily imposed from the outside by the dramatist. Marcel recalls the annoyance and impatience of one producer who, perplexed by the ambiguity surrounding Ariane's whole life and character, asked: "cette femme est-elle un ange ou un démon? vous devez bien le savoir"⁵⁰, the question presupposing that none of Marcel's characters should hold any secret from their author. Such a situation, however, can only exist where the dramatist has sacrificed creation to productivity, the characters retaining no mystery or independence of their own and becoming little more than labelled products. Where there is authentic creativity, on the other hand, Marcel believes that the spectators should find themselves confronted by characters for whom there are no convenient labels or formulae. Marcel's numerous reflections on the theatre and, in particular, on his own personal experiences as a dramatist, the constant allusion in his essays and lectures to situations drawn from his plays, and the strikingly familiar way in which he talks about many of his characters as though they were real people whom he has known for many years, all indicate not only that Marcel's dramaturgy occupies an important place in his work, but also that it is absurd to question the strength and authenticity of his dramatic vocation.

49. In Cinq pièces majeures, Paris, Plon, 1973.

50. Le secret est dans les îles, p. 11.

For Sartre, on the other hand, the theatre, although offering him an exciting and challenging mode of expression, cannot be considered his vocation. In fact, his interest in the theatre came relatively late in life. The magic and mystery of the written word - as opposed to the spoken word - dominated his early life. Indeed, as a child, Sartre was more at home in his grandfather's library than in the world outside. "J'avais trouvé ma religion," he writes of his childhood: "rien ne me parut plus important qu'un livre."⁵¹ It was through his reading of adventure stories, in particular, and through his own childhood fantasies that he was able to escape into the world of the imagination and discover the feeling of inevitability and necessity which his normal day-to-day life lacked. He also speaks of his fascination for the cinema and his taste for music, but makes no mention of the theatre. When Sartre speaks of his self-appointed mission in life as a writer, it is clearly as a prose writer that he envisaged his success, although he did begin writing plays at a relatively early age. According to M. Contat and M. Rybalka, the first of these were written between 1917 and 1920 in La Rochelle, another play, inspired by Jarry, was written around 1922 while Sartre was at the lycée Henri IV in Paris, and two further plays were composed between 1929 and 1930 during his military service.⁵² It is also interesting to note that, at the École normale supérieure, "il se signale dans des revues de fin d'année autant par ses dispositions de satiriste que par ses dons de chanteur et de comédien"⁵³, while it could also be maintained that the stage was the

51. Les Mots, Paris, Gallimard, 1964, p. 46.

52. See Un théâtre de situations, Paris, Gallimard, 1973, pp. 12-13.

53. Un théâtre de situations, p. 12.

most logical and effective means of expression for one important aspect of Sartre's childhood - namely his confrontation with the world of pretence and play-acting.

The undoubted turning point in Sartre's career as a dramatist came with his imprisonment by the Germans in 1940. He found himself spending the Christmas of that year, in company with many other Frenchmen, in a P.O.W. camp at Trier. The idea came to him to write a Christmas play which, although purporting to be a harmless celebration of the birth of Christ, would in fact be a call to firm and united resistance among the French against the Germans. The play was a great success in the camp: Bariona had been written by a prisoner for his fellow prisoners, and the message of the play was one which was directly relevant to the feelings and preoccupations of them all. The effect of the performance was that of a common unifying experience; for a few hours the prisoners were totally absorbed in, and united by the subject and action of the play, and it was at this point that, for the first time, Sartre realised that the real potential of the theatre lay in this "great collective, religious phenomenon"⁵⁴. His interest and involvement in the theatre grew steadily from this moment. Not only does he enjoy its atmosphere, but he is also attracted by the challenge and risk involved in writing for the stage. "Un livre peut parler à voix basse: le drame et la comédie doivent élever la voix," he remarks. "C'est peut-être ce qui m'attire dans le théâtre: ce coup de force et cette voix forte et le risque de tout perdre en une nuit."⁵⁵ Another attraction in the theatre for Sartre is that a successful

54. "Forgers of Myths , The Young Playwrights of France" in Theatre Arts, vol. 30, June, 1946, p. 330.

55. "Deux heures avec Sartre", in L'Express, no. 431, 17.9.1959.

live performance probably has far greater impact on the public than any literary, political or philosophical text. Thus, M. Contat suggests that Sartre turns to the theatre "lorsque l'événement provoque en lui le besoin de toucher plus directement, plus concrètement le public qu'il ne le peut par des livres ou des articles"⁵⁶. But although in Les Séquestrés d'Altona, for example, Sartre hopes to brutally awaken his audience to the awful reality of torture and although he sees the theatre as a means of writing "pour tous, pour le plus grand nombre, pour des bourgeois aussi"⁵⁷, he does not think that a play, any more than a novel, can change people's attitudes and behaviour. More significantly, however, Sartre continues to think of himself first and foremost as a prose writer. "En ce qui concerne le théâtre, c'est une habitude que j'ai de faire une pièce tous les trois ou quatre ans," he declared shortly before the first production of Les Séquestrés d'Altona in Paris. "Je ne suis d'ailleurs pas un auteur dramatique, mais un écrivain qui croit devoir écrire pour le théâtre, et qui aime cela."⁵⁸ This in no way diminishes Sartre's stature as a dramatist, nor does it cast doubt on his knowledge and understanding of the theatre: indeed, most people consider him a far more successful playwright than novelist, while Serge Reggiani, an experienced and talented actor, says of him: "On est toujours étonné, par la science du théâtre qu'a Sartre, par sa clarté de jugement pour tout ce qui concerne la mise en scène, par sa précision et sa volonté."⁵⁹

56. Explication des "Séquestrés d'Altona" de Jean-Paul Sartre, Archives des lettres modernes, no. 89, Paris, Minard, 1968, p. 5.

57. "Les Séquestrés d'Altona nous concernent tous" in Théâtre populaire, no. 36, 4^e trimestre, 1959, p. 1.

58. Paris - Journal, 12.9.1959.

59. Arts, 30.9.1959.

Despite very obvious differences in the role the theatre has played in the life and work of Marcel and Sartre, there is in their overall conception of the theatre much common ground. This becomes apparent when the basic structure and movement of their plays are compared. Both playwrights concentrate on a gradual unfolding or discovery of truths leading up to a *dénouement* of great psychological intensity which introduces a new perspective or level of interpretation into the play. The *dénouement* in the theatre of Marcel and Sartre unites actor and spectator in a communal "prise de conscience". What the dramatist proposes is not an escape from the problems and difficulties of day-to-day living by a release of the emotions, but a deeper understanding of, and insight into these problems and difficulties by a heightening of the powers of reflection. The plays of Marcel and Sartre fall into two main categories: the "pièces éclairantes" are those like Le Monde cassé and Le Dard, or Les Mouches and Le Diable et le Bon Dieu, in which the *dénouement* leads the protagonist to a full understanding of himself, his situation and the course of action that he must take, while the "pieces ambiguës" such as La Chapelle ardente⁶⁰ and Un Homme de Dieu⁶¹, or Les Séquestrés d'Altona, end with the realisation of the individual's inadequacy to cope with the seemingly inextricable or overwhelming situation in which he finds himself.

Marcel and Sartre also believe firmly that drama should be committed or "engagé". In his essay on the new generation of post-war dramatists

60. Paris, La Table ronde, 1949.

61. In Cinq pièces majeures.

in France⁶², Sartre claims that the function of the theatre is to present to modern man a portrait of himself, his hopes and his fears, his problems and his struggles - a point of view which Marcel himself shares. This does not, of course, mean that Marcel and Sartre raise the same questions and problems in their plays. Marcel's vision of life is deeply religious and he therefore sees the search for faith, for example, as a particularly significant and representative aspect of human experience. The world in which his characters move is one that is highly personalised, and this reflects Marcel's attitude to commitment which he describes as being "au service de ce qui est le plus humain dans l'homme, c'est-à-dire de l'universel véritable qui n'est pas abstrait, mais intime, mais personnel"⁶³. Sartre, on the other hand, shows no real interest in his theatre for intimate and personal details except in so far as they reflect an important aspect of the individual's social and political situation, as with Frantz in Les Séquestrés d'Altona, for example. Sartre's commitment is overtly political and this is revealed through the plays in his preoccupation with the evils, abuses and contradictions that exist in society. It should not, however, be assumed that Marcel's basically Christian view of life excludes all concern for the pressing political issues of his time. Indeed, in his conference on Rome n'est plus dans Rome, Marcel quite openly denounced "l'esprit d'évasion qui est apparent dans presque tout notre théâtre contemporain, à l'exception de Sartre et peut-être de Camus"⁶⁴, and claimed that to pass over with indifference

62. "Forgers of Myths, The Young Playwrights of France" in Theatre Arts, vol. 30, June, 1946, pp. 324-35.

63. Les Nouvelles littéraires, 15.1.1953.

64. Rome n'est plus dans Rome, Paris, La Table ronde, 1951, p. 151.

or approval "l'espèce d'aveuglement volontaire ou semi-volontaire dans lequel vivent tant de gens en Occident"⁶⁵ was totally unacceptable. But Marcel's theatre is never politically committed in the way that Sartre's work is since, for Marcel, the problems of injustice, oppression and suffering cannot be understood and resolved politically, whereas, for Sartre, these problems can ultimately be resolved by political action.

The epithets "existentialist" and "existential" have been rather indiscriminately used to describe either the plays of Marcel or those of Sartre. Marcel seems to accept the use of the latter, suggesting that "un théâtre est existentiel dans la mesure où les personnages principaux sont effectivement sommés d'avoir à décider de ce qu'ils sont"⁶⁶. Marcel gives as an example the situation of Claude Lemoyne in Un Homme de Dieu and that of Ariane Leprieur in Le Chemin de crête, while it is clear that Sartre's characters are also faced with the problem of understanding and realising their true identity. The term "existential" thus seems to provide an accurate description of the plays of Marcel and Sartre, but, as E. Souriau has pointed out, there is one respect in which all theatre is by definition existential since the aim of the dramatist "c'est de donner l'existence - une existence intégrale, profonde, éclatante, plénière - à des êtres fictifs"⁶⁷, the theatre ceasing to be existential when characters are sacrificed to ideas. Sartre's early definition of his drama as a "theatre of situations" is probably a more accurate and meaningful description of his own plays and can be applied to those of

65. Rome n'est plus dans Rome, p. 152.

66. Les Nouvelles littéraires, 27.1.1949.

67. Les Deux cent mille situations dramatiques, Paris, Flammarion, 1950, p. 68.

of Marcel as well. "La situation est un appel," writes Sartre; "elle nous cerne; elle nous propose des solutions, à nous de décider."⁶⁸ Here Sartre stresses the individual's freedom of choice and powers of self-determination, a very positive and optimistic view of man which he considerably modified in his later work. The emphasis on situation, however, and on the necessity of action remained. Marcel's characters are also involved in a situation which is a call or appeal eliciting a free response, but for Marcel freedom is indissociable from transcendence and grace whereas for Sartre it implies autonomy and self-sufficiency. There is also an important difference in the type of situation conceived by Marcel and Sartre. Sartre speaks of the situations in his plays as "situations-limites"⁶⁹ - representative situations taken to their most extreme and critical limit where the individual is faced with a decision or course of action which may involve murder or suicide. War, imprisonment, torture, the class struggle - these are the subjects which recur in Sartre's theatre and which reveal most about modern man and the age in which he lives. "Here the return to man excludes a tableau of everyday life and mediocrity," writes J. Guicharnaud. "Men are not truly men in their petty and niggardly daily acts but rather at the moment the idea of man is heroically brought into question through themselves."⁷⁰ For Marcel, however, man's "petty and niggardly daily acts" may well prove more representative and revealing than heroic acts involving violence and death. In fact, he believes that the apparently

68. "Pour un théâtre de situations" in La Rue, no. 12, novembre, 1947, p.8.

69. Ibid.

70. Modern French Theatre from Giraudoux to Beckett, New Haven, Yale U.P., 1961, p. 139.

mediocre and mundane often conceal "les grands à-pics de l'âme à côté desquels un observateur ordinaire pourrait passer sans en rien soupçonner"⁷¹. It is this inner spiritual drama which forms the basis of the situations in Marcel's plays, but these situations, although outwardly less extreme and violent than those dramatised by Sartre, often bring the individual face to face with suicide, suffering and death. "Ce sont toujours les situations humaines fondamentales qui ont retenu mon attention," he writes, "et elles sont justement commandées par le fait de la mort, le fait de la maladie, sans lesquels la condition de l'homme ne peut pas être appréhendée dans sa vérité."⁷² Marcel has also spoken of "situations-limites" when referring to his "piece éclairantes"⁷³, and by this he means an experience of insight or illumination which cannot be surpassed.

The belief in commitment leads Marcel and Sartre to dramatise very different subjects and situations, but they both agree that the theatre should challenge any smug, comforting view of life and awaken the audience to a deeper understanding of reality. In this, there is certainly nothing foreign to the essence of good theatre if we accept with V. Arout that we basically ask the dramatist not only to move us, but also "de nous donner à penser, d'alimenter ce qui, en nous, cherche et s'inquiète"⁷⁴.

71. Préface, Le Seuil invisible, p. 4.

72. "Théâtre et philosophie. Leurs rapports dans mon oeuvre." in Recherches et Débats, no. 2, octobre, 1952, p. 33.

73. Conference at Cerisy-la-Salle.

74. Carrefour, 23.9.1944.

The word "éclairant" or "libérateur" best describes the kind of awakening which Marcel hopes to elicit from his audience. He describes the normal field of vision as self-centred and insular, where "chacun de nous se saisit spontanément comme foyer unique d'un monde où les autres n'apparaissent que comme des silhouettes, des ombres chinoises, des êtres à deux dimensions"⁷⁵. In such a state, we are not only unable to understand and communicate fully with others, we are also prevented from being or realising our true selves. Marcel hopes that through our identification with the characters in the play, through seeing more clearly the particular problems, difficulties and doubts with which they are faced, we shall be lifted out of ourselves on to another level of consciousness "d'où il nous devient possible de jeter sur ce monde - ci un regard renouvelé"⁷⁶ - a look that is charged with greater love and compassion, and with a deeper sense of justice. The response which Sartre hopes to obtain from his audience is very different. Commitment for Sartre means demystification and, as he explained to M. Chapsal, his aim in whatever he writes is therefore "montrer, démontrer, démystifier, dissoudre les mythes et les fétiches dans un petit bain d'acide critique"⁷⁷. He seeks to induce in his audience a greater social and political awareness, to alert it to the realities of oppression and exploitation, and to encourage greater aggression and contestation. In the theatre this effect can be achieved when the spectators are presented with an arresting and disturbing representation of their own lives. "L'auteur dramatique présente aux

75. "Finalité essentielle de l'oeuvre dramatique" in La Revue théâtrale, no. 3, octobre-novembre, 1946, p. 285.

76. Ibid., pp. 285-6.

77. Les Écrivains en personne, p. 230.

hommes l'eidos de leur existence quotidienne," writes Sartre; "il leur montre leur propre vie comme s'ils la voyaient de l'extérieur."⁷⁹ But whether the truths to which they are committed are religious or political, Marcel and Sartre have in common the desire to address as wide a public as possible. Both express concern at the gradual appropriation of the theatre by the middle classes and its transformation into an élitist art form. "Je me demandais, ces jours-ci," declared Marcel in 1936, "si le théâtre en se fixant, en rompant avec ses traditions itinérantes, n'avait pas après tout tendu à se matérialiser, à s'embourgeoiser, à se ploutocratiser de la façon la plus dangereuse."⁸⁰ In a lecture given at the Sorbonne in 1960⁸¹, Sartre made a similar criticism of the theatre, and, like Marcel, he emphasizes the need to revive its past traditions and to recreate genuinely popular audiences.

According to J.-M. Domenach, the contrast between man's real and ideal state underlines nearly every theatrical performance. The theatre, he says, "nous donne le spectacle de ce que nous devrions être si nous vivions vraiment, et parfois de ce que nous sommes en réalité sans oser y penser"⁸². Although intended to apply to all types of drama, this is a particularly apt comment on the theatre of Marcel and Sartre in view of their emphasis on commitment and their conception of the dramatist as an "awakener". This does not, however, mean that they are only interested in

79. Situations, IX, Paris, Gallimard, 1972, p. 124.

80. "Réflexions sur les exigences d'un théâtre chrétien" in La Vie intellectuelle, 25 mars, 1937, p. 462.

81. See Un théâtre de situations, pp. 105-6.

82. Le Retour du tragique, Paris, Éditions du Seuil, 1967, p. 12.

cheap Christian or socialist propaganda. In his essay "Qu'est-ce que la littérature?" Sartre claims that literature should be moral - that is describe and draw attention to fundamental moral problems or choices - but certainly not moralising⁸³. His attitude to the theatre is basically the same. "Ce qu'un romancier, ce qu'un dramaturge peut essayer de faire," he observed, "c'est rappeler au public ses propres préoccupations sous une forme mythique. Notre rôle est de poser des problèmes devant nos contemporains, rien de plus."⁸⁴ Sartre's theatre does not leave totally unanswered the questions it raises. Les Mouches and Huis clos, for example, distinguish quite clearly between a life of freedom and a life of servitude, while Le Diable et le Bon Dieu can leave us in no doubt that political action is necessary in contemporary society and that it necessitates violence: but none of these plays states or advocates a precise and well-defined course of action. It should also be pointed out that Le Diable et le Bon Dieu, probably the most assertive and demonstrative of Sartre's plays, is followed by Kean, Nekrassov and Les Séquestrés d'Altona, all of which introduce into his theatre a note of increasing anxiety and uncertainty. For Marcel, too, there are no easy, straightforward answers to the questions he asks about man and his place in the world. Even after his conversion to Catholicism, Marcel's plays remain strikingly open and interrogative: there is an undercurrent of hope and belief, but no definitive or dogmatic assertions. Marcel is aware that religious truths are

83. See Situations, 11, p. 313.

84. Les Nouvelles littéraires, 1.2.1951.

often misconceived and misrepresented, and he has guarded against writing anything resembling "un théâtre apologétique où la foi apparaîtrait comme une pseudo-solution, je dirais même comme un bouche-trou"⁸⁵. Faith is sometimes presented in Marcel's plays as a very real and joyous experience, but it is never something that can be proved or demonstrated, nor does it immunise the believer against future uncertainty and doubt; faith is ultimately a wager and an act of personal commitment for which there can be no objective verification. The same is true of the political choice and commitment presented in Sartre's theatre. The fundamental ambiguity and drama of human existence is thus respected and preserved by both dramatists, and it is here that the distinction between "pièces engagées" and "pièces à thèse" becomes apparent.

Despite the fact that the theatre of Marcel and Sartre calls for a high degree of thought and reflection, it must not be assumed that it is purely intellectual entertainment. Since their plays are constructed around imaginary characters who are confronted by certain experiences or situations to which there are no logical, ready-made answers or solutions, they are able to generate and maintain a high degree of emotional involvement on the part of the spectator which only subsequently gives way to reflection. In contrast, an intellectual problem that is dramatised for the stage can appeal and induce participation only on an intellectual level. Thus if Pascal Laumière in Rome n'est plus dans Rome could reason his way to God and to the spiritual assurance that he previously lacked, or if Goetz in Le Diable et le Bon Dieu could reason his way to political action and thus free himself of his former preoccupation with the absolute, the drama would, in both cases, be intellectual

85. En chemin, vers quel éveil?, p. 168.

and not existential, and the theatrical experience would be almost exclusively cerebral. What in fact happens in both plays is that we gradually identify with the main character and share emotionally in his struggle towards personal freedom and truth before we reflect on the nature of this struggle and on the spiritual or political issues that it raises. In other words, the plays' existential framework ensures the emotional involvement of the spectators, a point that is overlooked by several of Sartre's critics. "When an audience views a Sartre play, they must think - not cry or laugh," writes M. Wreszin. "If this is construed to be an indictment of his drama, it must also be construed as a far greater indictment of his audience."⁸⁶ The inaccuracy of this statement is underlined by Sartre's comment on the reaction of certain sections of the public to the apparently blasphemous scenes in Le Diable et le Bon Dieu. "Il n'est pas mauvais d'être scandalisé," he declared, "mais après, pas pendant le spectacle, parce que le scandale gêne l'illusion dramatique."⁸⁷ Ultimately, of course, Sartre would prefer the dramatic illusion engendered by Le Diable et le Bon Dieu to give way to sober reflection rather than to a feeling of scandal and outrage. Sartre's comments on Les Séquestrés d'Altona emphasise even more clearly the combination of emotion and thought, involvement and detachment at which he is aiming in his theatre. Here he portrays the experiences of a young German officer during and after the Second World War while indirectly alluding to the situation of French soldiers involved in the Algerian War. At first, the

86. "Jean-Paul Sartre: Philosopher and Dramatist" in Tulane Drama Review, no. 3, March, 1961, p. 56.

87. Le Figaro littéraire, 30.6.1951.

spectator is unaware of this and finds himself involved in the tense and intriguing situation of the von Gerlach family: it is only later that he is able to make the necessary association of ideas and the comparison between Germany in 1940 and France in 1959, at which point he momentarily detaches himself from the play. "Disons que le mirage théâtral devrait s'effacer," observes Sartre, "pour laisser la place à la vérité qui est derrière ce mirage."⁸⁸ To achieve audience participation, Sartre relies not only on the fascination engendered by strong characterisation and extreme situations, but also on a whole range of theatrical effects which may contribute to the general atmosphere of the play. For Marcel, on the other hand, audience participation is restricted to our involvement in the situation of the characters, an involvement which will grow gradually deeper as we sense that something fundamental is at stake, something which directly concerns us. "Je suis ému au théâtre," he writes, "à partir du moment où j'éprouve directement que ce qui m'est proposé me concerne, que je suis moi - même en question."⁸⁹

It is in the setting and tone of their plays, and in their use of scenic effects that the greatest divergence between Marcel and Sartre as dramatists is to be found. At first sight, Marcel's plays closely resemble the highly popular form of boulevard theatre of which Henri Bernstein was a leading exponent in the inter-war years: the action invariably takes place in the drawing-room of a middle-class home, for which there is a

88. "Les Séquestrés d'Altona nous concernent tous" in Théâtre populaire, no. 36, 4^e trimestre, 1959, p. 3.

89. "Finalité essentielle de l'oeuvre dramatique" in La Revue théâtrale, no. 3, octobre-novembre, 1946, p. 289.

straightforward, realistic set, and centres around the difficulties and problems of a small family group. Where Marcel's plays differ from boulevard theatre is in the nature of the characters' preoccupations and in their depth of reflection or self-scrutiny. As such, although the main characters in Marcel's theatre may not be "des héros" and "des êtres d'exception"⁹⁰, they clearly stand out from the average person "par une clairvoyance intérieure plus aiguë qui leur permet à certains moments ... d'apercevoir et de condenser en une intuition ce qui, pour un regard moins pénétrant, demeurerait à l'état de poussière de conscience éparse et insaisissable"⁹¹. They remain, however, close to us because we can readily identify with the kind of situation in which they find themselves. By introducing more exotic settings or extreme situations, or by experimenting with symbolism or allegory, Marcel believes not only that we identify less easily with the characters on stage, but also that the metaphysical implications of their experience are considerably obscured. "Mais la vérité est que, si je me suis toujours appliqué à mettre sur la scène des personnages aussi proches que possible de nous," he observes, "participant à la même expérience, au même univers, d'autre part ce qu'on pourrait appeler la visée métaphysique était pour moi d'autant plus distincte."⁹² Marcel recognises that he has had no real contact with the working classes, a fact he deeply regrets, and that he has therefore restricted himself to depicting

90. Préface, Le Seuil invisible, p. 3.

91. Préface, Le Seuil invisible, pp. 3-4.

92. "Théâtre de l'âme en exil" in Recherches et Débats, no. 10, juin-juillet, 1950, p. 8.

in his plays the one milieu he knows well. He does not feel, however, that this seriously undermines the universality at which he is aiming, for an attentive and perceptive dramatist can rapidly pierce the trappings of social milieu and uncover "l'homme moyen sans particularités de vêtement ou de classe"⁹³. Universality is not achieved, he thinks, by generalisations or abstractions, but by deepening our understanding of the experiences of a particular individual. If the dramatist can convey to us the mysterious reality of each human life, then he will have succeeded in what Marcel considers to be the highest function of the theatre - "éveiller ou réveiller en nous le sentiment de l'infini que recouvre le singulier"⁹⁴.

It will be clear from these remarks that Marcel's theatre is basically inverted or introspective, concentrating on the inner, spiritual drama of man. "Monsieur Gabriel Marcel préfère à toutes les autres ces intrigues presque entièrement dépouillées d'incidents extérieurs," comments T. Malnier, "réduites au mécanisme des incidents infimes, des rencontres, des conversations, qui dévoilent peu à peu les profondeurs inavouées, censurées d'une réalité humaine d'abord masquée de ses apparences".⁹⁵ It is, however, important to remember that self-scrutiny, which plays such an important part in the inner drama of Marcel's characters, means neither definitive self-knowledge nor total isolation from the outside world. This point is overlooked by J.-H. Roy when he maintains that the extreme lucidity of Marcel's characters stifles any possible dramatic movement.

93. Théâtre et philosophie. Leurs rapports dans mon oeuvre." in Recherches et Débats, no. 2, octobre, 1952, p. 33.

94. "Théâtre de l'âme en exil" in Recherches et Débats, no. 10, juin-juillet, 1950, p. 13.

95. Combat, 7.11.1953.

"Car des consciences qui se connaîtraient, absolument lucides, seraient aussi absolument stériles, déjà mortes, déjà jugées," he observes. "Tant il est vrai que chacun se définit dans la rencontre d'autrui et non pas en se repliant sur soi-même."⁹⁶ A play like Un Homme de Dieu, however, shows that a character's thirst for self-knowledge depends on a dynamic living relationship not only with himself but also with those around him, and that as he looks more closely and deeply into himself, so he realises that self-knowledge can never be objectively established. "Une découverte progressive de cette nature ..., qui a pour résultat de faire surgir entre deux individus une réalité qui les domine en les reliant," writes R. Fernandez, "telle me paraît être la dialectique dramatique de Gabriel Marcel."⁹⁷ These comments not only answer the objections levelled at Marcel by J.-H. Roy, they also throw light on what is, in fact, the basic dramatic movement of his plays. Far from being static and devoid of action, the spiritual drama conceived by Marcel is constantly evolving and deepening from within as the characters seek to understand more fully the situation in which they find themselves. "Dédaignant le plan de l'expansion horizontale," observes L. Barjon, "la pièce) avancera, si j'ose dire, par creusées et forages successifs..."⁹⁸

Although the mystery of life is central to the conception and presentation of most of Marcel's dramatic work, the tone of his plays is very different from the spectacular Mystery Plays of the Middle Ages. For Marcel,

96. "Le théâtre de Gabriel Marcel" in Les Temps modernes, no. 48, octobre, 1949, p. 753.

97. "Un Homme de Dieu" in La Nouvelle Revue française, juin, 1925, p. 1062.

98. "Gabriel Marcel à la scène" in Études, vol. 262, septembre, 1949, p. 222.

mystery implies participation in, or awareness of a deep spiritual reality, something which he hopes to achieve by inducing reflection rather than by resorting to more forceful and emotive means. In fact, Marcel believes that spectacle diminishes rather than enhances audience participation and that "l'émotion obtenue avec des moyens réduits est plus authentique ... que celle qui est due à la mise en oeuvre d'un puissant ensemble matériel"⁹⁹. Marcel is also critical of what he calls "un théâtre de célébration", conceived as a bold and triumphant glorification of God and His presence in the Christian world.¹⁰⁰ Marcel's own theatre is never triumphant or assertive, and the paths to truth are fraught with many traps and pitfalls. Music offers a more certain and reassuring expression of truth for Marcel than the theatre, but much of Marcel's drama can be likened to a musical composition. In the preface to his first collection of plays, Marcel likens the reaction to which he hopes his two works will give rise among the audience to the emotion "que donne une grande musique"¹⁰¹, while his conception of participation in the theatre closely invites comparison with audience participation in a concert hall. This last point is underlined by R. Jouve who observes that "pour apprécier comme il convient ce théâtre il faut se mettre comme devant une belle musique en état du recueillement; car les drames de la vie intérieure ne sont pas des spectacles, mais des symphonies"¹⁰².

99. "Réflexions sur les exigences d'un théâtre chrétien" in La Vie intellectuelle, 25 mars, 1937, p. 459.

100. See Théâtre et Religion, Lyon, E. Vitte, p. 61 et seq.

101. Préface, Le Seuil invisible, p. 2.

102. "Un théâtre de la sincérité. Gabriel Marcel, métaphysicien et dramaturge." in Études, vol. 2, avril, 1932, p. 28.

Just as Marcel, from the publication of his very first plays, took an unwavering stand for realism, in the theatre, so Sartre has constantly upheld the need for some kind of aesthetic distancing, preferably through the use of myth. Sartre's avoidance of realism in the theatre is due, above all, to his choice of subject matter. Whereas Marcel turns his attention to the drama and conflict of everyday life, Sartre is interested in the major social and political issues of his time - resistance against the Germans, racialism in America, the nature of revolutionary politics, anti-Communist propaganda in the West, the use of torture in Algeria. To try and present such subjects realistically on stage would be a formidable, but also unnecessary task. Sartre realises that political essays or meetings are far more accurate and effective means of directly approaching these subjects than the theatre. What the theatre can effectively offer, on the other hand, is a striking interpretation or distillation of political reality rather than an exact reflection or representation of it. Invariably this interpretation will tend to be rather summary and schematic, but it will reflect certain general truths about revolutionary politics or colonial oppression, for example, Myth can then be used as in Le Diable et le Bon Dieu or Les Séquestrés d'Altona to convey these truths while, at the same time, ensuring that they are expressed and presented in a form which is suited to the theatre. "Il faut que la pièce donne une vision totale d'un moment ou d'une chose," writes Sartre, "mais il faut en même temps que ce qui s'y révèle, se révèle d'une manière entièrement théâtrale."¹⁰³

103. Un théâtre de situations, p. 326.

Where Sartre does not use some form of allegory or myth, he achieves distancing either by a slight transposition in time and place - as in Les Mains sales, for example, - or by comic exaggeration - as in La Putain respectueuse or Nekrassov - the only exception being Morts sans sépulture where, by the straightforward use of realism, Sartre had tried to dramatise the horrifying confrontation of the torturer and his victim. Aesthetic distancing must not, however, be confused with emotional detachment. Indeed, it is clear that the extreme tone of plays like Le Diable et le Bon Dieu and Les Séquestrés d'Altona, although totally unrealistic, generates an intriguing and fascinating atmosphere wholly conducive to audience participation. The spectators' detachment only begins at the point at which they realise the extent to which the imaginary world presented on the stage is a distillation of some of the more important moral and political questions raised in the real world outside.

Marcel is opposed to the use of myth in the theatre because he sees it as a dangerous form of systematisation and abstraction. "Il est plus facile d'accomoder les mythes au goût actuel," he declared in 1946, "de les mettre au service de doctrines philosophiques, voire politiques, que de créer des personnages doués d'une vie propre."¹⁰⁴ For Marcel the theatre should individualise and particularise, rather than simplify and generalise, while for Sartre the inverse is true. This does not, however, mean that his characters are mere types. Goetz and Frantz, for example, are fascinating individuals, but it is on the level of a myth or general truth that they make their real impact on us. In other words, we are ultimately less

104. Les Nouvelles littéraires, 14.2.1946.

interested in Goetz as a sixteenth century army captain or Frantz as a former Nazi officer than in the more representative issues of political commitment and the use of torture which they raise . It is this mythical aspect of a character to which Sartre is referring when he says that the dramatist should try to find "un personnage qui contienne, d'une façon plus ou moins condensée, les problèmes qui se posent à nous à un moment donné"¹⁰⁵. Sartre's use of myth also increases the element of spectacle in his plays. Oreste, Goetz and Frantz are all larger than life characters involved in exceptional situations or circumstances calling for violent and extreme actions. There is nothing inverted or introspective about Sartre's theatre: it is full of movement and colour, passionate tirades and bloody deeds, a drama of "faire" as opposed to Marcel's drama of "être". It is true that there is no violence or bloodshed in Huis clos or in Kean, but the situation of Garcin, Estelle and Inès is made memorable by the cruelty and intensity of their psychological conflict, while in Kean Sartre achieves a fascinating theatrical effect by the constant interplay between illusion and reality. In Les Mains sales and Les Séquestrés d'Altona Sartre experiments successfully with the use of flashbacks to recall past events before bringing the audience forward again to the present, while the staging of Les Mouches and Le Diable et le Bon Dieu involves a wide range of visual and auditive effects. Sartre's experimentation with such scenic effects underlines his claim that the theatre "ne doit se priver d'aucune des sorcelleries du théâtre"⁽¹⁰⁶⁾ and reminds us that, with its emphasis on spectacle, his own

105. Un théâtre de situations, p. 328.

106. "Jean-Paul Sartre nous parle de théâtre" in Théâtre populaire, no. 15, septembre-octobre, 1955, p. 8.

drama becomes, in the words of K. Gore, " a religious ceremony to the extent that it can be a form of rite during which certain myths are presented to the public - myths which concern them directly"¹⁰⁷. It is, however, Marcel's drama of "être", with its subdued tone but deep and penetrating insight into human situations, which, for the purposes of this study, is to provide the point of departure in the search for true personal identity.

107. "The Theatre of Sartre: 1940-65" in Books Abroad, no . 2, spring, 1967, p. 135.

CHAPTER TWO

The early plays: temporal discord and ambiguity

La Chapelle ardente¹ was first published as part of a trilogy of plays² directly inspired by the events and experiences of the First World War. There is an interesting comparison to be made between these three plays and the two plays of Vers un autre royaume³, written during and after the Second World War, a comparison which emphasises the evolution in Marcel's thought. La Chapelle ardente clearly belongs to the "pièces ambiguës", the majority of which were written before Marcel's conversion in 1929, whereas a play like Le Signe de la Croix, although inspired by events of a no less sombre nature, is, as its very title suggests, infused with an aura of light and hope. In its uncompromising severity and its atmosphere of oppressive confinement, La Chapelle ardente is a good example of Marcel's early drama; in form and style it is typical of Marcel's theatre as a whole.

The central figure in La Chapelle ardente is Aline Fortier, whose son, Raymond, has been killed at the front during the First World War. She and her husband, Octave, have taken into their care Raymond's fiancée, Mireille, who has, in fact, no family of her own. The play is set in 1920, but the memory of Raymond still haunts both Aline and Octave - although in very different ways. Aline unjustly attributes all the blame for Raymond's decision to enlist in 1916 to her husband who, at the time, was in command of a regiment at the front. Octave himself recalls that Raymond, in a

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1. All textual references are taken from La Chapelle ardente, Paris, La Table ronde, 1949, and will be incorporated in the thesis in the following abbreviated form: (CA..). Eg. (CA 20) = La Chapelle ardente, p. 20.
 2. Trois pièces, Paris, Plon, 1931. The three plays are Le Regard neuf, Le Mort de demain and La Chapelle ardente.
 3. Paris, Plon, 1949. The two plays are L'Émissaire and Le Signe de la Croix.

state of complete indecision and disarray, had come to ask his advice. He eventually prevailed upon his father to admit him to his regiment and later begged to be entrusted with a difficult mission during which he lost his life. The accusations brought by Aline against Octave distort and degrade the truth: she tries to inculcate Octave while at the same time undermining and belittling him:

Octave: Tu m'accuses de n'avoir pas assez veillé sur lui ...
Ah! pourquoi est-il venu au 427?

Aline: Comme si tu ne l'y avais pas attiré!

Octave: Il m'a demandé de l'y admettre, c'est lui qui a choisi d'y venir.

Aline: Il n'a rien choisi, il s'est laissé faire, il ne s'est pas défendu ... C'est comme le jour où ... (On la sent secouée par des sanglots contenus.) La cote 136 ...

Octave: Cette mission - là, il avait imploré pour qu'on la lui confiât.

Aline: Il ne pouvait pas faire autrement ... C'est un engrenage ... Non, non, Octave, je sais ce que tu vas dire, mais je ne veux pas ... tu entends ... je ne veux pas.

Octave, très pâle: Alors, moi, je ne l'ai pas aimé?

Aline: Moins que ton prestige.

Octave: Je n'ai pas souffert?

Aline: Une douleur d'homme, c'est un insigne ... ça se met à la boutonnière ... (CA 33-4).

This brief scene is a good example of the numerous confrontations in Marcel's theatre between an aggressive, embittered wife and a basically mild and withdrawn husband. There are very similar scenes in both Un Homme de Dieu, between Edmée and Claude, and in Rome n'est plus dans Rome, between Renée and Pascal. Certainly all the bitterness and resentment of Aline is brought out in the harsh words she exchanges with Octave: but to explain and understand Aline's attitude and state of mind at that time, we have to consider something which happened several years before - the death of her son Raymond - and the way in which Aline has reacted to it.

The past for Aline is not something which fades into oblivion, nor something whose pain is ever alleviated. Thus the death of Raymond should, for Aline, be experienced as intensely now, in 1920, as it had been when the news first reached the family. Moreover, Aline expects her husband, Octave, her daughter, Yvonne, and Raymond's fiancée, Mireille, to react in exactly the same way. This is made clear in the opening scenes of the play when Aline notices that her grandson has been playing with some of Raymond's toys in the back garden. She immediately tells the maid to return them to the attic, and explains to Yvonne that the toys must never again be removed. Aline is prepared to pay for any toys that Yvonne may want to buy; but Raymond's toys must remain untouched, and the attic where they are to be kept is to become a kind of sanctuary. Yvonne cannot understand why the toys should be left to gather dust instead of being put to good use, and she bitterly remarks: "Tu n'as pas la religion du passé, tu en as la superstition." (CA 18). Aline remains unmoved and coldly points out that "quand on a été capable d'aller au bal trois mois après la mort de son frère, on n'a pas qualité ..." (CA 18). The attitudes of Aline and Yvonne are equally extreme; the latter can be accused of a certain insensibility towards the past as well as a certain meanness and possessiveness (not only does she expect Raymond's toys to be available for her son, but she later suggests that she has the right to some of the furniture which Aline and Octave no longer need), while for the former, the past dominates and directs the present. There is in Aline's memory of Raymond evidence of an affection which is both deep and strong, but also blinding. When Mireille tries to explain that she too sees Raymond's toys almost as relics, Aline retorts: "Non, toi, tu ne l'as pas eu à toi tout petit, tu ne le revois pas comme je le revois, moi ... quand on les lui apportait dans son lit, quand il jouait au jardin, quand il les prêtait, quand il les donnait ... il aimait tant donner." (CA 20). Aline tries to fix definitively the image she has

of Raymond, but the attitude that she has adopted is clearly contradictory in that if she is to remain faithful to the true image of Raymond, she should take into account his generosity and the probability, as Mireille points out, that, if he were still alive, he would certainly have wanted his nephew to play with the toys he once played with as a child. Aline is far too inflexible to be receptive to such a consideration: overcome with grief at the news of Raymond's death, she reacts, in the words of J. Chenu, "comme si on n'avait plus le droit de vivre, comme si toute vie était une injure à la mémoire du mort, comme un manque de respect et une profanation ..."4. Henceforth, a life of gaiety is inconceivable for Aline; she has chosen to suffer, not inwardly and undemonstratively, but in such a way that she imposes her feelings on those around her. "Sa douleur je ne veux pas dire qu'elle l'affiche," remarks Octave, "c'est plutôt comme si elle la brandissait pour vous en écraser." (CA 56). Octave feels the breakdown in his relationship with Aline and in the atmosphere of the family as a whole all the more acutely since, before the war, their life together had seemed relatively happy and harmonious. The death of Raymond seems to have completely changed Aline, almost as though she has become "intoxicated" by their misfortune. In fact, Aline believes that Raymond's death is not a misfortune which she shares with Octave, but her own unique tragedy. She thinks that she alone has really suffered, that she alone has really remained faithful to the memory of her son. Raymond's death does not justify Octave's patriotic pride, nor the brief tribute which Octave would like to see inscribed on his son's grave. "Quand on a souffert ce que je souffre, moi," declares

4. Le théâtre de Gabriel Marcel et sa signification métaphysique, p. 106.

Aline, "... on n'a pas de ces beaux sentiments, il ne reste pas de quoi se les offrir; c'est hideux, la souffrance, et ça ne se met pas en alexandrins." (CA 34).

Aline's life has been so transformed that not only can she not now conceive of an existence without sorrow, but her real sympathy is accorded only to those who, like herself, have some real cause for unhappiness. If Aline is charitable towards Mme Noël, it is only because, as Yvonne cynically observes, she too has lost a son during the war. Aline's attitude towards Mme Verdet, Octave's sister, is also conditioned by the fact that Mme Verdet is now a widow, whilst her son, André, has an incurable heart condition. Mme Verdet is moved by Aline's great sympathy and understanding, commenting, significantly, that one must be unhappy to appreciate Aline's true qualities, and Aline herself adds: "Oui, c'est dans le malheur qu'on se retrouve." (CA 64). To claim solidarity in the face of suffering is not, in itself, suspicious, but it is so when it excludes the possibility of solidarity in moments of triumph or joy. This, however, is clearly Aline's attitude since she goes on to say: "Il n'y a que le malheur qui soit vrai." (CA 64). Moreover, despite Octave's observations concerning the change in Aline after the death of Raymond, there is still a suggestion of Aline's morbid fascination for suffering even before the war, since Raymond had several times mentioned to André: "C'est curieux, maman est quelqu'un qui aime les malheureux." (CA 119). Thus, as J. Chenu points out, Aline seems by nature already predisposed to exalt in her misfortune, thereby betraying her secret resentment of health and happiness. "La charité d'Aline Fortier n'était-elle pas déjà une sorte de haine sournoise contre tout ce qui est sain et robuste?" he writes. "Cela expliquerait en tout cas la forme qu'a

prise sa douleur, car si le malheur l'a transformée, et d'après son mari, comme 'intoxiquée', il ne l'a pu qu'en agissant sur un terrain préparé: la vie ne peut être pervertie par la mort que si l'on était déjà en faute à son égard."⁵

The real tragedy of La Chapelle ardente is not that Aline imposes on herself a life of bereavement, but that weaker and less perceptive people than Octave are unconscious victims of her passion for suffering. Since Yvonne is already married with a family of her own, and Octave sees through his wife's actions, Mireille, already heavily dependent on the Fortier family for her existence, is clearly the most susceptible of the three to the influence of Aline. Indeed, she is considered by the latter as a very worthy "companion in distress". Aline needs somebody like Mireille to share in her unhappiness, perpetuate the memory of her loss and therefore provide the mainstay of her whole existence. "Notre intimité, mon petit," she says, "je ne dirai pas que c'est pour moi une raison de vivre, mais c'est ce qui a fait que j'ai duré." (CA 47). There is a clear example of the way Mireille is influenced by Aline at the end of the first act. Having learnt that Mireille has become acquainted with Robert Chanteuil, a good-looking, athletic young man, and sensing that Mireille's apparent indifference conceals her true feelings towards him, Aline is secretly horrified at the possibility of Mireille starting life afresh with someone so young and healthy. Aline begins by warning Mireille that her fidelity to the memory of Raymond, although seemingly unshakeable now, is likely to be undermined by time and change. "Comprends-moi," she says: "à ton âge, on ne peut pas, on ne doit

5. Le théâtre de Gabriel Marcel et sa signification métaphysique,
pp. 105-6.

pas répondre de soi; tu m'entends bien, on ne le doit pas. On change; c'est affreux, mais c'est ainsi." (CA 47). Such is Aline's stature and prestige in the eyes of Mireille that a suggestion of this nature merely acts as a spur to Mireille's sense of duty. And Aline's intentions become, seemingly, even more apparent when she adds:

Aline: Si jamais tu te décides à refaire ta vie, et, au fond, c'est dans l'ordre ...

Mireille: Maman!

Aline: Ce ne pourra être avec un indigne ... non, après ce qui a failli être ... il y a une diminution morale dont je te sais incapable. Ce n'est pas un viveur, mettons, je ne sais pas, moi, comme ce Chanteuil, qui pourra jamais ...

Mireille, indistinctement: Pourquoi Chanteuil? (CA 48-9).

In the course of the second act, Aline and Octave learn through Mme Verdet of the precarious nature of André's health and of their nephew's strong affection for Mireille. Aline's reaction, while comforting Mme Verdet, does not fail to arouse Octave's sense of outrage. He foresees the sinister possibilities of Aline trying to arrange a marriage between Mireille and André, and therefore tries to persuade Mireille that, if she feels attracted to Robert Chanteuil, she should not be held back by any feeling of guilt. Already, however, unbeknown to Octave, Mireille has rejected Chanteuil's proposal of marriage and the way is thus made open for Aline to act. Again Aline acts by suggestion rather than by proposition, leading Mireille to believe that her true vocation is one of self-sacrifice, and in this way Mireille finds herself contemplating an act which she had initially rejected with horror⁶:

6. "Alors, tu t'imagines que je songe à commettre ce suicide?" (CA 89).

Aline: Il m'a semblé que, pour une âme comme la tienne, une âme mûrie par la douleur ...

Mireille: Tu appelles ça mûrie?

Aline: Le bonheur ne pouvait être qu'un autre nom, du ... oui ... mettons du sacrifice ... (CA 91).

In her underhand denigration of Chanteuil and in her insidious suggestion that, for someone like Mireille who is already marked by suffering, happiness implies self-sacrifice, Aline appears, at first sight, to be a totally repugnant figure, selfish and embittered. And yet she defiantly refutes Octave's suggestion that she has dictated Mireille's life. "Personne ne respecte plus que moi la liberté des autres," (CA 94) she declares. Rather than a sign of blatant hypocrisy, Aline's statement suggests that she is a tyrant blinded by the force of her passion. Octave himself suddenly realises that Aline's influence on Mireille was perhaps more unconscious than planned: "Ce n'est peut-être pas de la perfidie," he says, "peut-être que tu ne sais pas toi-même..." (CA 97). In addition, we learn that, even without direct action through words, Aline often reveals feelings and attitudes which she sincerely believes to have kept hidden. When she tells Mireille that she would not have stood in Mireille's way had she decided to marry Robert Chanteuil and that she would have concealed her disappointment, Mireille retorts: "Je ne sais pas si tu y aurais réussi. Tu es moins maîtresse de toi que tu ne crois." (CA 85). This again lends weight to the idea that Aline's influence is often unconscious, as, for example, when Mme Verdet observes: "Avec toi, on ne dit pas ce qu'on veut; je l'ai souvent remarqué." It is almost as though Aline were endowed with strange and fascinating powers which only the firm and perceptive are able to resist. "Il y a un fait," says Mireille at the end of the play, "c'est

que la vie n'est supportable que si elle est loin!" (CA 128). All that Aline can be reproached with is that she is someone "qui ne s'efface jamais ... qui vous empêche d'exister" (CA 128). Her presence alone arouses doubts or sows discord: "C'est comme si elle ne pouvait pas s'empêcher de détruire ... pas par des actes, simplement parce qu'elle est là." (CA 130). To see Aline as a cold and calculating figure would be not only contrary to the author's intentions, but would also destroy the dramatic effectiveness and tragic resonance of the play. It is essential that we sympathise with Aline as an unfortunate and unhappy person, blinded and confused by her own suffering and, sometimes consciously, but more often unconsciously, bringing the same unhappiness into the lives of those around her. Thus, it is only at the end of the play, almost a year after the marriage of Mireille and André has taken place, that Aline realises the part she had played in turning Mireille away from a man she may have loved to another person for whom she felt at best a little sympathy: "Alors, c'est vrai! C'est ma faute! et ce malheureux Chanteuil, peut-être ..." (CA 125). For this realisation to be a moving theatrical experience, the tyrannical and resentful side of Aline's character must be balanced by her inner blindness and confusion. The reaction of the spectator, initially one of condemnation and horror, should gradually give way to an overwhelming feeling of pity. Mireille probably sums up this reaction best of all at the end of the play when, despite all the suffering and misery which Aline has brought into her life, she refuses to see her "maman" as anything other than "une pauvre femme" (CA 135).

Aline's attitude to the past forms a striking contrast with that of Octave. Aline wants the memory of Raymond to remain sanctified and untouched as a constant reminder of the unjust and tragic destiny of man.

Octave, however, remembers the past with pride, because, despite the loss of his son, he knows that he died defending the honour of his country. Despite the horrors of war, Octave recalls the courage and solidarity of his regiment. He considers it his duty - and an act of fidelity to the memory of those who lost their lives - to write a book which will recall their actions and deeds. "Ce ne sont pas mes mémoires," he says. "Ce sont les annales de mon régiment, c'est par fidélité." (CA 32). He has also had printed a special booklet about his son, containing the numerous letters written by Raymond to him during the hostilities with some photographs and quotations. "C'est seulement pour les amis ...," he explains, "pour ceux qui l'ont connu ..." (CA 26). Aline looks at the past as something to be sanctified by silence and mourning; Octave remembers it with pride as something to be heralded and proclaimed. Both have experienced the loss of a son, but, as Mireille says to Octave: "Vous n'avez pas la même façon d'être malheureux." (CA 27).

Octave also acts as a foil to Aline in his attitude towards others and, in particular, towards Mireille. Whereas Aline is authoritarian and self-imposing, Octave does not try to interfere in the lives of those around him. It is only when he sees Aline's reaction to the news that André is in love with Mireille that he tries, unsuccessfully, to intervene. Here, however, Octave is acting with the intention of negating Aline's destructive influence and thus leaving Mireille free to choose, but already he senses that he is almost powerless to prevent a false sense of abnegation and self-sacrifice from superimposing itself on Mireille and stifling her natural desires and affections. Thus, when Mireille questions the nature of the happiness which she may be permitted to experience, Octave retorts: "Ce n'est pas une phrase de vous." (CA 73).

In fact, Octave is by far the most clear-sighted character in the play, and his analysis of the relationship between Aline and Mireille, although minimising the essential ambiguity of Aline's actions, is a penetrating summary of the basic subject of La Chapelle ardente:

Octave: Cette espèce d'étau dans lequel tu enserres cette malheureuse petite ... cette tyrannie sous ces dehors de tendresse ... Maman ... Elle t'appelle maman!

Aline: Assez, Octave!

Octave: Et alors ... Oh! ça, c'est pire que tout ... cette porte que tu entre-bâilles, parce qu'il s'agit d'un mourant!....

Aline: Ainsi, Raymond ...

Octave: Non, non, nedis pas que c'est pour ton fils, c'est pour toi, c'est par ... il n'y a pas de mot pour dire ce que c'est, il n'y en a pas. Et tu as exploité son chagrin, ses scrupules, son admiration pour toi ... Tu t'en es servie comme d'autant de chaînes pour la ligoter, et maintenant qu'elle a peut-être l'illusion de s'évader, voilà que c'est encore toi ... (CA 95-7).

Octave's own personal tragedy is that he is clear-sighted but unable to prevent Aline from destroying a once united family. He sees Aline's attitude stifling Mireille, estranging Yvonne and finally causing his own departure. In the third act Octave has become a sad and disillusioned figure, now living on his own, his whole faith in life and other people irreparably undermined by his recent experiences. The amiable and cheerful grandfather we had once seen carrying his grandson on his back around the garden has become suspicious and cynical. "Vous savez que je n'apprécie guère la philanthropie chez les jeunes femmes," he says to Mireille. "C'est une vertu de vieux." (CA 101). J. Chenu rightly points to the difference between "la charité" and "le goût du malheur"⁷, a confusion doubtless entertained by Octave simply because in Aline he had

7. Le théâtre de Gabriel Marcel et sa signification métaphysique, p. 105.

never seen anything approaching the selflessness and generosity that real charity implies. The future now holds so little in store for Octave that he is overcome with a feeling of hopelessness and despair. "Pourquoi voulez-vous que je tienne encore à la vie ?" (CA 104) he asks Mireille.

The character for whom we feel the most sympathy - perhaps because of her basic innocence and helplessness - is Mireille. It is soon made clear that Mireille is far from happy at Franclieu, not because of the death of Raymond, but because of the increasingly oppressive atmosphere of the house. "Mais si vous vous doutiez de l'atmosphère dans laquelle je vis ici ..., " she says to André. "Il y a des moments où il me semble que j'étouffe." (CA 43). She recognises that the strength of the relationship between herself and Aline, which is such that each is indispensable to the other, is stifling her freedom and independence: "Quand on est indispensable aux autres de cette façon - là ... je ne sais pas, on n'est plus libre ... on ne ... respire plus." (CA 43-4). But frightened by the enormity of such a disclosure, and fearing the consequences of her own lucidity, she suddenly declares: "Ah! qu'est-ce que je dis? Non, ce n'est pas ça; ce n'est pas ça ... " (CA 44). In some respects Mireille resembles Électre in Sartre's Les Mouches. Both yearn nostalgically for freedom and deliverance, but neither has the strength of purpose or character to assume the burden of solitude and responsibility that such freedom would entail. There are moments of lucidity, despair and revolt when Mireille seems close to breaking away from Aline and leading a life of her own. "Tu entends, je veux être libre, je me mépriserais moi-même sans cela; d'abord, c'est bien simple, je ne serais plus rien, et toi, je te détesterai aussi," Mireille declares at one point. "Quand ces

pensées-là me viennent ... j'ai envie de m'en aller pour ne jamais revenir." (CA 83-84). But, in an earlier scene with Octave, it is evident that Mireille is as incapable of leaving Franclieu as she is of deciding her own future:

Mireille: Vous me torturez, vous me ... Ah! si je pouvais partir!

Octave: Partir?

Mireille: Mais je n'en aurai pas la force. (CA 73).

In fact, Mireille's attitude to Aline alternates between, on the one hand, respect and admiration, - "Je ne connais personne qui ait sa capacité de souffrance. Quand je la compare aux autres ... c'est comme un don qu'elle a." (CA 56) - and, on the other hand, extreme resentment, - "Mais qu'est-ce que tu cherches à me faire dire? Tes remords font autant de mal que ta tyrannie! Ah! je te déteste!" (CA 125). The tragedy of Mireille's situation is that, having lived for so long with, and so close to Aline, she cannot now know to what extent she is merely the product of another person. Thus, when Aline indirectly suggests that, in marrying André, Mireille would be faithful to her true self, Mireille finds herself momentarily agreeing, but unsure as to whether the idea is really hers. Then, in a moment of anger and revolt, she turns on Aline and cries: "C'est peut-être une contagion!" (CA 92). Although an outside observer like Octave is aware of the gradual change that has come over Mireille, it is almost impossible to make a clear-cut distinction between her "real" identity and the "false" identity which has been forced on her through Aline's presence. Thus, on one occasion, Octave finds that Mireille springs quite spontaneously to Aline's defence when he voices his feelings about the latter:

Mireille, âprement: Ce n'est pas une maladie d'être malheureuse ...
Est-ce que vous trouvez la maison trop triste, comme Yvonne?
(Mouvement d'Octave) La vie ne reprend pas assez vite? Vous
souhaiteriez un peu de détente?

Octave, avec douceur: Ce n'est pas vous, qui parlez en ce
moment, ma petite ...

Mireille, s'exaltant: Eh bien, moi, j'admire, cela, entendez-
vous, de toute mon âme ... C'est peut-être terrible, mais il n'y
a que ça de beau. Tout le reste est médiocre ... médiocre ...
(CA 57-8).

The complexity of Mireille's identity is clearly instanced by this reaction which shows that she has digested Aline's influence to the point of making it an inextricable part of her whole being. Thus, although it is possible to isolate certain decisive moments such as those at the end of the first and second acts, first when Mireille decides to throw away the flowers sent to her by Chanteuil, and later when she discloses that she felt obliged to tell André that she was in love with him, as irrefutable examples of Aline's insidious presence, it is nonetheless evident that such acts also reflect Mireille's own weakness and complicity. Henceforth, it is extremely dangerous to speak of Mireille's authentic and inauthentic self - as Octave tends to do - or to attribute total responsibility for her acts to Aline.

After the development of the first two acts, the third act brings confirmation of the hopeless impasse into which Mireille has been led. She has been married to André for almost a year, during which time she has been outwardly happy and contented. In fact, she is desperately trying to reconstruct her past and convince herself that the decision to marry André was hers alone, while at the same time trying to persuade herself that at last she has found true contentment and peace of mind. The fact that she is no longer so susceptible to resentment and self-doubt is, she says to Octave, "le signe que j'ai trouvé ma route" (CA 102). She feels perfectly contented "maintenant qu'un autre a besoin de moi" (CA 105).

But when Aline comes to visit Mireille and André for the first time since their wedding, Mireille's calm assurances melt away and reveal her despair and uncertainty. The inner thoughts and feelings which Aline's attitude expresses, albeit unconsciously, provoke an emotional torrent of defiant, but evidently false, affirmations on the part of Mireille. "André est très bon ... il m'aime tendrement," (CA 124) says Mireille. And then, with growing discomfort, she cries: "J'ai la vie que j'ai choisie ... que moi j'ai choisie." (CA 124). In her determined attempt at self-justification, Mireille merely underlines what the audience has known all along - her hopeless dependence on Aline. "Si j'ai décidé d'épouser André, c'est que je savais ... ne trouver ailleurs que déception ... qu'amertume; que je n'avais ni la force, ni le désir, tu entends, ni le désir de rechercher certaines ... satisfactions," she admits. "Ce qu'il me fallait, c'était la détente, la paix du coeur. Elle est venue ... je l'ai ..." (CA 125). But, as Mireille reaches the end of her outburst, so the mask is finally torn from her face, distraughtness and tears revealing her true state of mind. Moreover, as a result of this outburst, André is now led to sense the truth about Mireille's feelings for him as well as the truth about his own health. But something even more significant has taken place: Aline, aware of the discord she has suddenly brought into the young couple's life, tells André and Mireille that she is leaving. Moments later Mireille is anxiously questioning the significance of this "adieu". With growing confusion and fear, she begins to envisage the possibility of Aline committing suicide: "C'est qu'elle a tant souffert ... En somme, qu'est-ce qui la retiendrait? ... Elle n'est pas croyante ... Et alors, si elle, André, si elle se tuait ..." (CA 135). Far from envisaging the suicide of Aline as merciful liberation and release, Mireille sees it as a horrifyingly imminent

punishment for her temerity. "La vie ne serait plus possible," she says. "Il faut à tout prix ..." (CA 135-6). There is a moment of silence as Mireille moves to a desk and looks among the books and papers lying there, before she turns to André and tells him that she is looking for the telephone number of the friend with whom Aline is staying.

Long after the play has ended, the audience will probably still be haunted by the disturbing and perplexing figure of Aline and by her complex relationship with those around her, with Mireille in particular. We are left to reflect on two aspects of Aline's character. First of all, there is her total obsession with the memory of Raymond, an obsession which is conveyed in the title of the play, the "chappelle ardente" being the mortuary chapel in which the body of the deceased person lies exposed in the coffin prior to the funeral service and burial. Raymond's presence lies behind all Aline's thoughts and actions in the course of the play; but it is a destructive presence, the presence of a dead body to whom all must be sacrificed. Thus we see Aline's opposition to the possibility of Mireille developing a deep relationship with the young and active Chantuil, and her approval of a marriage with a weak, unhealthy person like André, totally inferior to Raymond and thus unlikely ever to efface his memory. Moreover, it has already been established that there is a basic inconsistency in Aline's attitude to Raymond since we are led to believe that the latter was a warm and generous person who would not want his family and friends to suffer in any way on his account.⁸ And yet this is what happens. Aline's apparent fidelity is a form of

8. See below, pp. 44-5.

blindness which vitiates all her actions. Her sinister powers are, in Marcel's own words, those of "un être rendu tyrannique par le fait qu'il est possédé par une seule idée, un seul amour"⁹. Marcel does not question the meaningfulness of fidelity to the memory of those we have loved but shows how, in the case of Aline, such fidelity is undermined and distorted by an obsessive and overpowering "idée fixe". The death of Raymond has turned Aline in on herself by emphasising her personal loss, and has closed her to the needs and feelings of those around her.

Our attention is therefore drawn to Aline's egoism or self-centredness; but the horror which her actions may initially inspire in us is mitigated by the fact that she is herself deceived as to her true motives. Thus she genuinely believes that she played no part in inducing Mireille to marry André, when it is clear that this is not true at all. "Ainsi, la mauvaise foi est le ressort même de l'action," notes Marcel, "mais comme si souvent ou comme presque toujours, la mauvaise foi n'a pas conscience d'elle-même, elle peut s'apparaître comme sincérité."¹⁰ We have, therefore, a figure who is neither the tyrant initially depicted by Octave, nor the totally innocent person she herself claims to be. Moreover, the play ends without the ambiguity surrounding Aline being clearly resolved. She is a character of whom we are critical, but for whom we also feel considerable sympathy and who cannot be described or classified in clear-cut terms. "C'est en somme, du théâtre de l'ambiguïté," observed Marcel at the time of the play's revival in 1950, "et comme dans

9. La Dignité humaine, p. 140.

10. Ibid., p. 141.

Le Chemin de crête, la conclusion qui s'en dégage est l'impossibilité de juger les êtres en profondeur, pas seulement sur leurs simulacres."¹¹

One of the most striking aspects of La Chapelle ardente is that, although the basic subject is exceedingly complex and does not lend itself to a convenient explanation or solution, it is presented with great simplicity and clarity. This is particularly evident in the exposition where Marcel introduces us to the initial situation and prepares us for its future development. There are no long explanatory speeches - perhaps the most convenient form of introduction to a play, but also the most slow-moving and untheatrical of methods. Instead, Marcel has chosen a series of brief, incisive scenes in which each of the main characters is in turn presented and his or her salient features clearly outlined. In the first five scenes - which would represent about fifteen minutes on stage - we have a clear picture of Aline's authoritarian nature and attitude to the past, and of Mireille's docility and dependence on her - Mireille's attitude being offset by that of Yvonne and of Octave. In other words, the dramatist sets the situation and tone of the play with the greatest possible conciseness and economy. The only obvious criticism concerns the inevitable flurry of exits and entrances that such a technique involves and this is something which the actors should obviously minimise rather than accentuate if they are not to sacrifice coherence to discontinuity. This danger is particularly apparent during the first act in which there are a total of fourteen different scenes, all of which involve exits or entrances. During the second act there are ten more scenes, with another nine scenes in the final act.

11. Interview in Combat, 5.10.1950.

It is unfortunate that a problem of "mise en scène" should hamper what is otherwise a very compact and well constructed play. There are no irrelevant or superfluous scenes, and there is an underlying logic and inevitability about the whole development from the exposition to dénouement. This development is particularly gripping in the first two acts since it is during this time that Mireille's fate is virtually decided. We follow stage by stage Aline's insidious acts and Mireille's uneasy submissiveness with an ever-increasing sense of fatality until the final, decisive scene in the second act. In many ways, this is the scene on which the whole play hinges. In the previous scene, there had been a furious battle of words between Octave and Aline, ending with Octave's declaration that he feels unable to live in Franclieu a day longer. Aline is left alone, and Marcel's stage directions make it clear that this is a crucial moment for Aline, a moment of self-doubt which could yet affect her future actions and the whole destiny of Mireille: "Aline reste d'abord immobile et muette mais elle se débat visiblement contre les mots qu' Octave vient de prononcer, elle murmure avec une sorte de stupeur indignée. ('Moi, de la perfidie? ce n'est pas vrai! ce n'est pas vrai!') Pourtant l'angoisse monte en elle; et elle tombe enfin à genoux , desespérée." (CA 98-9). Just as the audience is beginning to anticipate the possibility of a highly dramatic "prise de conscience" on the part of Aline, Mireille quietly enters, pale and subdued, moves towards Aline and whispers: "Il a fallu lui dire que je l'aimais ..." (CA 99). Almost before we have time to measure the awful significance of Mireille's remark, the curtain closes for the end of the act. Aline's self-doubt has come too late; her insidious influence on Mireille has triumphed, Octave will not now revoke his decision to

leave Franclieu and Mireille's future has been irrevocably signed away. It is clear that the third act will not be a development, but a confirmation of this despairing situation. We may, perhaps, be momentarily deceived by Mireille's affirmations of contentment, but this impression is rapidly swept away. The theatrical effect of the final act is to impress on the audience a feeling of hopeless confinement and a sense of oppressive irrevocability. The present and future have been decided by the past, and neither Mireille nor André are likely to break free from Aline's haunting presence. In tone and atmosphere, this final act calls to mind Sartre's Huis clos: a bleak, unchanging future stares as uncompromisingly at Mireille, André and Aline as it does at Estelle, Garcin and Inès. The latter trio may be in hell, but what is life for Mireille, André and Aline if not hell on earth? Moreover, Mireille's last despairing words which close La Chapelle ardente are uttered with all the resignation and hopelessness of Garcin's famous "Eh bien, continuous"¹² at the end of Huis clos.

At first sight La Chapelle ardente would seem to be a play which rapidly dates. The language, customs and values of the social milieu represented by the Fortier family clearly belong to the period following the end of the Second World War in France. This is particularly apparent in the case of Octave, whose patriotism and nostalgic recollections of solidarity and companionship are out of place as far as present-day attitudes to war are concerned. Indeed, for an audience today Octave

12. Théâtre, p. 168.

would probably appear as a rather pathetic figure, clinging blindly to totally outmoded beliefs. On the other hand, it should be pointed out that the historical context is merely the pretext for analysing a subject of universal significance - namely the ambiguity of the individual's identity and the destructiveness of a blinding and obsessive passion - and that the circumstances which affect Aline, Octave and Mireille could arise in the aftermath of any period of violence and bloodshed. When, however, the play was revived in Paris in 1950 it was not greeted by the critics with great enthusiasm. Many considered not only that the play was decidedly inferior to Un Homme de Dieu (which had been performed the previous year), but also that it lacked any real theatrical impact.

This particularly severe criticism should be seen within the context of Claude Martin's production. Indeed, in a lengthy review of the play¹³, F. de Roux attributes most of the blame for the relative failure of La Chapelle ardente to the producer. The play had originally been produced at the Vieux-Colombier in 1925 by Gaston Baty, but Marcel had not been entirely satisfied with his interpretation which had, to a certain extent, distorted the true tone of the play. "La pièce fut quelque peu desservie par des interprètes assez mal accordés à leur rôle, et que d'ailleurs Gaston Baty, le metteur en scène, avait quelque peu induits en erreur," recalls Marcel. "Ce fut du moins le cas pour Jeanne Lion, qui incarnait le personnage d'Aline, et quelques mois plus tard, devait me dire avec une sincérité touchante, 'je me rends compte que j'ai trahi votre pièce et je vous en demande pardon'."¹⁴

13. Le Figaro littéraire, 14.10.1950.

14. En chemin, vers quel éveil?, p. 128.

Marcel seemed, on the other hand, completely satisfied with Claude Martin's interpretation of the play, a reaction made all the more surprising by the widespread condemnation of the overall production. F. de Roux's article raises three important points. We have already alluded to the number of very short scenes around which the play is constructed. These scenes form a kind of mosaic from which an underlying unity gradually emerges. This unity stems from the forceful presence of Aline, all the other characters being seen in relation to her. The impression created in performance, however, was one of discontinuity, the actors emphasising the breaks and pauses between scenes by clumsily executed exits and entrances, when it is clear that the scenes should follow smoothly, and virtually unnoticed, one after the other. The second and third points made by F. de Roux concern the actors' interpretation of the text. He notes that a great number of the sentences in the play are, in fact, never completed, the pause indicating either a silent continuation of the characters' thoughts or a certain hesitancy and inner confusion. But a pause can only be effective in performance if it is interpreted, that is to say if the actor conveys his feelings and emotions beyond the limits of the spoken word; uninterpreted silences create an unnecessary void and break the overall tone and rhythm of the action. "A l'acteur donc, de suggérer au spectateur la fin, ou plusieurs fins possibles, de la phrase interrompue," writes F. de Roux. "Les acteurs, ici, non seulement ne suggèrent rien, mais font sentir la coupure et ne sortent même pas la partie de la phrase qui a été exprimée en clair."¹⁵ Finally, he observes that Marcel's plays belong to what André Obey classified as the "théâtre

15. Le Figaro littéraire, 14.10.1950.

de conversation". The amount of physical movement being extremely limited, the actors must rely almost exclusively on the spoken word to express themselves - presuming, of course, that the text does indeed contain something worthy of expression: "Ou bien le théâtre de conversation n'est que de la conversation, et alors ce n'est rien, ou bien la conversation est un moyen d'expression qui recouvre, comme un voile transparent, l'action et, d'abord, l'action intérieure."¹⁶ The first term of the alternative is clearly belied by a close reading of the text, so that if, in performance, the play seemed devoid of "action intérieure" the fault must, to a large extent, lie with the actors. Indeed, experienced and influential drama critics like R. Kemp¹⁷ and J.J. Gautier¹⁸ emphasised the actors' lifeless and uninspiring interpretation. "Si la conviction les habite, celle-ci leur reste personnelle," comments the latter. "Ils ne la communiquent pas."¹⁹ Only Mary Grant as Aline seemed to have achieved any degree of theatrical presence. "Si Mme Mary Grant traduit quelque chose du pathétique d'Aline," reports another critic, "les autres restent trop guinés pour nous émouvoir tant qu'il faudrait ..."²⁰ As for the unfortunate producer, who was also playing the part of Octave, R. Lalou observes that, on the night of the dress rehearsal, "Claude Martin - dont la mise en scène est beaucoup trop lente pour ces dialogues incisifs - transformait son rôle en confidences, réservées aux trois premiers rangs de l'orchestre."²¹

16. Le Figaro littéraire, 14.10.1950.

17. In Le Monde, 11.10.1950.

18. In Le Figaro, 11.10.1950.

19. Ibid.

20. La Croix, 14.10.1950.

21. Les Nouvelles littéraires, 19.10.1950.

Although Claude Martin's production of La Chapelle ardente undoubtedly did the play a great disservice, it remains one of Marcel's best early works. The character of Aline, in particular, is one of the author's best dramatic creations and one who emphasises not only the pitfalls of egoism, but also the individual's complexity and irreducibility to simplistic categorisation. This is a theme which recurs repeatedly in the later plays and which underlines the existential dimension of Marcel's dramatic work. La Chapelle ardente was, in fact, just one of five plays completed by Marcel during the three years he spent at Sens between 1919 and 1922 as a philosopher teacher. The afore-mentioned trilogy inspired by the events of the First World War reflects Marcel's preoccupation with some of the domestic problems or upheavals which such events could cause, and the same concern with the concrete problems of daily life and with the fragility and vulnerability of personal relationships is also apparent in the two remaining plays completed at Sens, Le Coeur des autres²² and Un Homme de Dieu. Moreover for a brief time after the war, Marcel's theatre had been brought to the attention of the Paris public. Le Coeur des autres and La Grâce²³ were performed in 1921, Le Regard neuf followed a year later and La Chapelle ardente was produced for the first time in 1925. These plays, however, enjoyed only moderate success and, with the exception of two later plays performed shortly before the Second World War (Le Dard in 1937 and Le Fanal²⁴ in 1938), Marcel's work as a dramatist lay in almost total

22. Paris, Grasset, 1921.

23. In Le Seuil invisible.

24. Paris, Stock, 1936.

neglect until in 1949 a provincial theatre company undertook the production of Un Homme de Dieu, first published in 1925.²⁵ The play was an immediate success and, when it was created for the first time in Paris by the Centre Dramatique de l'Ouest, the startled critics recognised a work of great value which had been gathering dust on library book-shelves for almost a quarter of a century. It has, in fact, turned out to be Marcel's best known play, although it should be pointed out that it belongs to the early period of his work and is not considered by the author to be either the most significant of his plays from the point of view of thought and content, or the most complete from an artistic point of view. "Ce qui manque dans Un homme de Dieu," he writes, "c'est une certaine qualité musicale dont j'oserais dire qu'elle est perceptible dans les meilleures scènes, celles qui se sont imposées à moi et où je me suis senti médium ..." ²⁶

As with La Chapelle ardente, Un Homme de Dieu²⁷ had at first been conceived in a slightly different and unfinished form. The original figure of the Protestant minister is basically the same in the first versions of the play - to be entitled Le Guérisseur or Guérir - written in 1921 as in the definitive version composed the following year. There are certain modifications concerning the situation between the minister's wife and her lover, and in the situation of the minister's family, but the principal change in the definitive version is on a temporal level. The crisis envisaged between the minister and his wife in the 1921 versions

25. Paris, Grasset.

26. En chemin, vers quel éveil?, p. 235.

27. All textual references are taken from Cinq pièces majeures, Paris, Plon, 1973, pp. 9-104, and will be incorporated in the thesis in the following abbreviated form: (HD..). Eg. (HD 9) = Un Homme de Dieu in Cinq pièces, p. 9.

takes place at the time of Edmée's adultery; but in Un Homme de Dieu the events in the play take place twenty years later. "Du coup toutes les perspectives sont entièrement bouleversées," observes Marcel. "Deux données essentielles étroitement liées entre elles s'imposent. D'une part l'existence de l'enfant adultérine, Osmonde, de l'autre la réapparition de l'amant qui est le père de cette enfant, avec tous les problèmes qu'elle pose."²⁸ These brief observations will make it apparent that Un Homme de Dieu, like La Chapelle ardente, is centred around a closely-knit family drama: indeed, the triangular relationship between Octave, Aline and Mireille is to some extent reflected in the situation of Claude, Edmée and Osmonde in Un Homme de Dieu, while the memory of Raymond plays no more important a part in the lives of the first group than does the memory and reappearance of Michel for the second group.

The central figure in Un Homme de Dieu is Claude Lemoine; but the drama of Claude's existence cannot be dissociated from the anguish and self-doubt which beset Edmée, while their life together is inextricably bound up with that of their daughter, Osmonde. Thus Un Homme de Dieu is constructed around two inter-related "dramas", one marital, the other filial, which run parallel to, and complement each other. This situation is not, however, immediately apparent at the outset of the play, and the whole of the first act is like the gradual unveiling of a painting, initially seen to be a work depicting peace and harmony, but which turns out instead to be a nightmarish evocation of conflict and turmoil.

28. Notes annexes, Un Homme de Dieu, Paris, La Table ronde, 1950, p. 212.

Certainly, as soon as the curtain reveals the set for the first act - "Ameublement froid et banal. Au mur, des 'paraboles' de Burnand et une reproduction de la Vierge de Saint Sixte." (HD 9) - the spectator can have no real premonition of the scenes of furious recrimination which lie ahead. Moreover, what we see of the characters seems, at first sight, totally in keeping with their austere surroundings. Claude appears to be a devoted and hard-working minister, his wife Edmée is responsible for a "Union de jeunes filles" (HD 12), while Osmonde is kept busy looking after Mégal's two children and with her Sunday School activities. There are, however, signs that these appearances may not reflect the characters' true identity. Although Claude's very tone and manner suggest total absorption in his work, Edmée's sharp, critical observations, especially towards Osmonde, form a striking contrast with her supposed piety and charity, whilst Osmonde clearly resents her mother's constant supervision. "Non, maman n'oublie jamais rien," she says, "maman est terrible." (HD 14). After these initial impressions, the audience gradually discovers that, if the present is seemingly quiet and peaceful for Claude and Edmée, it is not true of their past. Claude's mother, Mme Lemoyne, inadvertently reveals to Edmée that her son has told her all about the difficult first years of his marriage, and this brings a violent reaction from Edmée: "Oh, ce n'est plus la peine de chercher à me tromper ... Ce secret ... notre secret ... il l'a ... le misérable! ..." (HD 19). At first, the exact nature and circumstances of this secret are not explained. Then we learn through Claude of his wife's adultery, and of the long, slow period of doubt and anguish before they both emerged from their trial reunited and reconciled. But with the arrival of Claude's brother, Francis, in the following scene, the whole situation is suddenly seen in a new perspective: for now

Claude discovers that the man with whom Edmée had committed adultery, Michel Sandier, has recently come to consult Francis about his health. "Michel Sandier n'a plus que peu de temps à vivre, et il se sait perdu," (HD 25) reveals Francis. With his death so near at hand, he has one last wish: "Il demande à voir sa fille avant de mourir." (HD 27). Thus the last telling revelation is made: Edmée had not only committed adultery, but her daughter is the child of Michel and not of Claude.

This exposition is handled in such a way that the audience, at first mildly suspicious about the whole atmosphere of piety and calm in the Lemoyne family, becomes intrigued by the "secret" between Claude and Edmée, gradually senses the significance of this crisis in their lives, and finally discovers quite unexpectedly that the past is, as it were, brought to life again through the reappearance of Michel. There may be some justification in pointing to the rather fortunate coincidence whereby Claude is called upon to reflect on the past (and thus inform the audience) minutes before he learns of Michel's return, as well as the fact that Claude's brother conveniently happens to be a specialist in the very affliction from which Michel is dying: but these objections on purely realistic grounds are very unlikely to strike the spectator during a performance of the play.

The most significant development in the course of the first act concerns the audience's attitude to Claude. Unlike his wife, Claude seems totally at one with himself and with his religion. It is clear that Edmée's infidelity had, at the time, been a great shock to him, but it had also helped to make his religious faith more real and necessary. Before Edmée's infidelity, Claude had never really experienced anguish or despair: "L'épreuve, maman ... Avant ces terribles mois ce mot - là me semblait creux . Mais quand on a vécu ce que j'ai vécu..."

(HD 22). Since this moment, his faith had been brought alive, a faith which was no longer an abstract ideal but a deep, inner experience which had transformed his life. In pardoning his wife and in his unconditional trust in God, Claude's whole existence had taken on a new meaning: "Quand je songe à tout ce que ce pardon m'a apporté, à moi ... à cette paix intérieure ... ce sentiment d'une force qui veut avec vous, mais non pas à votre place ... C'est bien depuis ce jour-là que le monde s'est illuminé pour moi." (HD 22). Although Claude had ultimately achieved peace of mind, the path he had chosen to tread demanded great courage and humility, for the Christian ethic of forgiveness, far from providing an easy and convenient solution to the problem of infidelity, implies mutual recognition of the other's need, perseverance and strength of character. "Chacun a porté aussi la croix de l'autre," observes Claude, "chacun a saigné pour l'autre. Nous sommes comme enrichis - meilleurs, oui, meilleurs ..." (HD 23).

Nothing at this stage in Claude's attitude or words bely the profundity or authenticity of this experience. When, for example, he learns of the return of Michel Sandier and of his desire to see Osmonde, it is totally consistent with Claude's Christian outlook on life that he should see this unexpected situation as "une épreuve qui se présente à moi" (HD 28). Contrary to Francis' exhortations, Claude feels that Edmée must also be informed of Michel's return. Again, there is absolute consistency in his claim ~~that~~ to hide the truth from Edmée would be to betray the very confidence and trust which they have established in their relationship. On the other hand, we cannot help feeling that Claude's picture of Edmée does not quite fit the figure we have seen in previous scenes, and that Edmée's pious existence is not really, as Claude thinks, an indication of her transformation. In this respect, we sense that

Francis, practical and down-to-earth, is much nearer the truth. "C'est cette vie exemplaire, oui, c'est cette austérité, cette régularité qui m'inquiètent," he observes to Claude. "Tout cela, je ne sais pas, moi, c'est une espèce de sommeil. Il me semble quelquefois que ta femme dort sa vie." (HD 29).

A confrontation between Claude and Edmée, a renewed examination of the past, and the revelation of Michel's request to see Osmonde bring the first act to a highly dramatic conclusion, while at the same time awakening fresh doubts in the minds of the audience. Edmée's attitude to her husband clearly belies the confidence he has in her. When Claude reflects once again on his reaction to the news of Edmée's infidelity and on the new-found hope which faith had given him, Edmée cynically suggests that Claude was really only concerned with his own salvation—a comment which passes unnoticed by Claude — and she scarcely conceals her irony when she concludes: "Je trouve tout ça merveilleux." (HD 35). But Edmée's attitude soon becomes one of anger and horror when she learns that Michel has returned and that Claude feels duty bound to let him see Osmonde. Claude's magnanimity and forgiveness, far from arousing his wife's admiration, horrify her in that they seem contrary to basic human emotions. How can her husband feel compassion for a man who had once made love to his wife? How can Claude forgive so readily and so easily? "Cette grandeur d'âme à bon marché me fait horreur," (HD 37) cries Edmée. The thin mask of piety which she has uneasily assumed, and of which seemingly only Claude had been a dupe, dissolves into a mean and spiteful attack on her husband. She sees the pardon which has transformed Claude's life as a convenient solution not only to the situation which then confronted the couple, but also to the serious doubts which Claude had previously experienced about his

calling in life. This, she believes, is the real explanation for his actions - a pardon motivated not by the love he felt for his wife, but by the necessity of finding the spiritual assurance which had temporarily disappeared from his life. Edmée is stung to the quick and humiliated to think that she as a person - and, above all, as a woman - counted little in Claude's reformed faith: "Si tu ne m'as pas pardonné parce que tu m'aimais, qu'est-ce que tu veux que j'en fasse de ton pardon?" (HD 37). As Edmée unashamedly breaks down - for the first time moving the audience to sympathise with her -, and as Claude stands baffled and shocked, so the act comes to a close, and we are left to reflect on the possible truth of Edmée's unsparing accusations.

The play is, at this point, centred around two immediate problems: the first concerns Claude - for unlike Edmée, Osmonde, Francis and Mme Lemoyne we feel there is something essential to an understanding of the minister which nonetheless escapes us - and the second concerns the consequences of a possible confrontation with Michel Sandier. Even before Claude and Edmée have had time to consider what action they will take as regards Michel, they learn that the latter has now decided to take the matter into his own hands by calling round to see the Lemoyne family. Once again Claude and Edmée are divided, the latter refusing categorically to admit Michel, while Claude continues to believe that his pardon and their reconciliation make no sense if they cannot now face the man who had once brought so much unhappiness into their life. Edmée expects her husband to react with all the pride and passion of a man, and not with the humility and sense of duty of a minister of God:

Edmée: Si tu crois que je ne devine pas ce que tu penses en ce moment! tu me méprises parce que je suis bouleversée.

Claude; à voix basse: Ma chérie, mais ta croix, je la porte avec toi.

Edmée: Claude, tu es mon mari, tu n'es pas un prêtre.

Claude, de même: Ce qui nous arrive là est valu; cela ne peut pas être ... un accident. Edmée, cette épreuve ...

Edmée: Toujours cet horrible mot!

Claude: Nous devons la vivre en chrétiens.

Edmée: Tu n'as pas de quoi la vivre en homme! (HD 44).

Is Claude merely reciting the duties of a Christian as a child mechanically recites the maxims and precepts which it has been taught? Is Claude dominated by the idea of duty, rather than by a duty which he experiences as an essential part of his faith? Is there a divorce between the man and the minister? These are the questions which the audience begins to ask with increasing frequency, but without ever being sure where the truth lies. The note of tension and expectancy quickens considerably when Osmonde comes in to say that a visitor is waiting to see them, and moments later Michel Sandier enters. The real significance of Michel's reappearance is that, for the first time, Edmée, whose role up to this point has been that of an accuser, finds that it is her turn to be accused. Claude's pardon has been questioned by Edmée; now Edmée's avowal of infidelity is questioned by Michel. In being forced to see her relationship with Michel through Michel's eyes, Edmée suddenly begins to see the past in a much less certain and reassuring light. Michel had asked Edmée to leave her husband, but Edmée had chosen instead to tell Claude the truth and thus end her affair with Michel. An act of integrity and courage, or of cowardice and fear? Michel sees her decision as a weak refusal to break with established moral values, and as a sign of resignation to a life which, although uninspiring, offered safety and security:

Michel: La façon dont vous aviez été révéler notre liaison à votre mari, et ensuite ce lâche besoin de replâtrage ...

Edmée: Pourquoi lâche? Il y avait un risque.

Michel: Il n'y en avait aucun, et vous le saviez. Je me rappelle ce que vous disiez de votre mari. Non, vous avez tout mis en balance et vous avez estimé que le confort moral, la sécurité, la paix de l'âme, que sais-je ... (HD 54).

The only real risk was the risk that Edmée refused to take - to leave Claude for Michel. Instead, she chose "le chemin le plus facile, celui de l'aveu" (HD 55) . But the thought which really torments Edmée is that, in breaking off her relationship with Michel, she became partially responsible for the desperate and dissolute life which he went on to lead. "J'en ai usé si largement, de cette liberté que vous m'aviez rendue," declares Michel, " ... eh bien, que j'en meurs, voilà, c'est très simple." (HD 54). Edmée's conscience is pricked and her agitation betrays an increasing feeling of guilt: "Quand je vais me retrouver seule avec cette idée-là, mais ce sera affreux." (HD 55). But Michel refuses to absolve Edmée from any blame and leaves her with the reminder of how different their lives could have been if she had acted differently: "Mais enfin, si vous aviez eu un peu plus de cran et un peu moins de vertu, eh bien, à nous deux nous aurions peut-être pu avoir une vie , tandis que, dame! après votre confession ... vous, je suppose que vous vous êtes endormie ... et moi j'ai roulé." (HD 56).

Edmée, left to reflect on Michel's words, reacts in a bitter and cowardly fashion by turning on her husband. Michel was probably right to suggest that Edmée counted on Claude's forgiveness and understanding almost as a matter of course, and Edmée tries to blame and belittle her husband because of it:

Edmée: Au fond, ce soir-là, je ne t'ai pas parlé comme à mon mari.

Claude: Edmée!

Edmée: C'est la cause de tout. Si tu avais été mon mari, si tu m'avais aimée comme on aime sa femme, avec le meilleur et le pire de soi ...

Claude: Le pire de soi?

Edmee: Tu sais bien que je ne t'aurais pas trahi. (HD 60-1).

Edmée's continual questioning of Claude's acts has gradually induced doubt and uncertainty into Claude's mind. We feel profound sympathy for him as he seeks desperately for reassurance, but meets only with hatred and bitterness. Edmée is burning with revenge because her pride has been hurt and her conscience awakened: Claude is to be her prey, and he is pursued mercilessly. She accuses Claude of being not a man, but a spineless minister of God, and his pardon is now seen as "une occasion aussi merveilleuse de déployer (s)es dons évangéliques" (HD 61). For the first time Claude visibly wilts and, as he turns angrily on Edmée, so we realise the effect of her constant disparagement of his beliefs and acts:

Claude, il s'est dressé, blême: Tais-toi.

Edmee: Ah! tu vois clair.

Claude: Tais-toi: tu me détruis. (HD 61).

The second act, like the first, thus closes on a note of high drama. Henceforth Claude's self-examination induces in him increasing doubt and despair. The confrontation with Michel has already left Edmée beset by anguish and remorse, but Claude refuses to dismiss the last twenty years of his life as a hypocritical façade. Nevertheless, in the ensuing scenes, Claude's gestures and tone of voice betray his growing agitation. Recognising his own inadequacy to evaluate his past acts, and recoiling from Edmée's bitter attacks, Claude turns for self-assurance to his brother; but Francis can do no more than affirm that Claude's pardon seems consistent with his character and religious beliefs. The

doubt still remains in Claude's mind - and, indeed, in ours - as to whether he acted charitably, by sharing in Edmée's misery, or selfishly, by considering his own "salvation". When he tries to refute Edmée's accusations and triumphantly assert the value and sincerity of his acts - "Il n'y a pas de banqueroute; quelles qu' aient pu être mes faiblesses, je suis ce que j'ai cru être." (HD 67) - his words on this occasion carry very little conviction, and Claude himself is certainly not consoled by such a hollow assertion. Not only does his relationship with Edmée seem to be breaking up, but he now discovers Osmonde's increasing frustration with the life she has been leading and her desire to start a new life with Mégal and his two children. Claude is thus made aware of his failure both as a husband and as a father. "Je n'aurai rien transmis," he bitterly observes to Osmonde, "je n'aurai préservé personne, je me demande pourquoi j'ai vécu." (HD 75). It is at this moment that Claude reveals to Osmonde that he is not her real father. Osmonde at first assumes that he has only just discovered the truth about Michel Sandier, and Claude is too weak to disabuse her, sensing that his pardon would arouse Osmonde's scorn and alienate her even further from him. Finally Claude turns to his mother and denounces her part in making of him "le raté que je suis" (HD 91). Mme Lemoyne has come to tell Claude that there is every chance of his shortly being appointed to "une grande paroisse de la rive droite ... Chaillot" (HD 79); her undisguised pride and joy contrast markedly with Claude's sombre preoccupations and accentuate the heavy irony of the situation. Claude feels that he can no longer tolerate the image which his mother has erected around him, the image of an eloquent and inspiring preacher, and a model of generosity and kindness. He bitterly recognises the influence his mother had on the lives of her children with her pre-established list of "noble" professions;

in pride of place, minister, because of the family tradition, followed by teacher "parce qu'on forme des âmes" (HD 81), and finally doctor "parce qu'on est encore au service de l'humanité" (HD 81). Claude recalls his mother's pride when she first noticed his interest in theology and her disappointment when he first experienced doubts about his vocation. The whole atmosphere of Claude's formative years imposed on him a certain idea of life which may have been alien to his true nature. "Non, vois-tu, ce n'est tout de même pas complètement ma faute si j'ai fait faillite," he declares. "Ce mot t'étonne, c'est pourtant la stricte vérité. J'ai vécu sur de l'argent qui ne m'appartenait pas. Toujours à crédit." (HD 82). Claude sees himself as the mere product of his upbringing, and, for the first time, he renounces all belief in himself: "Je ne suis rien, je ne suis rien." (HD 82). The edifice built up during the last twenty years of his life is now beginning to crumble around him, but after the angry scenes with Edmée, Claude feels nothing but emptiness and helpless resignation. "Ah! oui, vous pouvez me regarder ...," he says to Edmée and Mme Lemoyne, "je suis votre oeuvre." (HD 83).

It is during the final act that the audience's reaction to Claude momentarily ceases to be one of sympathy. He is forced to acknowledge that he had lied to Osmonde about the circumstances of Edmée's adultery and, at the mere mention of Michel Sandier, he adopts an uncharacteristically aggressive attitude. Edmée's contemptuous insinuations that Claude was perhaps a Christian, but certainly not a man, have released in him a flood of violent and spiteful emotions. But Claude's reaction, far from "humanising" him, is degrading and obnoxious. "Jeter quelqu'un dehors ... taper dessus," he cries. "Voilà où j'en suis. Moi. C'est comme si j'avais bu de l'alcool..." (HD 92). And when Osmonde announces her intention of leaving home to devote herself entirely to Mégal's children,

Claude becomes harsh and intolerant. It is Osmonde's turn to denounce her upbringing but, unlike her father, she has not left her revolt until it is too late. Claude bitterly realises that, with Osmonde gone, "il ne (lui) restera rien" (HD 97).

Claude and Edmée are left to reflect on the events and circumstances of their early married life. Was the earnest and inspired look which had once so fascinated Edmée the mark of genuine religious fervour or the sign of self-delusion? "C'est sur la foi d'un regard ou d'une intonation que tu as engagé ta vie," says Claude. "Un regard qui promettait ... quoi? cette promesse mystérieuse n'a pas été tenue, et voilà toute l'histoire de notre vie commune ..." (HD 100). Had Claude really felt in communion with God or was he merely the victim of "une exaltation menteuse" (HD 101)? And is Edmée really as mean, cowardly and calculating as Michel has suggested? Both Claude and Edmée realise that the questions which have poisoned the last days of their life together cannot be answered with any assurance or certainty. Edmée had presented an image of Claude which probably owed more to her jealousy than to her lucidity. She thought she had revealed the truth, but she can no longer be sure: "Là où il y avait un plancher, il y a un gouffre." (HD 65). The past is as hazy and impenetrable as the future is open and undecided. Claude cannot rest until he knows his true self, but he also senses the impossibility of ever finding a satisfactory answer: "Quand je cherche à me saisir, je m'échappe à moi-même." (HD 101).

If the question of human identity is ultimately unanswerable, then man seems condemned to eternal frustration, anguish and doubt. Is not death, therefore, a merciful alternative to impossible self-knowledge? Claude is clearly preoccupied by this dilemma. "Être connu tel qu'on est....," he says to Edmée, "ou alors dormir." (HD 101). Thus Claude's

journey of self-inquiry leads him to consider what ~~was~~ Camus has called the only worthwhile philosophical question - that of suicide.²⁹ But Claude is suddenly reminded that he is responsible not only to himself, but to all those members of his parish who not only look up to him as a man of great virtue, but who also depend on him for the confidence in life which he inspires in them. "Voilà ... voilà pour qui il va falloir vivre à présent," (HD 104) observes Edmée, while Claude turns to his wife and thoughtfully repeats: "Etre connu tel qu'on est ..." (HD 104). The interrogative tone of the play is thus maintained to the end and the implications of Claude's final remark, which could be seen by the reader as a gesture of despair - suggesting suicide as the only valid answer - , of hope - suggesting refound faith and confidence in life - , or of resignation to a hypocritical and meaningless existence, will for the spectator depend largely on the interpretation of the producer. Thus we find a far more optimistic and hopeful ending in Jean Deschamps' production of the play in 1951 compared to the original production in 1949.

The movement towards an acute crisis of self-doubt in the life of Claude and Edmée is paralleled by Osmondé's increasing unhappiness and revolt. It had been clear from the outset that Osmonde had very little affection for her mother - not because she initially felt no affection, but because Edmée's attitude had stifled it. "Maman, c'est quelqu'un qui ne vous aide jamais," she says to Claude. "D'abord elle juge tellement tout ce qu'on dit, tout ce qu'on fait; et moi ça me paralyse, mais à un point..." (HD 39). We recognise in Edmée's continual supervision and

29. See Le Mythe de Sisyphe in Essais, p. 99.

judgement of others a trait which was very prominent in Aline. The difference is that Osmonde is a much stronger and more independent person than was Mireille. Osmonde feels far closer to Claude, but even here her trust and affection have been undermined by Claude's preoccupation with his duties as minister. As a result, Osmonde has felt increasingly unimportant, the intimacy of her relationship with her father gradually being reduced to a mechanical and professional tête-à-tête. "Tu as trop d'obligations, papa...", she observes. "Sentir qu'on n'est qu'un numéro entre la fille mère de la rue de l'Ouest et la paralytique de l'avenue du Maine ..." (HD 41). Despite her religious upbringing, Osmonde feels more conscious of the emptiness and futility of life than of its richness and beauty: "Oui, pour toi la vie, n'est-ce pas? c'est un cadeau de Dieu, quelque chose de grand, de magnifique; la vie! quand tu dis ce mot-là ta voix tremble. Et moi, au contraire, ça me paraît dérisoire, insignifiant." (HD 40). Moreover, Osmonde's accusations merely seem to confirm what Claude himself is beginning to fear - namely that his words and acts, devoid of real faith, conform only outwardly to a Christian way of life, with the result that his ministerial duties have become little more than a professional obligation. Osmonde has dutifully carried out all the charitable tasks that were expected of her without ever really understanding the value of such sacrifices or feeling the necessity for them. Momentarily ashamed by her outburst when she is deceived into thinking that, unbeknown to her, Claude has recently been living with the knowledge of his wife's infidelity, Osmonde finally discovers the truth and denounces the imposture of the life she has been expected to lead. She sees her father's faith as a filter impermeable to all that is real and natural, so that one is left with a totally abstract and unreal vision of life. "C'est peut-être que j'ai trop entendu parler³⁰

30. Un Homme de Dieu, Paris, La Table ronde, 1950, p. 183 reads "pérorer".

autour de moi sur nos devoirs, sur notre dette envers Dieu," (HD 97) she declares. A religion that stifles life instead of transforming or rejuvenating it, and which is built on precepts and words rather than on insight and experience brings disillusionment and revolt: "Je crois que si ce n'était pas une sorte de routine même pour toi, si j'avais eu près de moi quelqu'un qui vécût dans la terreur ou dans l'éblouissement ... Mais une religion comme la tienne, en somme, ça ne change rien à rien. C'est une toile de fond, rien de plus." (HD 97).

Alienated from the Christian values upheld by her father, Osmonde is thrown back on a morality of spontaneous, affective choices. "Ce que j'appelle voir clair en moi," she explains to Claude, "c'est savoir ce que moi je trouve bien, ce que moi je trouve mal." (HD 73). She is attracted to Mégal because she recognises in his feelings for her something real and sincere: he sees Osmonde as a pleasant and physically attractive young woman, and not as a model of Christian charity and piety. Thus Osmonde turns away from "une existence sur rail" (HD 74) to a life of freedom and independence. Osmonde knows that she has reached a critical and decisive point in her existence - "Je t'accorde que je suis au bord ... d'un précipice," (HD 74) she admits to Claude - but, after discovering that her father had lied to her, she decides that she can no longer accept a falsely pious and uneventful life at home at the expense of a franker, albeit more uncertain life with Mégal. Unlike her parents, Osmonde does not shrink from acting in accordance with her feelings, nor is she influenced by considerations of security or of public opinion. She represents a generation of revolt, but also of courage and sincerity.

It may be surprising to find in so sombre a play comic elements

bordering on pure farce. P; Lagarde found such elements out of place and likely to disturb the overall tone of the play³¹, whereas for T. Maulnier "les interventions comiques d'un jeune pensionnaire inopportun aux moments les plus dramatiques sont très habilement amenées pour accroître encore la tension"³². Whether such comic interludes, limited to the brief appearances of Fred in the third and fourth acts, accentuate or diminish the theatrical effect would seem to be very much a question of personal taste, but such elements are certainly not inserted haphazardly. We first learn of Fred's arrival through Edmée who tells Francis that he is trying to get his bath-tub into his room. "Oui, c'est sa grosse préoccupation du moment," (HD 65) she wryly observes. Indeed, Fred's concern with trivial, down-to-earth questions contrasts ironically with the sombre preoccupations of Claude and Edmée. When Fred reappears in the final act, he interrupts a heated confrontation between Edmée and Osmonde, at a point where Edmée is close to breaking down, to announce that he would rather not have spinach for dinner as it is likely to upset his stomach. He then returns moments later to remind Osmonde that "si on a par hasard la bonté de me faire un oeuf, il vaudra peut-être mieux qu'il ne soit pas à la coque" (HD 89). The full irony of Fred's situation becomes particularly apparent at the moment when he confides to Osmonde that he has "énormément de foi, énormément" (HD 90) for, as J. Chenu observes, what at first sight may seem to be an almost endearing expression of faith is, in fact, totally ridiculous in the context in which it is made "parce que cette foi énorme est affirmée bêtement devant des gens

31. Libération, 30.5.1949 .

32. Article in La Bataille. Extracts reproduced in France Illustration. Supplément théâtral et littéraire, no. 46, 12.II.1949.

dont l'existence est ravagée par le problème de la foi"³³.

It would be quite wrong to see in Un Homme de Dieu a fierce attack on religion or, more particularly, on Protestantism. Nevertheless, Marcel recalls that it was for this very reason that Pierre Fresnay decided not to accept the part of Claude, and G. Joly's review of the play when it opened in Paris lent further weight to this misunderstanding. "Je doute fort que M. Gabriel Marcel trouve audience à Genève ou à Lausanne," he reported.³⁴ In another review F. le Grix claimed that the play presented a very sombre picture of religious faith since it implied not that the believer may sometimes be deceived as to the true motives of his act, but that he cannot avoid being deceived. "Langage assurément fait pour jeter la suspicion sur la qualité et, si j'ose dire, la valeur de bienfaisance de la plupart des croyances religieuses," he writes. "Bien qu'il proteste là contre, on peut supposer sans témérité que M. Gabriel Marcel ne tiendrait plus tout à fait le même langage aujourd'hui, je veux dire ne réécrirait plus sa pièce tout à fait dans le même ton."³⁵ There are several remarks to be made in answer to these objections. First of all, it should be remembered that long before Marcel felt called upon to dismiss the misconceptions to which Un Homme de Dieu had given rise, the play had been reviewed by François Mauriac who quite rightly saw that the butt of Marcel's criticism was not Christianity but Pharisaism³⁶. Secondly, as far as the anti-Protestant charge is concerned,

33. Le théâtre de Gabriel Marcel et sa signification métaphysique, p. 215.

34. L'Aurore, 30.5.1949.

35. "Spectacles d'un temps. A propos de Un Homme de Dieu pièce de M. Gabriel Marcel." in Écrits de Paris, no. 65, mars, 1950, p. 150.

36. "Un Homme de Dieu, par Gabriel Marcel" in La Revue hebdomadaire, vol. 7, juillet, 1925, pp. 235-9.

it should be pointed out that the play had great success in countries like England and Germany which are not predominantly Catholic, while Marcel himself reminds us that it was once performed at Coburg "devant une assemblée de théologiens protestants, au cours d'une Semaine protestante du théâtre, et sans éveiller chez eux l'ombre d'une objection"³⁷. Finally, F. le Grix's suggestion that Marcel's treatment of the basic subject of Un Homme de Dieu reflects the sombreness of his outlook prior to his conversion to Catholicism and is therefore unrepresentative of his outlook in 1950 is very misleading. F. le Grix completely overlooks the fact, that, only a few years after his conversion, Marcel wrote Le Chemin de crête, a play which he considers to be essential to an understanding of his theatre as a whole and which, in theme and tone, closely resembles Un Homme de Dieu. In fact, there is no reason at all to imagine that, rewriting the play in 1950, Marcel would in any significant way attenuate or modify his treatment of Claude's self-interrogation. Nor is there any question of Marcel undermining the value of religion or of religious faith; the play leads us to reflect not on Claude's ministerial duties and the value or authenticity of his pardon, but on his attempts to scrutinise and ascertain the motives of such an act.

As G. Neveux points out, the drama of Claude and Edmée is not that they see through the inauthenticity of their past, but that they are confronted with its impenetrability and ambiguity. "Ils ne sont ni entièrement les êtres courageux qu'ils se croyaient ni entièrement les lâches qu'ils se découvrent," he writes. "Ils sont ce que nous

37. En chemin, vers quel éveil?, p. 234.

sommes tous dès que nous portons sur nous-mêmes un jugement lucide, ils sont ambigus."³⁸ We have here a proposition which is central to Marcel's earlier reflections on the question of self-knowledge. Thus in 1918, three years before embarking on Un Homme de Dieu, Marcel had noted:

"Découvert ce matin une articulation capitale. Les questions auxquelles je puis répondre sont exclusivement celles qui portent sur un renseignement que je suis susceptible de donner (fût-ce sur moi-même). Ex: quelle est la capitale de l'Afghanistan? aimez-vous les haricots? Mais plus il s'agit de ce que je suis comme totalité (et non de ce que j'ai plus la réponse et la question même perdent toute signification; par ex: êtes-vous vertueux? même: êtes-vous courageux?"³⁹

As J. Chenu observes, such reflections point not to the impossibility of self-knowledge, but to a sphere of awareness which transcends the level of rational thought. Enclosed within the limits of reason and objectivity, the individual either reduces himself to a mathematical and scientific entity - "c'est réduire l'homme à l'inhumain, c'est en faire une chose"⁴⁰ - or recognises the inadequacy of his approach. Claude's despairing words "Etre connu tel qu'on est ..." (HD 104) which close the play are clearly a cry for help, an appeal which underlines man's inability to fully understand himself in purely rational terms. They should be seen not

38. Les Nouvelles littéraires, 2.6.1949.

39. Journal métaphysique, p. 152.

40. Le théâtre de Gabriel Marcel et sa signification métaphysique, p. 115.

as a hollow piece of rhetoric but as a gesture of profound humility and spontaneity which suggests that the way may be open for an authentic religious experience and for the rediscovery of a faith which, over the years, seems to have become more of an appearance than an inner reality⁴¹. This is the interpretation offered by J. Delhomme in her article on Un Homme de Dieu:

"Claude ... s'est trouvé seul, au fond d'un désespoir sans remède, pour lequel toute consolation est trompeuse; mais à ce point où il est arrivé, quand plus rien ne résiste, une foi sans mauvaise foi est peut-être possible; ne s'abritant plus derrière aucune expérience ou derrière aucune preuve, renonçant au confort des certitudes psychologiques ou rationnelles, pure des arrière-pensées et du goût des révélations, elle est l'appel, informulé et informulable, de celui qui sait, dans sa chair et dans son esprit, que tout est perdu."⁴²

Commenting on the situation with which Claude is confronted in the course of his lectures at Harvard, Marcel confirms this interpretation when observing: "Le seul recours reste pour lui la prière, l'invocation à Celui qui le connaît tel qu'il est, alors qu'eu cours de sa vie tâtonnante, il se sera toujours méconnu ou connu tel qu'il n'est pas."⁴³ We must, however, bear in mind that Marcel made this observation forty years after the play had been written. Although we have refuted the

41. Cf. Le théâtre de Gabriel Marcel et sa signification métaphysique, p. 117.

42. "Un Homme de Dieu", in La Table ronde, no. 24, décembre, 1949, p. 1952.

43. La Dignité humaine, p. 146.

suggestion that Marcel would have significantly modified the tone of his play, were he to have rewritten it in 1950, it is quite clear that, as a result of his conversion, Marcel sees Claude's cry for help at the end of the play in a slightly different light. There is no reason at all why the final words "Être connu tel qu'on est ..." (HD 104) should be changed; but, whereas in 1922 Marcel did not understand fully the implications of this plea, his own personal experience of Christian faith later clarified for him the seemingly insoluble question of self-knowledge. In other words, Marcel's conversion, does not lead him to question the essential ambiguity of Claude's identity, but it does enable him to see the possibility of such an ambiguity providing the spring-board for an appeal to God, and for an authentic experience of religious faith.

The reaction of Jean Deschamps who was involved in the two major productions of Un Homme de Dieu, first at the Théâtre de l'Oeuvre in 1949 and then at the Théâtre de Rochefort in 1951, is particularly significant in this respect. In the first production, the attitude and gestures of Claude and Edmée in the final scene after the exit of Mlle Aubonneau and her nephew, indicated a feeling of almost total helplessness and despair. The two short reflections which end the play⁴⁴ were uttered by the two actors "effondrés dans un fauteuil, chacun à un bout de la

44. Edmée: Voilà ... voilà pour qui il va falloir vivre à présent.

Claude; perdu dans ses pensées: Être connu tel qu'on est... (HD 104).

scène"⁴⁵. That such an interpretation is not unacceptable is certainly confirmed by the fact that Marcel did not initially object to François Darbon's production of the play at the Théâtre de l'Oeuvre. Jean Deschamps, however, who had played the part of Michel Sandier in this production, felt that the conclusion should not have been presented in so stark and sombre a manner. In his own production of the play in which he played the part of Claude, he introduced a different and more hopeful interpretation of the final exchanges:

"Dans ma nouvelle mise en scène, le pasteur se lève, met son bras sur l'épaule de sa femme. Celle-ci dit sa réplique avec une résignation confiante. Et le pasteur s'adressant à Dieu: 'Etre connu tel qu'on est ...' Avec la foi! On sent que ce couple, après l'épreuve, commence la remontée et qu'ils sont partis vers une nouvelle vie..."⁴⁶

Marcel declared himself to be in total agreement with Jean Deschamps' new production, and his later reflections on the play do in fact suggest that this production offers a more complete interpretation of Un Homme de Dieu than that of François Darbon since it interprets the play not as an isolated and unrelated phenomenon but within the context of Marcel's work as a whole.

From a structural point of view Un Homme de Dieu is centred around Claude Lemoyne, reflecting his agonising journey of doubt and despair which culminates in the final gleam of hope. In the first act, Claude is calm and assured, but Edmée's accusations have already begun to sow the seeds of uncertainty in his mind as well as arousing the audience's suspicion. The second and third acts show the gradual disintegration of

45. "Un Homme de Dieu n'est pas une pièce désespérée nous dit Gabriel Marcel" in Opéra, 28.3.1951.

46. Ibid.

Claude, his increasing agitation and sense of failure. In the final act, Claude finds himself totally abandoned and momentarily fascinated by the possibility of suicide as a release from his misery and confusion - but the way is also open for a return to God. For Edmée and Osmonde, too, the movement is from apparent stability and security to a crisis on which their whole future depends. All three characters are thus left "au bord ... d'un précipice" (HD 74). Edmée's doubts about her "aveu" are mirrored by Claude's doubts about his pardon, and their drama is paralleled by that of Osmonde. Finally the comic element accentuates the sombre tone of the play while, at the same time, ironically contrasting the youthful and idealistic effusions of Fred with Claude's bitter experiences.

Not all the critics hailed Un Homme de Dieu as a masterpiece of dramatic art, but few denied that it was a play of high quality - and, above all, the work of a dramatist, not a philosopher. "D'un bout à l'autre des quatre actes de Un Homme de Dieu, c'est l'homme de théâtre qui l'emporte nettement sur l'essayiste ...," commented B. Simiot⁴⁷, while for T. Maulnier "jamais le professeur de philosophie ne prend le pas sur le dramaturge, sur le peintre, assez cruellement satirique, des sentiments et des moeurs"⁴⁸. The confrontations between Claude and Edmée provide moments of great psychological intensity, while the unexpected return of Michel Sandier introduces an element of tension and suspense.

47. "Un Homme de Dieu par M. Gabriel Marcel" in Hommes et Mondes, no. 37, août, 1949, p. 703.

48. France Illustration. Supplément théâtral et littéraire, no. 46, 12.11.1949.

In general, the dialogue is sharp and incisive, each new scene unveiling hidden emotions or awakening fresh doubts. The action, although purely psychological, far from being heavy or static, is constantly changing and evolving, and the audience's attention is held throughout from Claude's first appearance to his final dramatic plea. "Forte, riche, vigoureusement conduite jusqu'à son terme, la pièce de M. Gabriel Marcel nous apparaît sans indulgence, dure, implacable même," writes T. Maulnier: "pas une minute ne s'affaiblit l'intensité d'une action tout intérieure, où le déroulement même de la situation oblige les personnages à une prise de conscience progressive de plus en plus angoissée."⁴⁹ Secondary figures like the obnoxiously interfering Mme Lemoyne and the cynical but deep-suffering Michel are not treated in the same depth as Claude or Edmée, for example, but they are carefully delineated, and the play thus provides a rich and varied tableau of characters and generations. Moreover, far from being a simple family drama, the subject of Un Homme de Dieu leads us to a question of very deep significance, the whole drama of Claude's pardon reflecting the impossibility of establishing one's identity by self-interrogation.

The family conflict presented in both La Chapelle ardente and Un Homme de Dieu takes place on two levels. First of all, there is the total lack of trust and understanding between the husband and wife, the difference between the two plays being that Octave and Aline are finally irrevocably separated whereas the rift between Claude and Edmée may have led to renewed confidence in each other. Secondly, there is an important conflict of generations, between Aline and Mireille in La Chapelle

49. France Illustration. Supplément théâtral et littéraire, no. 46, 12.11.1949.

ardente and between Claude and Osmonde in Un Homme de Dieu. Marcel's depiction of the bitter, jealous factions and of the uneasy, fragile relationships within a family is by no means limited to these two plays: there is a very similar background not only to the majority of his early dramatic works, but also to most of those written after 1929 (the date of Marcel's conversion). The theme of ambiguity, central to Marcel's existential vision of man's situation in the world, is also prominent in both La Chapelle ardente and Un Homme de Dieu as well as in many of his other plays. We can accept the reality of Aline's grief and suffering, and of Ariane Leprieur's sickness in Le Chemin de crête, and we are aware of the destructive effect which it has had on each of the two characters as well as on those closest to them, but we cannot with any certainty evaluate the exact nature of Aline's motives and actions, any more than we can establish the real identity of Ariane. Similarly our efforts to seize and objectify our past actions, as Claude realises and as Antoine and Sylvie in L'Émissaire⁵⁰ will later discover, are certain to be frustrated, and emphasise further the irreducibility of the individual's identity to clear-cut, rational or scientific formulae. In short, there can never be any kind of objective self-knowledge.

The overall tone of La Chapelle ardente and Un Homme de Dieu is sombre and the questions they raise cannot be lightly dismissed as unreal or unimportant, nor can they be easily resolved. Aline's fidelity to Raymond and Claude's adoption of the Christian faith have led to the disintegration of the family and to the collapse of those relationships which we normally expect to be the most durable and enriching. In fact,

50. In Le secret est dans les îles.

both plays evoke a very powerful feeling of discord and solitude, and in La Chapelle ardente at least, there is certainly no hint of any release into a world of harmony and communion. Claude's final plea does, however, suggest the possibility of such a release or liberation and in this respect it prepares the way for the experience of spiritual peace and assurance which characterises most of Marcel's later works. That there is not an abrupt transition from the plays written before 1929 to those written after Marcel's conversion is also underlined by the evidence of early works like Le Quatuor en fa dièse⁵¹ and L'Iconoclaste, both of which were begun during the First World War. In the first of these plays, it is in listening to a quatuor composed by her previous husband that Claire glimpses a level of reality far beyond the torn and divided world in which we seem to have been enclosed, while in L'Iconoclaste Abel finally realises that only by recognising the fundamental mystery of life can we attain a true understanding of human existence. These fleeting visions of another world suggest, albeit imprecisely, the possibility of attaining a richer and deeper level of experience than that which the individual has hitherto enjoyed. With the publication of Le Monde cassé in 1933 there is, for the first time in Marcel's theatre, a clear and explicit indication of such an experience.

51. Paris, Plon, 1925.

CHAPTER 3

The middle period: spiritual communion and truth

Le Monde cassé¹ is undoubtedly one of Marcel's most important plays, constituting a turning point in the whole development of his theatre. It reflects not only the possibility of peace and communion through faith, but also the author's increasing preoccupation with the outside world. In La Chapelle ardente and Un Homme de Dieu, the drama remains firmly enclosed within the walls of the Fortier or the Lemoyne family, but in Le Monde cassé, the personal drama of Christiane Chesnay's life mirrors the precarious and uneasy state of the society to which she belongs. At first sight, it may seem that the society depicted by Marcel is so restricted both in the class of people who belong to it and in the age which it reflects as to have little interest for the modern spectator. It is clear that people like the Chesnays lead a sophisticated and materially comfortable existence, while the tastes of the time - in particular, the evocation of the jazz age - belong to the 1930s. But in fact this society does not seem at all remote and distant in the present age; indeed, many interesting comparisons can be drawn between the two eras, and the "broken world" first evoked by Marcel in 1933 seems to have almost prophetic resonance forty years later. The veneration of jazz musicians and of jazz as a source of liberation and of self-expression is not dissimilar to the respect accorded to modern pop groups and to the belief in the salutary effect of their music. For people like Christiane, Denise and Gilbert, social life has become synonymous with fashionable soirées or dances, and the

1. All textual references are taken from Cinq pièces majeures, Paris, Plon, 1973, pp. 109-216 and will be incorporated in the thesis in the following abbreviated form: (MC ..) . Eg. (MC 109) = Le Monde cassé in Cinq pièces majeures, p. 109.

transition is easily made to the world of parties and discotheques. Finally, there is in the character of Bertrand a forerunner of the modern youth for whom the pursuit of happiness passes through sex and drugs.

Although it is interesting to make such comparisons, it is clear that the details are not important in themselves. What really matters is the situation which they reflect - namely the feverish attempts to find through pleasurable distractions contentment or peace of mind. Here Marcel touches on the theme of "divertissement" which is certainly not new in French literature or philosophy. Pascal, for example, underlined that "tout le malheur des hommes vient d'une seule chose, qui est de ne savoir pas demeurer en repos, dans une chambre"². He saw that those who were unable to come to terms with themselves and with the misery of the human condition sought an escape either at the Court or by enrolling in the army. Marcel, too, recognises that if society in the twentieth century accords so much importance to distractions it is because the individual needs to shut his eyes to the basic emptiness of his existence. In his ^{lecture} ~~conference~~ on the "mystère familial", for example, in 1942, Marcel observed:

"A l'origine de la distraction, de la volonté de distraction à tout prix, il y a une fuite; mais devant quoi? Ce ne peut être que devant soi-même. Le moi est sans doute placé devant ce dilemme: s'accomplir ou se fuir.

2. Pensées, Paris, Garnier, 1964, no. 139, p. 109.

Là où il ne s'accomplit pas, il ne peut que s'éprouver lui-même comme un vide béant, insupportable, et dont il lui faut se protéger à tout prix."³

Thus the attempts to secure peace of mind through "divertissement" are destined to fail. Self-fulfilment can only be achieved in facing the reality of one's existence, and not in trying to flee from it. Distractions offer, at best, only a transitory release from a feeling of emptiness and despair. Thus Christiane remarks rather sadly to Denise that she is "ce qu'on appelle une femme occupée" (MC 122), for to be outwardly busy and active is merely an appearance which often conceals some inner agitation or disquiet.

The atmosphere of Christiane's "broken world" is made immediately apparent to the audience in the opening scenes of the play. When the play begins, Laurent, Christiane's husband, is sitting in an armchair smoking quietly, and Christiane who has just returned from a brief holiday in Biarritz is speaking over the phone to her son's nurse. She has barely had time to discuss Claude's latest indisposition with her husband when she is interrupted by a phone call from Henri who is keen to hear all about Christiane's holiday. Significantly, all that Henri seems interested in, and all that Christiane can call to mind are some very banal details about the hotel and about some of the people she had met: "Qui cela? la petite de Brucourt? Oui, elle était là-bas. Gentille, certainement. Elle ne danse pas bien, enfin je ne trouve pas ..." (MC 110-1). Another brief conversation with Laurent ensues before they are again interrupted by a phone call, this time from a Russian

3. Homo viator, Paris, Aubier, 1963 (new edition), p. 108.

jazz musician with whom Christiane had become acquainted while she was at Biarritz. These sudden staccato-like interruptions are merely a prelude to a rush of visitors. Christiane clearly has little time at all to spend quietly with her husband, for she is soon welcoming her father and Denise, and a little later she is visited by two of her many male admirers: first by Henri and then by Gilbert. The tone of the conversation is exceedingly frivolous, the only details worthy of interest seeming to be the number of "conquests" made by Christiane while she was at Biarritz.

The life thus evoked is busy, hectic and disordered, while the interests and values of people like Denise and Gilbert are very superficial. There is, however, a difference in the reaction of Christiane and Denise or of Henri and Gilbert; all four lead the same kind of life, but only Christiane and, to a lesser extent, Henri, are aware of its basic emptiness. This awareness clearly implies recognition of the fact that, in the words of Rimbaud, "la vraie vie est absente"⁴, whereas for somebody like Gilbert who is apparently at one with the life he is leading, there is no feeling of unease, nor any realisation that the world to which he belongs is in any way empty or shallow. For an outside observer, however, it is difficult not to share Christiane's view that she and her friends live "si ça peut s'appeler vivre ... dans un monde cassé" (MC 121).

There are two important aspects of the milieu presented in Le Monde cassé: the first throws into light the fragile and superficial nature of the inter-personal relationships, and the second reflects the

4. Oeuvres complètes, Paris, Gallimard, bibliothèque de la Fléiade, 1954, p. 229.

shallowness of the moral and intellectual values. For those already acquainted with Marcel's previous plays, the almost total absence of balanced and harmonious relationships will come as no real surprise; the difference here is that the breakdown in communication affects not just one small family unit, but seemingly society as a whole. When Gilbert, noticing Henri's dislike for Proust and his own aversion to dancing, observes to Christiane: "Vous ne trouvez pas que c'est effrayant? Qu'on communique si peu ..." (MC 129-30), he does, in fact, albeit unwittingly, strike on a profound truth as far as the society to which he belongs is concerned. This failure to communicate with the other is particularly evident in the very relationships which should be the most solid - namely those between husband and wife. The two central figures, Laurent and Christiane Chesnay, have been married for about twelve years, but it is soon apparent that their life together has become little more than an uneasy co-existence. As a result, Christiane tries to escape from the barrenness of her relationship with Laurent by leading a gay social life and by surrounding herself with numerous male admirers. She does, however, remain faithful to her husband, whereas her close friend Denise, who is married with a small child, has been having an affair for some time. Both she and her husband openly recognise the failure of their marriage but are temporarily kept together for the sake of their child. There is also Christiane's father, Augsburg, a widower who is feeling increasingly lonely and insecure in his old age, but who finds that he is not rich enough to keep the lady whom he had intended to marry. Finally, the relationship between Antonov and Natalia reflects, on a comic level, the same lack of sympathy, respect and understanding between individuals, and the failure to treat the other except in function of one's own interests.

A casual remark made by Denise to Christiane suggests why such relationships have broken down so easily. Christiane recalls Gilbert's rather obvious attempts to make advances to her after the car in which they were travelling conveniently had seven or eight punctures during their return to the hotel at Biarritz. Denise is amazed to think that Christiane could have resisted Gilbert's advances. Her attitude is simplistic and dangerous, for she reduces human beings and personal relationships to a purely affective level, never stopping to consider if a relationship is not something more than a spontaneous, irresistible attraction, or if each individual is not infinitely more complex than a mere parcel of impulses and desires:

Denise: Tout de même ... il est charmant ... non?

Christiane: Je ne dis pas le contraire.

Denise: Tu n'es pas très sincère avec toi-même.

Christiane: Eh bien, je crois que si.

Denise: C'est un garçon auquel il me semble que je n'aurais pas résisté. Si gai, si simple ...

Christiane: Personne n'est simple.

Denise: Tout le monde est simple. La complication, c'est du décor, du trompe-l'œil pour soi et pour les autres. (MC 121).

It is inevitable that Denise should think merely in terms of adapting to each new situation. "Que veux-tu? il faut s'adapter," she observes to Christiane. "Nous en sommes toutes là." (MC 120). Her attitude justifies the most transitory whims and desires, and thus precludes any possibility of fidelity or trust, both of which presuppose stability and duration. Reflecting on the insecurity of Denise's relationship with Bertrand, and on the ease with which people pass from one relationship to another, Christiane sadly remarks to Henri:

"Quel carambolage!" (MC 154), while Denise reveals her own frustration and dissatisfaction with the life she is leading when she bitterly asks Christiane: "Est-ce que personne aime personne?" (MC 161).

The irony of Denise's affair with Bertrand is that she is unaware of the extent to which it is she who is being used and exploited. But this situation is perfectly clear to outside observers. When Christiane explains to Henri that, ever since Denise's husband, Max, has started going out with an actress, Bertrand's attitude to Denise has become considerably cooler, Henri observes: "C'est évident; si Max est sérieusement pincé, Bertrand se détachera de Denise. Il craindra que Max ne songe au divorce et que Denise ne saute dessus pour lui demander à lui, Bertrand, de l'épouser." (MC 154). Clearly Bertrand was only interested in sleeping with Denise as long as there was no possibility of marriage being discussed. He has merely used her as an instrument of sexual pleasure, just as Max and Henri had once kept the same mistress when they were students: "Vous savez entre étudiants ... on fait des économies ..." (MC 130).

The debasement of the other to the level of an object vitiates not only marital relationships but also communication between friends and acquaintances. There are two particularly significant scenes which demonstrate this, the first of which occurs in the course of the first act when Christiane is entertaining Henri and Gilbert. Laurent, who had not been in when either Henri or Gilbert called round to see Christiane, reappears in the course of an animated discussion about Henri's plan to stage a ballet with Christiane. The stage directions make it clear that his entrance passes completely unnoticed: "Laurent est entré sur ces entrefaites, personne ne fait la moindre attention à lui." (MC 128). Indeed, it is not until she hears her husband cough

a few moments later that Christiane becomes aware that he has returned; but after briefly acknowledging his presence, she resumes her conversation with Henri and Gilbert. As for her two admirers, it is not until Christiane addresses Laurent for a second time that they realise, with a momentary feeling of embarrassment and unease, that they have been completely ignoring the person in whose house they are being entertained:

Christiane: (A Laurent): Tu viens seulement de rentrer?

Henri, constatant la présence de Laurent: Ah bonjour! Comment ça va?

Gilbert, de même, un peu gêné: Tiens bonjour, comment allez-vous? (A Christiane) Et à qui destinez-vous ce ballet? (MC 129).

These brief embarrassed salutations over, Henri and Gilbert feel that they can return straightaway to their subject of conversation without any further exchange of civilities. They look upon Laurent's presence almost as something of an intrusion, but an intrusion which convention demands to be acknowledged, albeit falsely and hypocritically. Laurent does not interest either Henri or Gilbert; he is not worth their attention or respect, and can be conveniently categorised as Christiane's boring and uninteresting husband. But in thus classifying the other, how can we be aware of his problems and difficulties as an individual or understand him as a subject? Clearly we cannot, because the other has become as depersonalised and as empty of real substance as the most accurately completed "fiche" or identity card. The same point is made with equal force in La Chapelle ardente and Un Homme de Dieu: Aline is no more the cold, calculating figure initially suspected by Octave than Claude is the weak and cowardly minister portrayed by Edmée. In both cases, the individual's identity defies objectification.

The second important scene takes place several days later. This time Laurent returns late from an evening spent with his uncle to find Christiane, Denise and Henri in heated conversation. Laurent would

much rather retire unnoticed to bed, but Denise seizes on the opportunity to speak to Laurent about Christiane. "J'aime beaucoup mieux vous parler devant elle; j'ai horreur de ces cachotteries," (MC 163) she says.

Although such a remark suggests a certain openness and frankness, consistent with Denise's long friendship with Christiane, she goes on to speak about Christiane in such a cold and detached tone that it is hard to realise that the person with whom she is supposedly so concerned is, in fact, in the same room. Christiane is no longer a second person subject, a "toi", but has become a totally distant and objectified "elle":

Denise: Si elle continue à mener cette existence, dans six mois elle fera de la dépression nerveuse.

Laurent: Vos conclusions?

Denise: Je vous demande tout simplement d'user ... mais oui, de votre autorité pour obtenir qu'elle s'en aille deux ou trois mois dans un endroit tout à fait tranquille, je ne sais pas moi, peut-être en Suisse ...

Laurent: Je vous demande pardon, je ne saisis pas très bien. J'avais cru comprendre que vous étiez venue parce que vous aviez, vous, une question urgente à poser à Christiane.

Denise: C'est autre chose ... c'est-à-dire ... tout cela se tient. Sa façon même de répondre ... Je vous assure, elle m'inquiète. (MC 163-4).

Laurent's ironic comments clearly show that he is not moved by Denise's apparent concern for Christiane, while Christiane herself "s'est assise de l'air résigné et ironique de la personne réduite à l'état d'objet" (MC 164). This attitude to the other is symptomatic of a milieu increasingly undermined by selfishness and cynicism. Such are the prevailing values of the society to which Christiane belongs that there is no longer any place for acts of charity and generosity, and the very concept of devotion and service seems to have become totally meaningless. This is apparent in the remarks made by Denise and Augsburgers concerning the recent recording of church music at Solesmes:

Christiane: Comment se fait-il qu'à Solesmes, dans une abbaye, ils aient autorisé cet enregistrement?

Denise: Je suppose qu'ils ont vu là un moyen de propagande.

Augsburger: Et puis, tiens, ça rapporte. (Il a un geste vulgaire de la main droite.) C'est comme dans le temps ... la Bénédictine.

Denise: Ce doit être le principal aux yeux de ces bons religieux.

(MC 118).

The cynical attitude of both Denise and Augsburger shows to what extent they are enclosed within a narrow egocentric vision of the world, unable to see and appreciate the acts of other people - here the monks of Solesmes - except in the light of their own shallow feelings and experiences. The same attitude is evident in the way in which Henri contemptuously speaks of charity as though it were an arduous imposition and not, in essence, a joyful and spontaneous expression of innate generosity. "Il y a assez de femmes pour faire ce métier-là," (MC 165) he says to Christiane.

These exceedingly shallow moral values go hand in hand with a certain intellectual snobbery and pretentiousness which is equally superficial and empty. As in later plays like Mon Temps n'est plus le vôtre⁵ and La Dimension Florestan⁶, Marcel is particularly critical of those who hail new values in the arts, irrespective of their meaning or implications, simply because of their novelty. Christiane's enthusiasm for jazz, for example, has clearly developed into something resembling

5. Paris, Plon, 1955.

6. Paris, Plon, 1958.

a state of infatuation, for she initially fails to see that Antonov, whom she believes to be a talented and original musician, has no real musical sense at all. The effect of his savage and vigorous attempts at musical composition on Christiane's piano is, in fact, likened by Henri to "un dialogue entre guillotineur et guillotiné" (MC 148), while Antonov's annoyance at being interrupted - "Qu'est-ce que c'est que ce bruit? cette maison est impossible." (MC 146) - is all the more ironic in view of the jarring and discordant notes which he has been playing. Christiane also rather blindly seizes on Antonov's pompous declaration that art and advertising are one and the same thing - "L'art, c'est pour ainsi dire la publicité devenue folle ..." (MC 140-1) - as though it were a proof of his intelligence and originality. An impressive sounding juxtaposition of words is, however, no guarantee of profound, or even original thinking and Laurent scornfully dismisses Antonov's observations as "un cliquetis de mots" (MC 144).

In theme and tone Marcel's play bears certain similarities to Salacrou's Histoire de Rire⁷, both works showing the author's concern for a world which seems devoid of a stable moral foundation. But, whereas Histoire de Rire presents us with a grimly ironic and pessimistic picture of man and society, and goes no further, Le Monde cassé opens ultimately on to a world of spiritual communion and truth. There is a difference of perspective which clearly reflects not only the contrast between Salacrou's moral sense, unrelated to any transcendent Being or reality, and Marcel's own moral and religious outlook, but also the advance in Marcel's work since his conversion in 1929.

7. In Théâtre, IV, Paris, Gallimard, 1945.

Marcel sees nihilism, despair and the temptation of suicide as the logical outcome of the collapse of moral values, and this is clearly brought out in his portrait of Denise. Although we may be critical of the life she is leading, we are sympathetic for her as a person for, despite her selfishness and cynicism, Denise's words often bely her true feelings and mask her acute unhappiness. She is not really prepared to fly from one lover to another as her remarks to Christiane would first suggest and thus she is secretly tormented by the basic insecurity of her relationship with Bertrand. This is made apparent by the way she anxiously asks Christiane if she thinks Bertrand's attitude towards her is in any way changing. In fact, Denise yearns basically for a stable relationship, but it is probably only by returning to her husband that there can be any hope of this. Instead, undermined by her weakness and lack of confidence, Denise clings desperately to Bertrand, although she has no illusions as to his real worth: "C'est un malheureux, c'est une loque ... est-ce que je ne le sais pas depuis le premier jour?" (MC 162) she admits to Christiane. Denise does not stand outside the milieu in which she moves as a detached and cynical observer, but comments on it from the inside, while she lives and experiences her life in all its emptiness and fragility. Her need to find consolation for the breakdown of her marriage in a gay social existence has become for Denise like a drug which she knows to be destructive but which she cannot be without. She is also blinded to the extent that, disenchanted by the existence she has led, she believes that life is empty and meaningless however it is lived. She therefore reproaches Christiane for her suggestions that there can be some kind of escape or release from the broken world in which they live, "comme si on pouvait se fuir, comme si on n'emportait pas avec soi tout ce qu'on déteste et dont on ne peut pas se passer ..." (MC 161). Moreover, as each experience seems to justify Denise's

pessimism, so her whole confidence or even interest in life is gradually undermined to the point of utter hopelessness and despair from which the only escape is in death - or in suicide. "Ou alors, oui," she says to Christiane, "il y a un moyen d'en finir, mais il n'y en a qu'un ..." (MC 161). Thus when Denise learns that Bertrand has decided to marry another person, it is almost as though the whole raison d'être has disappeared from her life and she attempts, unsuccessfully, to commit suicide. Sympathy and kindness are not enough to convince Denise that life is, indeed, worth continuing as far as she is concerned. She pathetically admits to Christiane: "Moi je n'ai d'intérêts nulle part" (MC 184) as though it were not in her power to change and start life afresh. It does not come as a surprise, therefore, when we learn in the final act that Denise has attempted suicide - this time successfully - for the second time.

Henri's attitude to the world in which he lives is certainly more critical and perceptive than that of Denise, but, on the other hand, he does not experience anything like the same degree of suffering or despair. He and Gilbert are frequently visitors to the Chesnay's house, and Laurent contemptuously refers to them both as "ces gigolos sans intérêt" (MC 171). There is, however, a very great difference between Gilbert and Henri. The latter is much older and far more mature, while, unlike Gilbert, he has no intention of seducing Christiane whom he has known for many years, his attitude to her being almost that of an adviser or guardian. Although, however, he is immediately sensitive to Christiane's growing unease, he misinterprets its real nature and sees the solution in sensual and not spiritual terms. On the other hand, his description of Laurent is highly perceptive and accurate, and he is also perfectly aware of the precarious situation to which Denise seems blind. Moreover,

there is something in the life which Denise leads which seems initially to arouse Henri's condemnation and revolt. "Au fond ... non, c'est idiot. Eh bien si, tout de même," he says to Christiane. "La mansuétude de Max, la résignation de Bertrand, les complaisances de Denise, vous ne commencez pas à trouver ça un peu? ... Moi ça me donne envie de casser quelque chose. N'importe quoi. Tous ces gens-là sont vraiment trop adaptés." (MC 124).

Henri refuses to accept the values of the milieu to which he, as much as Denise, belongs - but in the name of what? The answer is that he does not know, because he basically feels unable to accept, or is simply blind to the only values - moral or spiritual - by which the world he lives in can be considered empty or "broken". He is shocked and genuinely moved when he hears of Denise's suicide, but ultimately he considers it to have been "le parti le plus raisonnable" (MC 200), a reaction which underlines the kind of moral impasse in which he has become caught. There is a pressing need to break free from the forces of destruction and despair, but the question remains as to how this can be achieved and as to whether a world which has not been irrevocably undermined and vitiated does, in fact, exist.

These are the questions which Christiane has been asking herself for a long time. Her marriage with Laurent has become something of an ordeal, and all real intimacy, understanding and affection seem to have disappeared from their relationship. Christiane recognises that she is, in many ways, to blame for this situation since she knows that she did not love Laurent when she accepted his proposal of marriage. She believed that, in time, she would grow to love and admire him, whereas, in fact marriage had merely emphasised their differences and basic incompatibility.

Henri gives a cruel but penetrating description of the hopelessly boring and barren existence to which Christiane seems to be condemning herself:

"Vous ne vous rendez pas compte que c'est absurde, que c'est mal, que ça n'a ni queue ni tête, que vous n'avez pas été mise au monde pour l'agrément d'un petit maître des requêtes sans envergure, sans charme, sans originalité, d'un raseur en un mot, car il vous rase, Christiane, à longueur de journée. Mais oui ... il suffit de vous regarder quand vous êtes avec lui au concert, au théâtre. Le sourire inaltérable que vous affichez." (MC 125).

Laurent is aware that his marriage with Christiane has failed, but he prefers to abstain from talking openly about it and assumes instead an air of aloofness. Christiane, on the other hand, desperately seeks some kind of escape from the stifling atmosphere of her life with Laurent. "Le silence de notre vie m'accable," she says. "Je n'y respire pas". (MC 169). She has thus been drawn towards a seemingly carefree life promising laughter, gaiety and contentment. It is clear from remarks made by Laurent that Christiane was not initially attracted by such a life. Laurent denounces jazz as "la destruction de tout ce que nous avons aimé" (MC 113), and when Christiane asks who this "nous" is, Laurent replies: "Moi et une autre personne que j'ai cru être toi Quelqu'un qui n'aimait encore ni Biarritz ni le jazz." (MC 113). Certainly, Christiane is the first to see that the life she has now chosen to lead brings in its wake the bitter realisation of its falseness and superficiality. The value of "divertissement" is instantaneous but also of the most transitory nature. It is therefore not surprising that, on her return to Paris, Christiane recalls her previous three weeks in Biarritz with distaste. "Du reste j'aimerais autant qu'on ne parle plus

de ce séjour," she says to Henri and Denise; "maintenant que c'est fini je constate qu'il me laisse un souvenir plutôt déplaisant." (MC 123). In fact, in an earlier scene with Denise, Christiane shows that she is in no way deceived about the kind of life she is leading. The failure of her marriage, the emptiness of gay social distractions and the cynicism of so many of her friends have convinced Christiane that she has allowed herself to become trapped in a world to which she does not belong. It resembles a watch which, on the surface, seems in perfect order: but, on closer examination, it is found to be broken and no longer working. In the same way, the heart of the world seems to have stopped beating; the spirit of love and fraternity has disappeared, and one is left with the existence of each individual person solely pre-occupied with his or her immediate interests:

Christiane: Laurent met sur pied des règlements, papa est abonné au Conservatoire et entretient chichement une petite dame, Henri se prépare à faire le tour du monde ...

Denise: Ah! je ne savais pas.

Christiane: Antonov fait répéter son poème symphonique ... Chacun a son coin, sa petite affaire, ses petits intérêts. On se rencontre, on s'entrechoque, ça fait un bruit de ferraille.

Denise: Comment pourrait-il en être autrement?

Christiane, suivant sa pensée: Mais il n'y a plus de centre, plus de vie, nulle part . (MC 121).

Christiane's reaction is more than just a nostalgic yearning for a better life: it implies that part of her refuses to be submerged by, or become identifiable with the existence she is at present leading, a part of her which recognises an essential order and harmony in life. Outwardly, Christiane seems to accept and uphold the attitudes and values of people like Denise, Henri and Gilbert, but inwardly she recognises that she does not belong to the "broken world" of her friends. "J'ai

toujours l'air d'être avec vous tous," she says to Henri, "comme vous tous qui ne croyez à rien, qui vous moquez de tout, sauf de la mort et de la souffrance, car vous en avez une peur affreuse ..." (MC 146). She experiences an acute sense of isolation and exile but, from time to time, she mysteriously feels within her "un être qui se cherche, et qui se trouve en des secondes bien rares du reste, dans un monde inconnu auquel on dirait que vous n'appartenez pas" (MC 156).

Although Christiane has never been unfaithful to Laurent, she begins to realise that her whole future depends on creating between herself and Laurent greater confidence and understanding. Christiane's fidelity suggests that she is capable of devotion and self-sacrifice but, deprived of any real contact with Laurent, of any help or understanding, she realises with horror that it is the worst and not the best which is brought out in her. "Tu aurais pu me rendre meilleure, moins égoïste," she says; "au contraire, tu me livres à moi-même. Et moi, quand je suis livrée à moi-même, je ne vaud plus rien." (MC 168). Christiane experiences a deep and urgent need for love and affection, and she also recognises that her true identity lies in sharing this love and affection with another person, that being implies being with. "Il faudra désormais que nous soyons ensemble ...," she says to Laurent. "Pas l'un à côté de l'autre. Ensemble." (MC 172).

The turning point in Christiane's life comes with this sudden desire to transform her whole relationship with Laurent. In this, she is strongly influenced by Henri who believes that her success and popularity merely exacerbate Laurent's wounded pride, and increase his sense of inferiority. He suggests that Christiane can only help Laurent by making him feel more important, thus dispelling this feeling of insignificance. Christiane knows that Laurent's greatest failing lies in his

proud refusal to ask anything of other people. He believes his aloofness to be a sign of strength and independence - "Non, moi je n'ai personne . C'est aussi ma force." (MC 134) - when, in fact, it merely emphasises his lack of generosity, vulnerability and underlying weakness. From time to time Laurent's mask drops and reveals his unhappiness and acute sense of failure. "Certains jours," observes Henri, "oui, je l'avoue, il me fait l'effet d'un homme ... malheureux." (MC 157). But he would hate to feel that other people, even his own wife, had gone out of their way to do anything for him. "Moi je peux te dire une chose," he says to Christiane, "c'est que le jour où je saurais que tu as fait pour moi ce que tu appelles un sacrifice, il y aurait entre nous quelque chose d'irréparable." (MC 136). Thus Christiane knows that if she is to take the initiative and try and change the nature of her relationship with Laurent, it must be without Laurent realising it. Through Henri's suggestions, the idea of adopting a humble and penitent attitude forms in Christiane's mind. She leads Laurent to believe that she has fallen in love with the base and vulgar Antonov, and, in thus humiliating herself, she succeeds in arousing Laurent's concern and sympathy. But Laurent's sympathy is vitiated by his basic egoism and pride, for Christiane's confession induces within him a feeling of satisfaction that Christiane has been punished for the gay life she has been leading. "Ce que tu appelles ta pitié n'était qu'une revanche, d'amour-propre," she says to Laurent at the end of the play. "Mesquine. Inavouable..." (MC 215). Instead of achieving the rapprochement she had hoped for, Christiane finds her husband's whole attitude odious and despicable. He begins to pity her in a manner which merely increases the gulf between them. "L'espèce de tendresse compatissante que tu m'as témoignée alors," she says, "était comme une caricature horrible de ce que j'avais

tant souhaité." (MC 215). Laurent's attempts to help Christiane thus prove degrading for both of them, and Christiane is left with an acute sense of helplessness and solitude. Laurent's continual reflections and observations on Christiane's supposed attraction to Antonov, the fact that he has even spoken of this attraction with Gilbert, and finally the news of the death of a certain Dom Maurice, a Benedictine monk, take the last vestiges of strength and hope away from Christiane. At this point, her need for human warmth and sympathy becomes almost overwhelming, a need standing between herself and, as in the case of Denise, total resignation and despair. "Gilbert, s'est trouvé là à ce moment pour me dire une fois de plus qu'il m'aimait," she reveals to Laurent.".... D'une seconde à l'autre, il a pris à mes yeux une valeur infinie, il m'est devenu indispensable, je n'ai plus eu la force de lui résister." (MC 215).

The play thus seems to be moving towards a sombre, despairing conclusion which will merely confirm that the world of Christiane and of those around her is irremediably ruined and beyond redemption. When the final act begins, we learn that Denise has committed suicide, that Henri has returned from his trip around the world even more convinced than before of the futility and injustice of life, and that Christiane is considering leaving Laurent and starting a new life with Gilbert. The whole perspective and meaning of Le Monde cassé is, however, radically transformed in the last two scenes of the play. In the penultimate scene, Christiane receives an unexpected visit from Geneviève Forgue, a person she had known during the years she had spent with her parents at Cimiez. We discover that Geneviève is the sister of the Benedictine monk whose death Christiane had learned about several months earlier.

Christiane had been in love with Geneviève's brother, a love which radiated hope and joy. "Je l'ai toujours su, " says Geneviève. "Oui, à Cimiez quand je vous voyais ensemble ... vous n'étiez pas comme avec les autres, vous étiez différente ... je ne puis expliquer ... silencieuse, comme éblouie." (MC 209). But, at the very moment when Christiane was about to reveal to Jacques her love for him, she learned of his decision to become a monk. "Depuis ... depuis, je ne me possède plus ... je ne sais plus qui je suis," (MC 210) she admits to Geneviève. Ever since this moment, her life had become an escape, an attempt to find consolation for the cruel disappointment of a frustrated love. She had accepted Laurent's proposal of marriage although she did not love him, and, after the bitter disillusionment of their life together, had turned to a life of gay, but superficial distractions. At no point in the next twelve years of her life had Christiane experienced anything resembling the serenity and joy that she had found in her love for Jacques Decroy. Although momentarily carried away by her feelings for Gilbert, Christiane recognises that she had instinctively sought his affection "par nostalgie de l'amour".(MC 215).

Christiane had kept the secret of her love for Jacques not only from her friends but also from her own family. Geneviève was alone in the knowledge of this secret for even Jacques had been quite unaware of Christiane's real feelings for him. And yet, several months before his death and seemingly by pure chance, Jacques had learned through a dream of the love which Christiane had never ceased to feel for him. During the last days of his life, all his thoughts and prayers were centred around Christiane. He saw that his decision to embrace a life of seclusion and meditation might have induced in Christiane bitterness and despair, and he thus became aware of a certain responsibility for

the life she had chosen to lead. Far from feeling powerless to act, Jacques believed that, by praying for Christiane, she would, like himself, become aware of a divine order in which all men are reunited in a true spirit of love and fraternity:

Geneviève: A une certaine minute de sa vie, il a vu que l'acte par lequel il s'était donné à Dieu avait peut-être signifié pour vous le dés-espérance ... qui sait? la perdition. Il ne pouvait pas en être ainsi. Et depuis cet instant, il a prié ardemment pour que vous fussiez à votre tour éclairée, pour qu'il lui fût permis

Christiane, passionnément: Je déteste tout cela ... (MC 211).

Despite her initial refusal to accept the reality of any divine or transcendent order, Christiane is visibly moved by the news Geneviève has brought. At a time when she is thinking of leaving Laurent for Gilbert, Christiane learns that the man who has been present in her thoughts ever since she had first met him at Cimiez, has prayed that her life be given meaning and hope through faith. Can this totally unexpected and inexplicable intervention be reduced to a mere coincidence, devoid of any real significance? Or is it a mysterious call to Christiane, a reminder that her life is not beyond redemption? Christiane knows that there is something within her which refuses the life she has been leading, something which expresses a strong but, as yet, unfulfilled sense of being. Almost despite herself she glimpses a new sphere of reality. "C'est comme une brusque lumière que je ne peux pas encore regarder," she says. "Geneviève, est-ce que ces choses existent?" (MC 211). Christiane is torn between doubt and hope, between a world that is broken and a world that is one, while she is now faced with the awful responsibility of committing herself to one or other of these worlds. Suddenly, Christiane rejects this glimmer of light: she refuses to believe that Jacques' dream, the discovery of his diary and of his growing concern for her, his prayers and finally the intervention of Geneviève (who,

until she heard of Denise's suicide, had been unsure what action to take) are all mysteriously linked and a clear sign to her of a higher order of reality. "Vous en êtes trop sûre," she declares bitterly; "tout est simple pour vous, je le sens; nous n'habitons pas sur la même terre. Le monde où je vis, moi, c'est un monde cassé ..." (MC 212). But faith is not a convenient solution to the problems of existence. Christiane imagines that Geneviève is safe and secure in the knowledge that God exists, and is thus free from all temptation, anguish and doubt. She sees, however, that this is not true: for she learns that Geneviève's husband is paralysed for life, and that, despite her faith, Geneviève is not immune to fears or doubts about her own fidelity and devotion. "Je ne puis soutenir la pensée des mois, des années que nous allons avoir à vivre ...," admits Geneviève. "J'ai failli dire à mon mari la vérité sur son état parce que j'étais sûre qu'il se tuerait et que ce serait une délivrance." (MC 212). The only recourse in such a situation is one of renewed humility and prayer. There can never be any definitive triumph or peace of mind, and, for this reason, Geneviève asks Christiane to pray for her as she will pray for Christiane. Christiane's last doubts are swept away as, in a moment of clear and unmistakable illumination, she recognises and acknowledges the spirit of love, communion and truth:

Geneviève: J'ai prié, oh! sans ferveur, presque par habitude ... La tentation s'est dissipée. Mais je suis sûre qu'elle reviendra, je le sais ... Christiane, il faudra prier pour moi.

Christiane: Prier?

Geneviève: Vous avez un répondant.

Christiane: Geneviève, est-ce qu'il me voit?

Geneviève: Il vous voit, et en ce moment, vous le savez.

(Les deux femmes s'étreignent silencieusement.) (MC 212-3).

In the final scene, after Geneviève's departure, Laurent is struck by the complete change in Christiane's voice and manner: and, mysteriously, a new spirit of humility seems to be pervading him too since, for the first time, he is ready to acknowledge his basic pride and weakness. But when Christiane reveals to him that she had never once been in love with Antonov but, because of his attitude, had been unable to resist Gilbert, Laurent is momentarily overwhelmed as though his whole life has been totally ruined. "Pas un mot de plus, je ne peux pas le supporter," he cries. "Ai-je vraiment mérité ça!". (MC 215). Both he and Christiane have paid a heavy price for their lack of humility and generosity towards each other. Laurent had once reproached Christiane for seeing life and human relationships in terms of an account to be regulated and settled. "Malheureusement, je ne crois pas à cette comptabilité ... officielle," he had observed. "L'autre, la seule réelle, ne figure dans aucun registre. Elle est entièrement cachée et insaisissable." (MC 169). Now the reality of such a world - of which Laurent and Christiane had had at different times an idea or intuition - is clearly apprehended by them both. Christiane, in particular, uplifted and transformed by the news that Geneviève has brought her, sees that they are no longer alone and divided, but spiritually united in the recognition of their common guilt and need. "Nous ne sommes pas seuls, personne n'est seul ...," declares Christiane, "il y a une communion des pécheurs... il y a une communion des saints." (MC 216). Henceforth their relationship depends on a mutual effort of trust and understanding: a new life

opens before Laurent and Christiane as the curtain falls to end the play:

Christiane, avec solennité: Je te jure que je n'appartiens plus qu'à toi ... je suis délivrée ... C'est comme un rêve insoutenable qui s'efface. Il ne dépend plus que de toi ...

Laurent, dans une sorte de vision: Ah! c'est comme si tu m'étais rendue après ta mort ...

Christiane, humblement: Ce mot-là, je vais maintenant tâcher de le mériter. (MC 216).

Originally published together with a meditation on the ontological mystery in 1933, the play was later shortened and modified for performance. In the definitive version the action of the play is confined entirely to the Chesnay's apartment in Paris, whereas the third act of the original version takes place in Switzerland. It is during this third act that Claude, the Chesnay's spoilt, selfish son, and Mme Morgenthaler, a rich widow whom Antonov hopes to marry, appear. In fact, a lot of the act is taken up with Antonov's efforts to get rid of Natalia and the latter's refusal to be so easily disposed of. Neither Claude nor Mme Morgenthaler are at all important to the main theme and plot, and they do not appear in the definitive version. More significantly, Marcel has considerably reduced the number of comic scenes in this act thus avoiding an unnecessarily lengthy sub-plot which, although not irrelevant, would otherwise have tended to divert the audience's attention rather than concentrate it on and around Christiane. The comic element is, however, much more developed than in Un Homme de Dieu, for example. Its function is again one of contrast, serving in Le Monde cassé to accentuate the sombre and often despairing preoccupations of Christiane, Laurent, Denise and Henri. When, for example, Antonov moves into the apartment let by Christiane, his first complaint concerns the unbearable noise made by the neighbours which is preventing his musical genius from going to work:

Antonov: C'est terrible ... Là-haut, j'ai cru que je deviens fou. On ne m'avait pas dit que ce vieux monsieur et cette vieille dame ils dansaient.

Julie: Ils reçoivent leurs petits-enfants une fois par mois.

Antonov: Combien ont-ils de petits - enfants? ... Je croyais que les Parisiennes ne voulaient plus avoir d'enfants ... Une fois par mois! ... Je n'aurai pas le temps de me remettre d'une fois à l'autre ... (MC 145-6).

Antonov's musical talents - in which only he and those blinded by his pretentiousness believe - seem to blossom only in the most rarefied atmosphere. He returns from his honeymoon in Italy with Mme Morgenthaler complaining: "On ne peut pas composer de la musique là-bas , c'est impossible. Dolce Napoli, Santa Lucia, j'ai cru je deviens fou." (MC 203), to which Christiane ironically replies: "Ce n 'était pas la première fois." (MC 203). Antonov's frustration and indignation reach even more absurd proportions, however, when he tells Christiane that he has made a dreadful mistake in marrying Mme Morgenthaler. "Je citerai seulement un détail," he says, "mais tout de même Ida n'a pas encore voulu me donner un carnet de chèques. Quelle situation, madame, pour un artiste!". (MC 204).

Such comic touches may, at first sight, seem superficially light-hearted, but in fact the author's treatment of Antonov is heavily ironic. The latter reflects all the baseness and shallowness of the world from which Christiane is trying to break free; and the fact that Antonov seems basically contented with his life merely underlines his grotesqueness. We are sympathetic towards someone like Denise because her infidelity and cynicism have ultimately caused her to suffer deeply, whereas Antonov's clumsy plan to divorce Natalia and marry Mme Morgenthaler shows that he is totally amoral and impervious to the feelings of unease and emptiness which humanise Denise:

Antonov: Quel âge a Mme Morgenthaler?

Henri: Écoutez c'est une amie de ma mère, une amie un peu plus âgée.

Antonov: Ça ne m'effraye pas. Je lui dis maman, comme votre, Jean-Jacques disait. Elle est contente. Mais si elle est ruinée... ça n'est plus rien.

Henri: Elle possède encore une ravissante villa sur la Côte d'Azur, au Cap Martin. Un bois de pins parasols, une roseraie admirable.

Antonov: C'est délicieux ... L'atmosphère est de nouveau plus musicale (MC 151).

Antonov represents a morally and intellectually decadent age, a reflection on a comic level of the broken world of Christiane and her friends. This comic element is thus directly related to the main theme of the play and underlines the author's concern for a life which is gradually undermining the belief in moral or spiritual values, and thereby leaving the individual either with an oppressive sense of isolation and emptiness, or with a smug, self-centred feeling of satisfaction.

Structurally, Le Monde Cassé is similar to Un Homme de Dieu and, indeed, a good example of Marcel's dramatic technique as a whole. He starts from a given situation - here the gay social life of the thirties - analyses its effect on a small group of people - the Chesnays and Christiane's immediate circle of friends - and traces the growing awareness of the stifling and discordant nature of such an existence. We seem to be progressing towards a kind of "degré zéro" or point of no return from which all possible hope of regeneration or renewal seems to have been excluded. The dénouement thus provides a moment of extreme and critical tension after which there is resignation and despair or liberation and hope. Whereas Denise succumbs to the hopelessness of the situation in which she finds herself and Henri is quietly resigned

to a meaningless existence, Christiane, as J. Chenu observes, passes beyond a world "à la dérive sans attaches ni amarres" and attains "l'union, la fidélité, et un registre qui sans être hors du temps dans une éternité abstraite échappe pourtant à la succession"⁸.

Although the conclusion of Le Monde cassé is more explicitly hopeful than that of Un Homme de Dieu, the future of Christiane and Laurent is as uncertain as that of Claude and Edmée. The last two comments exchanged between Claude and Edmée are far more ambiguous than the sudden vision of a new order of reality which Christiane and Laurent share at the end of Le Monde cassé: but this vision does not mean that Christiane and Laurent are necessarily safe from the selfish, empty world which they have momentarily left behind. "Certes, on ne peut pas être sûr que cette illumination durera, et qu'ils ne retomberont pas tous les deux dans ce 'monde cassé' auquel la grâce les a comme soustraits," writes Marcel. "Mais ceci n'importe pas: ce qui compte seul, c'est que tous deux ont vu clair au moins un instant."⁹ This moment of spiritual illumination which closes Le Monde cassé is a particularly effective coup de théâtre, in that, having been led to believe that Christiane will leave Laurent, a forbidding sense of hopelessness hangs over us before Geneviève's appearance in the penultimate scene of the play.

It is certainly surprising to find that Le Monde cassé, presenting as it does a compelling picture of social life which is profoundly

8. Le théâtre de Gabriel Marcel et sa signification métaphysique, p. 133.

9. En chemin, vers quel éveil?, pp. 154-5.

relevant to the present day, has never been produced by a professional company in France. It has been performed in Germany and at the Gate Theatre in Dublin, and has also been produced recently for the radio by the Comédie Française¹⁰. Marcel recalls that, when it was first published, the play was favourably reviewed by Copeau but that, when approached by Marcel with a view to having it performed, Copeau replied that he feared "l'incompréhension du public" and chose instead a play by Jean Cocteau¹¹. Copeau's fears that Le Monde cassé would not be understood must be taken seriously in view of his very considerable knowledge of the theatre and its public in France at that time. And yet, a close reading of the text shows that, far from being a clumsy and incomprehensible deus ex machina, or even a sudden and abrupt transition from one level of existence or awareness to another, Christiane's "prise de conscience" in the final two scenes provides a coherent and fully justified dénouement. Although there is some justification in challenging the plausibility of events and coincidences which lead Geneviève to visit Christiane, this objection is far more likely to arise on reading the play as opposed to seeing it performed. We are, in fact, prepared for the dénouement in two ways. First of all, the significance of Christiane's feelings for Jacques Decroy is made apparent by a series of reflections and incidents which arouse a growing interest on the part of the reader in her past and her concern for Solesmes. When Denise first mentions the recording at the Abbey, Christiane is momentarily

10. On "France-Culture" at the end of 1972.

11. En chemin, vers quel éveil?, p. 155.

surprised and agitated. Later on, Henri also refers to the music recorded in the Abbey and, noticing Christiane's extreme agitation, asks her about the time she had spent at Cimiez. Similarly intrigued, Denise presses Christiane about Jacques Decroy and Christiane, although non-committal about her feelings for him, reveals that he had become a monk at Solesmes. Thus when Laurent casually announces to Christiane at the end of the third act news of the death of a certain Dom Maurice- "Mort le 26 juillet à l'âge de trente-trois ans, à Solesmes." (MC 196) -, the audience knows not only that Christiane's relationship with Jacques is vitally important for an understanding of her past, but that his death will have an important effect on her future. This last point is made clear when, in a state of shock and utter helplessness, Christiane's first reaction¹² on hearing this news is to turn to Gilbert and cry out: "Mon petit Gilbert, ne m'abandonnez pas." (MC 196). In the radio production by the Comédie Française religious music and chanting was played at several points in the text to emphasise the powerful, haunting memory of Jacques, while, at the same time, evoking an atmosphere of spiritual peace which looks ahead and prepares us for the dénouement.

Secondly, as far as Christiane's spiritual awakening is concerned, it has been evident from the outset that she not only rejects the life she is leading, but also senses the possibility of belonging to another world. Clearly this implies a need for transcendence which can only be met by some kind of religious insight or experience. Henri rightly sees that Christiane is being stifled by the life she is leading, but mistakenly sees in her "l'étoffe ... d'une grande amoureuse" (MC 155) when

12. Only later, when she is visited by Geneviève, does Christiane realise that the presence of those we love may, in fact, be even more strong and comforting after their death.

in fact Christiane recognises the need for fidelity and devotion if the whole basis of married life is not to be irrevocably undermined. If Christiane is capable of rising above the "broken world" to which she seems to belong, it is because she is predisposed to do so, and, in this respect, she differs from both Henri and Denise. When Denise says: "Oh, toi, tu ne peux pas comprendre ... tu n'as pas volé ton prénom." (MC 184), she senses in Christiane the very qualities and feelings which she does not have. Christiane's acts of charity as a young girl, her basic loyalty to Laurent and her refusal to become identified with the life she is now leading are indications of a certain level of being which, although stifled or concealed, is already a mark of grace. Christiane has the essential gift of "disponibilité" which Denise does not have, and this explains why Christiane responds to Geneviève's visit in the way that she does. "Disponibilité" implies a certain underlying generosity and receptivity by which the individual may break free from the hold of selfishness and possessiveness which frequently undermines and distorts his or her whole response to living. It is because her life is vitiated by "indisponibilité" that Denise has become blind to a higher order of reality and irremediably enclosed within the very narrow limits of her own immediate needs and interests. In this respect she has much in common with Aline, although the outward manifestation of their "indisponibilité" is very different. Aline is an independent and domineering person who is unaware of the destructiveness of her apparent fidelity to Raymond, whereas Denise lacks any strong beliefs or convictions, and finally recognises that she has been leading an empty and meaningless existence. But the tragedy of Aline's fidelity and of Denise's despair and suicide is basically the same: both lack not only the generosity and understanding whereby they can communicate fully with those around them, but also the receptivity which could have enabled them to recognise

and admire the inherent beauty and value of human life. For Christiane, however, the possibility of liberation from the self and from the threat of "indisponibilité" is already apparent in her reflections and reactions at the outset of the play. Ultimately, it is Jacques' message of hope brought by Geneviève which helps crystallise Christiane's sense of spiritual belonging. Here we see that the death of someone we love may illuminate and comfort us. Whereas Raymond's death had embittered Aline and had become the source of a blind and destructive egoism, Christiane is liberated and transformed by the news of Jacques' prayers for her spiritual help and guidance, prayers which are in no way invalidated by his death since he continues to remain present in Christiane's thoughts. Thus the play ends with Christiane having found a true sense of identity and a firm basis from which she can begin a new life with Laurent. It is clear that this awakening or liberation depends on an awareness of a transcendent order of reality, and has therefore little in common with the release from constraint, and the acts of self-indulgence to which Gidean "disponibilité" gives rise.

The fact that it is Christiane and not Denise who achieves spiritual liberation is neither fortuitous nor coincidental. An act of conversion is not, as Marfel envisages it, something imposed on the individual irrespective of his feelings or attitude by some kind of divine intervention. Instead, it presupposes the individual's own responsiveness and receptivity and his freedom to answer the call to faith. Thus Marcel emphasises that "la grâce ne semble pas pouvoir être pensée sans référence à une certaine ouverture, à une certaine disponibilité"¹³, while the individual is ultimately left with "la puissance singulière de s'affirmer

13. La Dignité humaine, p. 143.

ou de se nier, selon qu'il affirme l'Être et s'ouvre à lui - ou qu'il le nie et du même coup se clôt ..."14. An act of grace is therefore best understood as a mysterious call or appeal to which one is free to respond. Christiane does not suddenly decide to create a new life for herself by choosing to believe in God - an undetermined, independent and autonomous act which has little to do with authentic religious faith - but finds herself placed in a situation where the reality of another world is made suddenly clear to her. "C'est comme une brusque lumière que je ne peux pas encore regarder," (MC 211) she says to Geneviève, thus indicating a state of hesitation and indecision. At that precise moment Christiane is presented with an unconstrained and awe-inspiring choice, for which she alone is responsible. Her situation differs from that of Claude Lemoyne in that Claude reaches a critical moment in his life when he will either find new hope and confidence through faith or be submerged by an overwhelming sense of resignation and despair with no sign or offer of help to guide him, whereas Christiane has the reassurance and comfort of Jacques' presence. Claude's appeal for help remains unanswered, hence the ambiguity and uncertainty of the conclusion, but Christiane's appeal is heard and she is thus able to see the way that will restore meaning and hope to her life. Un Homme de Dieu, despite its implicit recognition of the need for faith in a transcendent Being, belongs therefore, to Marcel's "pièces ambiguës", while Le Monde cassé is one of the most explicit and, despite Copeau's reservations, convincing examples of his "pièces éclairantes". That the distinction between these two basic

14. Être et Avoir, Paris, Aubier, 1935, p. 175.

categories is not merely a question of chronology (that is to say dependent on whether or not the play was written before or after Marcel's conversion) is emphasised by the publication of Marcel's next play, Le Chemin de crête, while in Le Dard, also published in 1936¹⁵, Marcel, although reaffirming the possibility of liberation from the discordant and divided world in which we sometimes seem to be hopelessly confined, underlines the extent to which such a liberation is threatened by the prevailing attitude and mood of the society in which we live. While Le Monde cassé is primarily concerned with the moral and intellectual void of a certain sophisticated milieu, Le Dard reflects the destructive, medusa-like fascination of certain political ideologies on a wide social scale. It should be remembered that, at the time Le Dard was written and first performed, the spread of fascism and the threat of war hung over Europe, while in France the Front Populaire under the leadership of Léon Blum was proclaiming its faith in the principles of socialism. Le Dard contains explicit references to the menace of Hitler and to the evolution in thought among left-wing intellectuals who were to champion the cause of socialism. Indeed, the whole context of Le Dard is far more political and historical than any of Marcel's previous plays and evokes the growing increase and disarray in France in the years immediately preceding the Second World War.

The two central characters in Le Dard are Eustache Soreau, a left-wing intellectual who has married into a rich and influential family, and Werner Schnee, a singer who, having left Germany because of the persecution of his Jewish friend and accompanist, Rudolf Schoental, is temporarily staying in Paris with Eustache. Werner had met Eustache several

15. Paris, Plon. All textual references to Le Dard are, however, taken from Le secret est dans les îles, Paris, Plon, 1967, pp. 27-153, and will be incorporated in the thesis in the following abbreviated form: (D ..). Eg. (D27) = Le Dard in Le secret est dans les îles, p. 27.

years before at the University of Marburg and they had become close friends; but Eustache, in particular, has changed considerably since they first got to know each other, and the difference in their present outlook and preoccupations becomes increasingly apparent. The play revolves around the gradual rift between Eustache and Werner, between an ideology which is political, general and abstract, and a sense of fraternity which is apolitical, individual and concrete. Two women play an important part in the life of Eustache: Béatrice, his wife, whom Eustache loves but whose attitude he condemns as bourgeois, and Gertrude, whom Eustache had known before his marriage and whom he admires for her political views and actions. Gertrude is an extreme left-wing militant who has been suspended from her teaching post, although she is hoping to be reappointed at the beginning of the new school year. As far as Gertrude is concerned, political allegiance counts above anything else in life. The only valid relationships between people are those formed inside a political party and those who remain outside politics are totally contemptible in her eyes. This explains her suspicious attitude to Werner and his wife, and her ironic disparagement of Eustache's friendship with Werner:

Eustache: Gertrude, j'aime autant vous dire tout de suite que je déteste ces sous-entendus. Werner est pour moi plus qu'un ami: un camarade. Je ne devrais pas avoir besoin de vous expliquer ce que ça veut dire.

Gertrude: Vous avez vidé des bocks et mangé de la choucroute ensemble dans les brasseries de Marbourg ... Vous avez chanté à deux voix au clair de lune dans la forêt.

Eustache: Et alors?

Gertrude: Ce n'est pas encore tout ça qui fait qu'on est des camarades ... et vous le savez très bien.

Eustache: Je vous dis qu'il y viendra.

Gertrude: En tout cas, la petite dame n'y viendra pas; ça, je peux vous le garantir. (D 43).

Significantly, however, Gertrude is not able to appreciate Werner's courage and magnanimity in standing by, and giving financial support to his friend, Rudolf, thus imposing on himself exile and hardship. "Dites donc ... une amitié qui va loin," (D 42) she observes sarcastically. Such acts on an individual and personal level have no real value in Gertrude's eyes, although she would claim to believe in the cause of humanity. But this cause has become for her a vague political stand which conceals her basic inability to trust in individuals or, indeed, in life itself. Thus, when she finds herself made pregnant by a man she has no intention of marrying, and confronted with the possibility of not being allowed back into teaching, she tells Eustache that she sees little point left in living. "Vous pourriez vous douter que je n'ai jamais beaucoup tenu à la vie qui me fait l'effet d'une assez sale blague," (D 104) she says. For Gertrude, life is devoid of inherent value and purpose: it has become "une comptabilité, pas autre chose ..." (D 107), and her attitude immediately calls to mind that of Denise in Le Monde cassé. Gertrude is constantly adopting an aggressive and embittered moral or political stand which underlines her cynicism and basic discontent, and yet she enjoys considerable prestige in Eustache's eyes. He looks upon her as "quelqu'un qui a su mettre ses actes d'accord avec sa pensée" (D 50), thus measuring the vast difference between his own political sympathies and aspirations and the successful and privileged position he holds in society. Moreover, Gertrude's cynical and condescending remarks merely accentuate Eustache's sense of guilt and betrayal. He refuses to justify his present situation in terms of merit, but sees it purely in terms of chance. "J'ai eu de la chance ... une chance imméritée, insultante ...," (D 52) he says to Béatrice. Although he has probably been a conscientious and hard-working teacher, Eustache feels that he has been unjustly helped by Béatrice's father who

is a rich and influential politician. Béatrice does, to a certain extent, admire Eustache's attitude. "Eustache est une nature extrêmement scrupuleuse," she says to Werner. "Il lui semble qu'un certain confort, une certaine facilité risquent d'endormir la conscience." (D 89).

Indeed, there may at first sight appear to be in Eustache's feelings of guilt a certain nobility in that he refuses to forget the lot of those who are in greater material need. "Béatrice! en quoi ai-je plus de mérite que Derieux ou que Varignon qui crèvent de faim avec leurs femmes et leurs gosses?" (D 52). And he reminds Béatrice that, the bourgeoisie only maintains a clear conscience by carefully avoiding the most fundamental questions concerning humanity, those of inequality and exploitation.

Eustache's political views are, however, vitiated in two important ways, first of all because they owe much of their force to the fear of judgement by other people, and secondly because they are based, as in the case of Gertrude, on vague abstractions. It would be false to assume that Eustache does not believe sincerely in the ideal of socialism, but when he tells Beatrice that Gertrude believes him to be "embourgeoisé, avili ..." (D 52), it is clear that he is horrified not by his own inadequacy to live up to his ideals, but by the image he must assume in the eyes of unprivileged left-wing militants like Gertrude. He decides abruptly, for example, to refuse the post which he is offered in one of the most prestigious schools in Paris more through fear of Gertrude's implacable judgement than through strong personal conviction. Moreover, Eustache's obsession with causes and not with individuals leads him into the same kind of contradictory and destructive attitude of mind as Gertrude. Eustache claims his allegiance to the cause of social justice, yet meanly reveals what Werner has confided to him in secret to Werner's wife. "C'est ainsi qu'Eustache qui

ne cessait d'être hanté par l'idée de la trahison - de la trahison envers sa classe, c'est-à-dire envers une entité -, " writes Marcel, "aura effectivement trahi un être bien réel celui-là, celui qu'il appelait son ami."¹⁶ Principles are important in life if they are nourished and embodied by concrete acts and experiences; but they lose all weight and meaning when they become an abstract code of rules and regulations which one must try and observe. Eustache may claim that without the recognition of socialist principles one becomes blind to suffering and injustice; but Werner wisely observes that it is not the principles which should save us from such blindness or indifference, but the love we should feel for our fellow beings and the compassion which their misfortune arouses in us. "C'est si drôle de cultiver l'indignation comme un légume . . .," he says, "une plante piquante en tout cas. Si on sent l'indignation, on n'a pas besoin de la cultiver, et si on ne le sent pas . . ." (D 89). The situation of Eustache has certain affinities with that of Claude in Un Homme de Dieu, since Claude's faith, having degenerated over the years into a professional pose devoid of inner warmth and conviction, has become as cold and impersonal as Eustache's political beliefs. In fact, both plays underline the vital distinction between an intellectual and an existential philosophy of life.

Eustache's dissatisfaction and bitterness seem to have stifled any feelings of admiration and joy, and to exclude any real sense of fraternity. It is as though his whole being and presence in the world were being vitiated by a poisoned dart. "Cette espèce d'aiguillon, de dard

16. La Dignité humaine, p. 159.

empoisonné, ce n'est tout de même pas cette gueuse qui te l'a arraché?" (D 138) asks Béatrice, reflecting painfully on Eustache's sudden affair with Gertrude. Werner had known Eustache when he was relaxed and contented; now he has become exceedingly uneasy and vulnerable. Moreover, Eustache himself recognises that political commitment has not given his life any real sense of purpose. He experiences instead an overwhelming sense of hopelessness to which neither his affection for Béatrice nor his adhesion to socialism has provided any solution. "Le pire de tout, ce n'est pas la douleur, c'est le souci," he tells Béatrice. "On n'a seulement plus de quoi aimer. On est vidé. Il n'y a plus rien. Une dysenterie morale. C'est épouvantable." (D 112). He explains to Béatrice that he needs to escape from the life he has been leading and start afresh. "Il faut qu'il y ait du décisif dans ma vie," he says, and adds: "Je ne peux pas me laisser aller plus longtemps à la dérive." (D 140). He seems to believe that he will escape from his frustration and disarray by starting on a life of greater political agitation with Gertrude and by rejecting his past. But, by deserting a loving and devoted wife for a woman like Gertrude whose political views provide a flimsy ideological base on which to build a new life, Eustache stumbles even further along an impasse which he vainly imagines to be the source of liberation and self-realisation.

The contrast between Eustache and Werner could not be more radical. Eustache's dogmatic political generalisations are shown to be hollow and meaningless when set against Werner's quiet and unassuming acts of courage and fidelity. Werner did not need to question and justify his reasons for helping Rudolf, nor assume a political stand simply because his friend had been maltreated by the Nazis. He had acted out of friendship, not for any political motives. Had he been Jewish or a

political opponent of the régime, his departure would to some have been more readily understandable because it could have been categorised and reduced to a simplistic causal explanation. But it is this very desire to simplify and to categorise which Werner refuses. Thus, when Eustache reproaches him for his apparent indifference to the situation which has caused his exile, Werner replies: "C'est -à- dire qu'il faudrait prononcer certains mots rituels, je suppose. Mes pensées devraient mettre un uniforme: l'uniforme du proscrit? Mais je déteste les uniformes, même celui-là. Il faut avant tout rester un homme." (D 97). Eustache, however, insists that by leaving Germany, Werner has adopted a political stand and should therefore declare solidarity with all the other German refugees in Paris. Werner refuses to do this: he does not know them as personal friends and therefore considers that such an act would have no real significance for him. There is, however, no ambiguity about his attitude to the fascist régime in Germany since he unhesitatingly turns down the chance of returning to his country and resuming his career as a singer. Werner has deep personal convictions which he invariably keeps to himself, but which do not fail to show through in all his actions. He quietly accepts his situation whereas Eustache, were he in the same position, would make of Werner's misfortunes the justification for his existence. He indirectly admits this to Béatrice when he says: "Que veux-tu que je devienne? Il n'y a pas de guerre, pas d'épidémie, pas d'occasion de mourir," (D 141). Werner does not need to proclaim aloud the social and political injustices of the world to find a reason for living. His life finds meaning in his artistic sensibility - in particular, in his love of music - and in his affection for his friends.

Whereas Werner responds to the beauty of art and unashamedly expresses the joy and admiration which it inspires in him, Eustache morosely observes that such effusions are scandalous and unjustifiable: "L'art, la joie, la beauté, est-ce que je sais? on verra tout ça plus tard. Il faut d'abord que les gens mangent." (D 96). Eustache is only prepared to accept an art which can be assessed in terms of utility and political commitment. Werner, however, believes that art - and, in his case, music - has an intrinsic value of its own:

Werner: Tu crois que la musique doit donner des belles pensées. Mais ce n'est pas vrai. Tu crois aussi qu'elle est un instrument pour comment vous dites? zur Befreiung.

Béatrice: L'émancipation.

Werner: Elle n'est pas un instrument; elle a sa valeur par soi-même, une valeur plus grande que toutes les idées. Je ne peux pas expliquer, mais je suis sûr. (D 82).

The fact that Werner's deep love for music is something which he is unable to explain in objective terms and whose value he is therefore unable to prove suggests not that it should be invalidated and discounted, but that it makes sense only to those with a certain sensibility or insight - a gift which Werner clearly possesses and which Eustache does not. Werner's whole response to life is based on deep personal beliefs and convictions, and forms a marked contrast with Eustache's vague political abstractions. Unlike Eustache, Werner believes that suffering and unhappiness, for example, can only be combated on a limited individual scale. He is suspicious of vast, impersonal organisations which try to solve the problems of mankind for they tend to generalise discontent and stifle our sense of personal identity. In such a world there would no longer be any desire to write and compose music, and, without music, life for Werner would become barren and empty:

Werner: Oui, je sais bien, tu crois dans l'assistance publique. Moi je pense seulement que c'est un bureau pour généraliser la mauvaise humeur. Il y a des gens qui disent: si personne n'est satisfait, tout le monde sera un peu content, parce qu'on se dira: je ne suis pas bien, mais mon voisin il n'est pas bien non plus. Moi je dis: il n'y aura plus de malheur peut-être, mais il n'y aura pas de joie non plus. Tout le monde sera de mauvaise humeur. Mais c'est le pire qui peut exister! Avec de la souffrance on peut encore faire de la musique; pas avec de la mauvaise humeur.

Eustache: La musique! c'est très secondaire après tout.

Werner: Non, Eustache, ce n'est pas secondaire. Si la musique diminue, si la musique devient plus pauvre, alors la vie aussi diminue, elle devient mesquine. Sans la musique on ne vit plus, on vivote ... (D 85).

Werner lives in a quiet and undemonstrative way, and his unostentatious acts of generosity are far more meaningful and real than any of Gertrude's or Eustache's denunciations of social injustice. Eustache turns down a chance of promotion to another school for political reasons and writes an abusive letter to a minister, but his treatment of Béatrice and Werner is mean and shabby. A vague social ideal has thus supplanted the care and attention he is prepared to accord to the individual. And it is ultimately Werner who, without aligning himself with a specifically political cause, achieves far more for the unhappy victims of the divided and oppressive world in which he lives, than Eustache. He comes to announce to Eustache and Béatrice that he has decided to return to Germany. Although Gisela, his wife, has deserted him to live with a rich German baron, Werner does not feel that his brief exile in France has been an unnecessary or meaningless hardship. During this time he has learned of Rudolf's death in Switzerland, but this news does not erase the vivid memory of his friend's unjust persecution. The more Werner thinks about Rudolf, however, the more difficult it becomes for him to remain in Paris where he has found himself almost immediately liked by those who have got to know him and thus invited to spend the coming months with different families. Werner has very little money,

but he knows that there is no danger of his starving to death or sleeping on the streets. Rudolf, on the other hand, had none of Werner's immediate attraction and charm. "Il n'y avait pas de danger qu'il arrive par la sympathie," says Werner to Béatrice. "Il serait mort de faim peut-être." (D 148). It is, in part, this realisation which makes Werner's exile suddenly seem to him more of a privilege than a hardship; but by refusing to benefit from the privileged situation in which he finds himself, Werner realises that he has probably also been influenced by Eustache's own bitter denunciations of the success that has come his way. "C'est peut-être un scrupule," he says to Béatrice; "je dirai davantage: c'est peut-être Eustache qui de quelque manière me l'a passée... comme la grippe." (D 148). He feels, however, that he must return to Germany and join with those who are being oppressed and persecuted, for it is they who, more than anyone else, need somebody with his natural warmth and generosity. "La sympathie, chez Mme Broissard, c'est agaçant, c'est idiot," he says to Béatrice: "dans un camp de concentration, c'est peut-être une force." (D 149). Béatrice is at first stunned by Werner's decision which she believes to be an unnecessary gesture, almost an act of suicide. But, far from throwing his life away, Werner is offering it to those who may be able to draw comfort and hope from his presence: he is offering himself not to a vague ideal, but to real individuals who are suffering and who need help:

Werner: Je me mets simplement à la disposition.

Béatrice: De qui, Werner? de quoi? de la cause? de la révolution?

Werner: La cause ne m'intéresse pas; les hommes m'intéressent, quoique Eustache ait cru le contraire. (D 150).

Not only has the memory of Rudolf's persecution and Eustache's tirades against social injustice influenced Werner in his decision to return to Germany, but his mind has also been made up by the realisation of a deepening affection between himself and Béatrice, for on no account would he allow himself to cause the break-up of Eustache's marriage. Moreover, the situation is made more critical in that Eustache has left Béatrice and is having an affair with Gertrude. Werner knows that Béatrice alone, by her kindness, devotion and understanding, can save Eustache from his present confusion and disarray. "Vous ne pouvez pas l'abandonner," says Werner to Béatrice. "Il faut vous rappeler toujours que vous êtes la femme d'un pauvre ..." (D 152). The poverty from which Eustache suffers is clearly not of a material nature, for he has had both money and success. It is the poverty of a man who experiences no real sense of vocation or belonging, and whose life is thus devoid of any inherent value or purpose. Moreover, Eustache is not alone in his poverty: from the "broken world" of Christianâ Chesnay we pass into a world threatened by the spread of political ideologies and by the vast, impersonal political and social institutions set up to ensure universal happiness. "Les léprosiés vont se multiplier sur la terre, je le crains," says Werner to Béatrice. "Ce sera une grâce réservée à très peu d'y vivre en sachant qu'on vit parmi les lépreux, et sans les prendre en horreur." (D 153). And as Béatrice expresses her uncertainty and apprehension, Werner reminds her that when he has gone his memory will be to her the source of strength and hope which Rudolf's memory has been to him. "Vous penserez à moi comme je pense à Rudolf," he says. "Plus tard je vous habiterai comme Rudolf m'habite ..." (D 153).

There is an important comment made by Béatrice when, confronted with Eustache's increasing bitterness and dissatisfaction and with her father's pomposity, she sadly remarks: "Mon Dieu, quelle horreur! est-ce qu'il

n'y a donc dans la vie que des fantoches et des ... des désespérés?" (D 135). Béatrice's attentions seem to be divided between those who are totally disenchanted with life - such as Eustache and Gertrude - and those whose life is an absurd caricature of all that is enriching and meaningful - such as Durand-Fresnil and his wife. It is true that, through her deep appreciation of music, Béatrice is able to share with Werner a deeper, more harmonious order of experience; but these moments are brief and fleeting, seemingly overshadowed by the grating clamour of the "fantoches". It is this element of discord which provides an important background to Le Dard and which the author treats, as he had done in Le Monde cassé, with unsparing irony and satire.

Much of the first act is taken up with the presentation of these essentially comic characters. When the play opens, Mme Soreau is in conversation with Eustache and Béatrice with whom she has just had dinner. It is soon clear that, despite her loquaciousness, Mme Soreau has very little of any importance to say. She is indignant to find that Gertrude knows nothing about the recent murder at Argenteuil, and when the latter coldly observes that she does not read the "faits divers", Mme Soreau replies: "Ah bien! vous n'êtes pas curieuse. Je ne suis pas comme vous. J'aime bien savoir ce qui se passe." (D 28). Despite her rather limited interests and banal preoccupations, Mme Soreau is considerably less obnoxious than Béatrice's mother who is excessively snobbish and dictatorial. When she and her husband call round to see Eustache and Béatrice, she is horrified to find that it is Béatrice who is forced to prepare tea for her visitors because the maid has the afternoon off. "Moi je spécifie toujours que ma femme de chambre ne sortira pas les dimanches de réception," (D 61) she says, and adds that she has already noticed that Béatrice's maid is not "si bien stylée" (D 61), a comment which does not fail to arouse Eustache's indignation.

Mme Durand-Fresnil is very conscious of what is generally considered a mark of good taste and good breeding when in fact these values are often exceedingly superficial. Moreover she interferes into and tries to supervise the lives of her husband and children lest they forget the dignified station which they hold in society. Monsieur Durand-Fresnil is less of a snob than his wife, but equally pretentious when it comes to expressing his own opinions. He is particularly fond of the sound of his own voice, of holding long political discussions and of upholding his belief in the honour and glory of France. His reaction when he hears that Eustache has turned down the chance to teach at the lycée Henri IV and has written an abusive letter to the minister concerned is an absurd and grotesque caricature of anger and indignation. "Un procédé comme le vôtre est digne des bolcheviks ...," he splutters. "Peut-être ces gens-là sont-ils vos amis; ils ne seront jamais les miens. J'ai lu hier dans Le Temps des récits qui m'ont donné la chair de poule. Un vieux libéral tel que moi ..." (D 134).

It is against this background that the conflict between Eustache and Werner is developed. By representing a world devoid of any deep or lasting values, and devoid too of any awareness of its basic emptiness, the comic element serves to throw into relief moments or situations of deep significance. The appearance of Werner at the end of the first act, for example, is thrown into relief by the noisy, clamorous discussions which have been taking place since the arrival of Béatrice's parents and brother, Maxime. Werner has returned to Paris after visiting Rudolf in Switzerland. He knows that his friend has very little time left to live and he is clearly deeply moved and distressed. Durand-Fresnil's rather anxious preoccupations with the political situation are made to seem all the more superfluous in comparison with something as real as the persecution and death of a close friend, while his obvious love of rhetoric

is contrasted with Werner's quiet , unassuming manner. Moreover, Durand-Fresnil and his wife show no real sensitivity to Werner's distress: Mme Durand-Fresnil chatters on about the happy memories of her visits to Switzerland, while her husband seizes on the opportunity to defend his beloved France. "Nos Alpes françaises me suffisent," he says: "quelles richesses touristiques dans ce pays! quand saurons-nous les exploiter?" (D 72).

Le Dard is a short, but exceedingly compact three act play built, as J. Chenu observes, around "l'opposition familière à Marcel de l'être et de l'avoir, ou plus directement de la pauvreté et de la richesse intérieure"¹⁷. It is a play of balance and contrast. The strong satirical element is rich and varied, reflecting differences in class - those between Mme Soreau and Mme Durand-Fresnil, for example, - and in generation - Durand-Fresnil's patriotic fervour and belief in reason and progress contrasted with Maxime's indifference and cynicism. There is no trace of humour, however, in Marcel's treatment of the "désespérés" Eustache and Gertrude, whose empty existence, like that of Denise in Le Monde cassé, has essentially tragic implications. Moreover, just as Denise's attitude and behaviour is contrasted with that of Christiane, so Eustache and Gertrude are set against Werner and Béatrice. Emptiness is thus offset by plenitude, despair by hope, and the harsh, grating conflict of the present by a harmonious, intangible world evoked through music. The appearance of Werner, delayed until the end of the first act, is made all the more effective in view of the fact that, since the circumstances of his exile have been repeated on several occasions, we await

17. Le théâtre de Gabriel Marcel et sa signification métaphysique, p. 198 .

his return from Switzerland with increasing interest. From the moment he appears until the last words he exchanges with Béatrice at the end of the play, Werner stands apart from all the other characters as a constant reminder that life is not irremediably divided between the "fantoche" and the "désespérés" but opens on to a world of mystery, love and reconciliation.

By an exceedingly strange coincidence, the person who provided the main inspiration for Marcel's creation of Werner was the very same person who interpreted the role when the play was first staged in 1937 at the Théâtre des Arts. During the thirties, Marcel had received a number of visits from German writers and philosophers who had been forced to leave their country during the rise to power of Hitler. It was in this way that Marcel first met a young German who later came to be known under the pseudonym of Eric Noth. "Il m'avait été d'emblée sympathique," recalls Marcel, "et c'est à partir de lui que je conçus le personnage de Werner Schnee."¹⁸ When the play had been completed, Marcel read it to Noth and asked him if he would be prepared to play the part of Werner. Noth accepted and, despite his relative inexperience as an actor, Marcel recalls that "il devait incarner mon personnage de façon inoubliable et à la représentation générale, à sa seule apparition, vers la fin du premier acte, toute la salle éclata en applaudissements."¹⁹ The reaction of the critics was, however, very varied, ranging from comments that the play was "inégal et assez pénible théâtralement"²⁰ to highly appreciative articles by François Mauriac²¹ and André Maurois²², and to its assessment

18. En chemin, vers quel éveil?, p. 157.

19. Ibid., p. 158.

20. Paris-Soir, 4.3.1937.

21. Gringoire, 29.1.1937.

22. Marianne, 17.3.1973.

as "une pièce qui, avec Électre, de Giraudoux - domine le théâtre contemporain"²³. The full meaning of the play clearly escaped many of the critics, unsure as to the reasons for Eustache's sense of failure and to the significance of Werner's role. For those acquainted with any of Marcel's previous plays, in particular Le Monde cassé, however, there is no difficulty in recognising in Eustache's bitterness and discontent a symptom of the inner poverty or "indisponibilité" which vitiates the individual's response to life by stifling his or her spiritual awareness or receptivity. Life is, indeed, a heavy burden for those deprived of the power to admire or create, and whose lack of humility and charity undermines all their personal relationships, thus leaving them even more embittered and alone. Moreover, just as Denise in Le Monde cassé blindly pursues a gay social existence, unaware of its ultimate consequences, so Eustache has fallen under the insidious spell of ideological fanaticism. It is not gay socialising or political commitment as such of which Marcel is critical, but the particular form it takes in each play. The social life which Denise leads is destructive because other people are used as instruments of pleasure and not treated as real individuals. Thus "le divertissement" exacerbates Denise's "indisponibilité" and accentuates further the futility and emptiness of her life. There is no reason why Eustache who, like Denise, is basically uneasy and insecure, should not find some meaning and purpose restored to his existence by the recognition of certain essential human rights, by participating in what J. Chenu terms "une tâche commune et

23. From an article appearing in La Vie intellectuelle, septembre, 1937. See collection of articles and reviews on Le Dard in Fonds Rondel, Bibliothèque de l'Arsenal.

supérieure"²⁴. "Marcel feels great admiration for a man like Camus, for example, who, although refusing all forms of religious belief, was deeply committed to the social and political issues of his age. Camus' political principles, however, are those of someone who cares passionately about the lives of his fellow men, whereas Eustache's preoccupation with the idea of freedom and justice leads him to overlook the very real needs and feelings of those closest to him. "Malgré son action révolutionnaire sincère et réelle, Eustache n'adhère qu' à moitié," writes J. Chenu: "la réalité pour laquelle il combat n'est qu' objet de représentation intellectuelle."²⁵ Eustache's fascination with a vague, impersonal cause, with what Marcel later called "l'esprit d'abstraction"²⁶, is the dart which is poisoning an existence already impoverished by his own basic "indisponibilité". What Marcel clearly denounces and warns us against in Le Dard is any form of thinking or commitment, whether it be political, technocratic or scientific, which is so dominated by abstractions that it reduces the individual to a mere number or function, and thus depersonalises his whole identity. Eustache's preoccupation with socialism is but one of the many afflictions of our age characterised by what Marcel sees as "un manque d'amour qui consiste dans l'incapacité de traiter un être comme un être, et dans le fait de substituer à cet être individuel une certaine idée, une certaine désignation abstraite"²⁷. Indeed, in Werner's fear of the poverty and discontent which will spread like a plague over the earth, there is a remarkably accurate premonition

24. Le théâtre de Gabriel Marcel et sa signification métaphysique, p. 200.

25. Ibid, p. 200.

26. See preface to Les Hommes contre l'humain, Paris, La Colombe, 1951, p.7.

27. La Dignité humaine, p. 161.

of a bureaucratic world choked by facts and figures, statistical surveys and identity cards, and of a society divided by bitter ideological disputes and rival political factions.

In contrast to Eustache, Werner's life is both rich and meaningful. Like Christiane in Le Monde cassé he is "disponible", and this spiritual receptivity is apparent from the outset in his artistic sensibility. It is because art and religion offer an authentic experience of liberation and transcendence that Werner tells Béatrice at the end of the play that the artist and the believer will escape the plague of growing discontent. Through music Werner is able to glimpse a higher order of reality and, as a singer, he is able to interpret this experience and share it with others. It is in this respect that the artist and the believer are very close to each other, for the experience of artistic creation and of worship and prayer necessitates a state of total self-effacement and receptivity. The fact that Rudolf continues to remain not only present in Werner's thoughts after the news of his death, but also a source of comfort and guidance provides another concrete example of Werner's "disponibilité". Rudolf's presence, like that of Jacques in Le Monde cassé, also evokes the mysterious reality of a world beyond the categories of reason and objectivity, time and change. That Werner is aware that such a world exists is made clear by the end of the second act when he remarks: "S'il n'y avait que les vivants, Gisela, je pense que la terre serait tout à fait inhabitable." (D 121). Thus, when Werner decides to return to Germany at the end of the play, the possibility of torture and death does not hang over him as a sinister and threatening end to his life, and he realises too that, should he die, his death may give to others still living the strength and reassurance which Rudolf's death has given to him. This communion between the living and the dead which plays a highly significant part in the

dénouement of both Le Monde cassé and Le Dard indicates, as G. Deledalle observes, "qu'il n'y a pas pour Marcel deux mondes celui des vivants et celui des morts, mais un seul monde de vivants incarnés et désincarnés"²⁸. The presence of Jacques and Rudolf is not, however, something that can be objectively proved or demonstrated by Christiane and Werner, but implies a deeply personal and ultimately intangible experience of being with.

Despite the final message of liberation and hope which closes Le Monde cassé and Le Dard, both plays present a sombre picture of society, and one that is, in many ways, grimly prophetic too. The symptoms of Christiane's broken world and of Eustache's fascination with abstractions are clearly visible in the massive, feverish pursuit of pleasure and "kicks" among young people today, and in the spread of bureaucracy on all levels of our social life, together with the increasing number of divisive and disruptive ideological confrontations. In view of their striking "actualité", it is surprising to learn that the two plays have given rise to no more than a handful of performances in France. Indeed, because of the difficulty in obtaining most of Marcel's plays in libraries and bookshops until recent years²⁹, they have probably not even been widely read. For those who feel that Marcel's dramatic work merits far greater recognition than it has hitherto enjoyed, however, the "rediscovery" of Un Homme de Dieu some 25 years after it had first been published does at least offer some hope that there will one day be a widespread renewal of interest in plays like Le Monde cassé and Le Dard which provide such a deep and penetrating analysis of the underlying mood and preoccupations of our time.

28. L'Existentiel: philosophies et littératures de l'existence, Paris, René Lacoste, 1949, p. 111.

29. Le Dard was re-edited in Le secret est dans les îles in 1968, and Le Monde cassé reappeared as one of the Cinq pièces majeures in 1973.

CHAPTER 4

The final period: faith and the inextricability of a world in conflict

Both Le Monde cassé and Le Dard reflect Marcel's growing concern at the social and political climate of Western Europe in the 1930's. Hitler's rise to power, the spread of fascism and the persecution of the Jews form an important part of the political background to Le Dard. While many of the younger generation of France's intellectuals like Sartre and Simone de Beauvoir remained, at this time, comfortably esconced in a cocoon of idealism and thus blindly confident that there was no real threat to peace and order, Marcel, who had already endured the anguish and distress caused by one world war, was clearly awake to the ominously fragile political situation in Europe prior to the outbreak of war in 1939. In the next decade Marcel witnessed the overthrow of France at the hands of the German army, followed by a long and bitter struggle resulting in the defeat of Hitler and the rise to power of the Communists. One great political evil seemed to have been crushed only to be supplanted, in Marcel's view, by another. Three of the four plays written by him between 1938 and 1951, L'Émissaire, Le Signe de la Croix and Rome n'est plus dans Rome,¹ are directly concerned with the political situation in France during and after the Second World War. In this respect, all three plays are an example of politically committed theatre in as much as the action of each play is not only situated in a precise political and historical context, but is also modified and conditioned by it. They thus differ markedly from the Trois pièces in which the family upheavels are only indirectly affected by the events of the First World War. Raymond could have been killed in a car accident, but the basic subject and issues of La Chapelle ardente, for example, would have been unchanged, whereas the questions raised by L'Émissaire or Le Signe de la Croix can only be studied in the context of the defeat and occupation of France by the Germans in 1940.

1. The fourth play is La Fin des temps, written for the radio and first published in 1950. It was re-edited in Le secret est dans les îles in 1967.

Political commitment does not, however, mean that Marcel sides with one particular party or social class. Le Dard clearly indicates his distrust of political ideologies and his belief that, only by a recognition of spiritual values, can the individual find a true meaning to life and a real sense of belonging. Despite the importance of their political setting, L'Émissaire, Le Signe de la Croix and Rome n'est plus dans Rome all lend weight to this last point. In this respect Marcel is not politically committed in any of these plays in the same way as Sartre in works like Le Diable et le Bon Dieu and Nekrassov where the author clearly upholds one particular course of political action as the only effective answer to the situation in which the individual finds himself. The immense gulf between Marcel's attitude to "engagement" and that of Sartre was soon recognised by the former in the months immediately following the liberation of France in 1944. Marcel was horrified by the politically motivated purge which took place during this period. Special tribunals were hastily arranged to try large numbers of Frenchmen for treason with no attempt to ensure a fair and impartial jury. "Les existentialistes, alors en vogue, provoquèrent mon indignation par le cynisme avec lequel ils s'inscrivaient en faux contre les principes éternels du droit," recalls Marcel. "Et c'est ainsi...que se consumma la rupture entre moi et des écrivains tels que Sartre et Simone de Beauvoir..."² Marcel's refusal to over-simplify the issues facing his compatriots during the Second World War and his belief that there could be no clear-cut political answer to such issues is clearly brought out in L'Émissaire.³ In this play, the characters fall into three main groups: there are the active members of the Resistance like Bertrand Sérol, Collaborators like Roland de Cramoy, and those like Antoine Sorgue who follow a middle course believing that the situation cannot be reduced to a simple choice between

2. En chemin, vers quel éveil?, p.224. For Marcel's denunciation of the purge, see "Philosophie de l'épuration" in La Nouvelle Relève (Canada), nos.7 & 8, janvier & février, 1946.

3. All textual references are taken from Le secret est dans les îles, Paris, Plon, 1967, pp.157-270 and will be incorporated in the thesis in the following abbreviated form: (É..). Eg. (E157) = L'Émissaire in Le secret est dans les îles, p.157.

Resistance and Collaboration. The Collaborators presented in Sartre's Morts sans sépulture are odious, inhuman figures who inspire in us feelings of unmitigated horror. In L'Émissaire, the case of Roland de Cramoy is presented in a far more impartial light. His decision is shown to have been made in good faith: he believes in the possibility of Collaboration not as a means of exploiting defeat, but as a way of preserving France's independence. The risks and dangers of Collaboration were very great, but for someone like Roland there was the very real hope that, by such a policy, the French would not become a mere pawn of other great powers, that peace would be preserved in their own country and the strength of fascism gradually dissolved. "Mon fils me l'a dit souvent," says Mme de Cramoy: "le nazisme ne tire sa force que de la résistance qu'on lui oppose; ses adversaires les plus acharnés sont ses meilleurs auxiliaires." (E229). Without himself upholding Roland's political beliefs, Antoine recognises that by collaborating a great deal of unnecessary anguish and suffering could have been avoided, and that at least, now that the war is almost over, one should try to understand and respect the attitude of those who held different beliefs and opinions. Real courage lies in being true to one's deepest convictions, irrespective of how popular such convictions are, and Roland has proved that he possessed this courage since he stood firm by his beliefs in the face of growing contempt and condemnation. That he was not blinded by fanaticism is underlined by the fact that, as the Resistance movement grew and the hope of successful Collaboration faded, so Roland felt continually exposed to the danger of deserting a cause to which he had pledged his support. "Il m'a dit que même alors il ne se passait presque pas de jour où il n'eût à résister aux assauts d'un furieux qui prétendait être sa conscience," says Antoine, "et qu'il n'avait pas trop de toute sa lucidité et de tout son courage pour combattre et dénoncer cette imposture." (E237).

For Bertrand, on the other hand, Collaboration was a crime and he considered it the duty of the French to actively oppose the German forces.

The stand adopted by Bertrand is certainly no less courageous and sincere than that of Roland, but it is devoid of real nobility or generosity since he has become totally uncompromising in his denunciation of those who do not share his beliefs, while he also seems to have overlooked some of the frightening consequences of the Resistance - namely the risk of reprisals and of further unnecessary suffering. But perhaps the most insidious effect of the Resistance was that it had fostered a spirit of bitterness and revenge among many people, and, of this, the afore-mentioned tribunals set up after the war to try Frenchmen accused of treason provide the most striking example. When Mme de Cramoy comes to see Bertrand in the hope that there may be some possibility of freeing her son after his arrest, Bertrand, although regretting the excesses of the purge, adopts a cold, uncompromising attitude and clearly feels that there can be no reprieve for those who had chosen to collaborate. Mme de Cramoy passionately takes up the defence of her son's actions and motives, while Mme Ferrier sadly observes: "C'est si décourageant de constater que chacun reste sur ses positions." (E229). All respect and understanding for one another is swept away in a fierce debate between rival factions. "Vous avez raison," comments Antoine to Mme Ferrier; "on s' imagine opposer des faits, on n'oppose que des partis pris." (E229).

For someone like Bertrand, the facts and issues are clear and hesitation not admissible; but such an attitude almost invariably implies, if not fanaticism, then at least a certain blindness and oversimplification. In this particular respect there is a marked difference between Antoine and Bertrand. Antoine was opposed to Nazism and yet could sympathise with Roland because he saw that the effect of the Resistance would be to divide the French among themselves and expose them to the influence of foreign powers. "Il a cherché à se persuader," says Roger, "qu'une voie intermédiaire était possible pour un homme qui, détestant les Allemands, redoutait presque aussi vivement ce qu'il appelait l'asservissement de son pays par les Anglo-Saxons ou surtout

par les Soviets." (E205). Roger describes Antoine's attitude as "cette espèce d'isolationisme extravagant" (E206), whereas Mme Ferrier, whose husband had been deported as an act of reprisal against the Resistance, believes that there is much to be admired in Antoine's neutrality and that the Resistance has probably done more harm than good. Antoine believes in common with Roland that an act of courage is not necessarily one of defiance and rebellion. It consists in being true to oneself, and deep within him Antoine feels unable to side with one party or the other. All that he felt able to do in the years of unease and anguish during the Occupation was to keep as clear a picture of the situation and events as possible, to avoid the pitfalls of fanaticism and to help those in need whenever possible by compassionate and understanding acts. Roger, although initially doubting the sincerity of Antoine's attitude, recognises that the latter was probably right and that it was a great mistake to take a firm, unyielding political stand. "J'ai tenté de m'agrèger à un nous autres...nous les résistants..." he admits. "Mais ce nous autres est en miettes. Et c'est probablement bien qu'il en soit ainsi...." (E267). For Antoine there could be no easy solution to the innumerable questions and problems raised by the war: there could only be hope that all the meaningless atrocities which he has witnessed during the hostilities were not the final judgement of his age, nor a totally absurd end to the lives of those who had been killed during that time. But such a hope makes sense only when there is belief in a transcendent reality or Being and in the possibility of man's redemption. Antoine, a Christian, has this faith, and this implies not only the trust and hope which help him to overcome a feeling of ineradicable horror, impotence and despair, but also the charity and compassion which safeguard him against the insidious hold of fanaticism and sectarianism.

There is tangible evidence of the kind of brutality and suffering endured by many people during the war in the person of Clément Ferrier

who has returned to Paris after being unexpectedly released from a P.O.W. camp in Poland. Clément is an emissary in as much as the world to which he bears living witness is one of indescribable horror from which few emerge unscathed. What is immediately impressed on the audience is that, despite his return, Clément is not fully restored to his family. "Je ne sais pas," observes Sylvie, "c'est un peu comme s'il nous avait dépêché un simple émissaire...comme si lui-même n'était pas arrivé, pas même encore en vue...." (E173). Despite his physical presence, Clément as a person is absent. All the qualities and characteristics by which he was once so easily recognised seem to have been effaced. "Mathilde, tu ne te doutes donc pas...que tu parles à un mort!" (E198) he exclaims at one point to his wife, recognising not only the imminence of death in a physical sense, but realising also that he is already dead to a world of joy and laughter in which he was once able to participate. Thus, when Antoine tells him of the joy which the news of his return had given his family and friends, Clément replies: "Non, non, pas de joie; pas ce mot, je vous en prie." (E188). He feels excluded from a world in which the word "joy" retains its meaning, and Antoine himself realises later that there is something scandalous in Clément's return, so great is his mental and physical debility. But if Clément as a person has been destroyed as a result of his captivity and maltreatment, it is not within the power of science or medicine to restore him to his former self. Mathilde, however, busily makes preparations to ensure that Clément will, as soon as possible, resume "son existence normale" (E165). She has arranged for Clément to undergo various medical examinations, and tells Sylvie that they must do all in their power to distract him and keep his mind occupied, "Il va falloir nous ingénieur à le distraire, à le tirer de lui-même," (E165) she says. Sylvie, however, rebels against her mother's attitude which seems to reduce Clément to a mere object or instrument that has temporarily broken down: "Je ne sais pas, mais il me semble qu'on n'a pas le droit de le

traiter comme une espèce de pendule ou de radio qu'il s'agit de remettre en état..."(E166). Sylvie recognises that human identity cannot be reduced to a mere bundle of scientifically controlable phenomena and that her father's suffering is not therefore something that can be treated as though it were a passing physical ailment:

Sylvie: Toute cette souffrance atroce qu'il traîne derrière lui...pas seulement la sienne...celle de tous ses compagnons...ce n'est pas une poussière, une espèce de crasse dont il n'y aurait qu'à le nettoyer. C'est quelque chose de sacré, qu'il faut respecter.

Mathilde: Moi je ne connais que notre devoir qui est de le guérir....

Sylvie: Ce n'est pas non plus une maladie...je ne crois pas.(E166-7).

Sylvie rebels against her mother's over-zealousness to "cure" Clément, while Clément himself protests against the atmosphere of detached curiosity which surrounds him. When he learns that his return to Paris has been noted by the Ministry concerned with French prisoners and deportees, he is horrified that the suffering endured by himself and his fellow prisoners is to be recorded and classified as one enters down details pertaining to tax and insurance. Clément may be an emissary of an inhuman world, but he himself has not been totally dehumanised for he retains awareness of a world to which he once belonged and of an identity which refuses to be treated and classified as a mere object. "Tu comprends, je devrai partir..." he says to Mathilde. "Je ne supporterai pas...cette curiosité...je ne suis pas rentré pour la satisfaire."(E198).

Clément's presence in L'Émissaire underlines two important points. First of all, war is not waged between impersonal forces: it brings in its wake innumerable personal tragedies which will never be erased nor forgotten by those directly concerned by them, and which can never be justified on a political level because of the incommensurability of persons and causes. Secondly, the individual's sense of identity points to a deeper and richer level of reality or being than that of the purely objective or problematical. Our attention is drawn, in the first instance,

to the inadequacy of Bertrand's unyielding political stand and, in the second, to Mathilde's lack of human understanding. Antoine's humility and compassion stand out in marked contrast to the respective attitudes of Bertrand and Mathilde. Unlike Bertrand, Antoine makes no attempt to justify the horrors of war; he finds comfort and hope not in a vague social and political ideal but in faith and, as a Christian, in the message of the Resurrection. Unlike Mathilde, he deeply respects Clément and the suffering he has endured, and the fact that he asks if he can pray at Clément's bedside indicates his recognition of their spiritual brotherhood. Like Werner in Le Dard, Antoine reminds us that in an oppressed and divided world, authentic personal liberation and fulfilment can only be found through awareness of a higher order of reality in which we are called to participate and find our true being.

Sylvie's reaction to Antoine's faith is particularly significant since she is the one character in the play who desperately yearns for security and a sense of belonging. She is very different from Anne-Marie, her sister and the wife of Bertrand, who is cynical and unsympathetic, and from her brother, Régis, who believes that only by joining the Resistance will he free himself from the atmosphere of escapism and unreality which seems to surround his family. Sylvie's reply to Régis on this particular point is highly significant. She accuses him of being misguided by a vague heroic ideal, and when Régis asks her the kind of reality which she envisages, Sylvie answers: "Un monde où on puisse grandir, aimer, créer..." (E179). Her attitude indicates a deep reverence for life and an implicit recognition of the need for greater love and understanding among all people. Like Christiane in Le Monde cassé, Sylvie ardently aspires to a richer and more harmonious level of existence, yet deludes herself into thinking that this aspiration will for ever remain unfulfilled.

Clément's return from captivity is the test or "épreuve" which accentuates Sylvie's unease and eventually leads her to the point where

she must, like Christiane, resign herself to a life dominated by discord and conflict, or turn instead to a world which answers the individual's call for greater love and understanding. Sylvie is tormented by the change that has come over her father and by the possible meaning of his words "tu ne te doutes donc pas...que tu parles à un mort" (E198). The realisation of the extreme hardship and suffering endured by Clément initially turns Sylvie against Antoine. On the one hand, she is made aware of a world of physical torture and brutality, while, on the other, she recalls Antoine's neutrality and his constant efforts to justify his pacifism. She suddenly feels that Antoine's stand is a form of escapism and a refusal to come to terms with reality. "Non, je vous ai écouté trop longtemps," she tells him. "Toutes ces paroles, ces discussions, ces arguments...ces réponses plus ou moins plausibles mais toujours suspectes...je suis excédée de tout cela; et c'est de tout cela que le retour de mon père m'a délivrée." (E236). Sylvie has convinced herself that Clément's return must have some hidden meaning and interprets it as a denunciation of Antoine's pacifism. "Oui, il appartient déjà," she says of her father, "et à tout jamais à un monde qui vous condamne par sa seule existence, un monde qui ignore tous les compromis, et cette espèce d'acceptation dont vous vous prévalez et qui n'est que l'espèce la plus hypocrite de la servilité." (E238). When Antoine tries to defend himself against Sylvie's accusations, and admits, with great humility, that prayer alone had provided him with the strength and reassurance to live through the violent and bloody years of the war, Sylvie angrily rejects this recourse to faith. The horrible suffering to which her father bears witness seems to exclude the possibility of a transcendent reality and to indicate instead her imprisonment in a world devoid of order and justice. "S'il y a un autre monde, je ne suis pas sûre qu'il s'inquiète encore de nous," she declares; "tout a terriblement l'air de se passer comme s'il nous ignorait à jamais." (E241). Sylvie does not, however, find any more cause for hope in Bertrand's political action:

she is, in fact, beginning to feel totally deprived of any belief at all. "Je suis comme à zéro," she observes to Mathilde. "Je ne me reconnais plus. Je ne sais plus où je suis, qui je suis,...et je me demande si les trois quarts des Français ne sont pas au même point que moi." (E245). Submerged by an acute sense of hopelessness, Sylvie no longer has the strength of revolt, but recognises that she is below the point where she can affirm or deny anything. "Nous sommes dans le pays du même pas," (258) she says to Antoine.

Clément's return and subsequent death seem, therefore, to have left Sylvie not only bitterly disillusioned, but without recourse against moments "où une breche se fait par où l'horreur s'engouffre..." (241). The possibility of Sylvie being reconciled with Antoine and of finding meaning restored to her life through faith is at no time, however, totally excluded. First of all, Sylvie never categorically rejects a possible transcendent reality although she emotionally revolts against what she mistakenly believes to be Antoine's easy way out. When she has had time to reflect on her angry outburst, she recognises the unfairness of her accusations. She had refused to let Antoine pray at Clément's bedside, but then admits: "J'ai probablement eu tort de m'y opposer; je me le suis souvent reproché au cours de ces derniers mois." (E245). She also tells her mother that, although she had sometimes thought of religion as an escape from reality, she finds it possible to believe in Antoine's faith simply because he does not express his convictions with the "mécanique verbale" (E244) of a man who has never experienced doubt or uncertainty. Significantly, too, Sylvie recognises that in her need for guidance and assurance she has found a secret attraction to Christianity. "Comme si lorsque nous nous sommes fiancés," she tells Antoine, "je n'avais pas eu l'espoir secret que vous me gagneriez à vos croyances...comme si je n'avais pas toujours été quelqu'un qui/ froid..." (E240). Finally, Sylvie's passionate desire to understand why her father returned so unexpectedly from captivity indicates her refusal to accept that life can be reduced to a series of chance, meaningless events and encounters. "Nous n'avons

pas à consentir au hasard...au non-sens..., "(E253) she says to Bertrand.

Sylvie's spiritual awakening, like that of Christiane in Le Monde cassé, may be an effective coup de théâtre but is certainly not abrupt and incoherent. Sylvie had implicitly recognised the value of religion but had imagined that faith was a privileged possession of which she was fated to be deprived. Antoine, however, gently refutes such an idea: the world is not, he says, irrevocably divided between those with faith and those without it. A Christian does not stand apart and aloof from non-Christians, ranging himself among "nous autres catholiques...nous autres chrétiens..."(E259), but shares in their trials and suffering. Moreover, his faith is not a triumphant blast of certitude and salvation, for Antoine, like Geneviève in Le Monde cassé, emphasises his need for the support and affection of those closest to him:

Antoine: Seulement, voyez-vous, Sylvie, je ne peux rien tout seul...il faut que quelqu'un me fasse la charité...

Sylvie: Quelle charité?

Antoine: De ne pas désespérer de moi. (E259).

Just as Christiane is moved by Geneviève's sense of weakness and insecurity, so Sylvie feels far closer to Antoine now that he has expressed his need for her help and understanding. She feels that Antoine's need is an appeal to which she is asked to respond: "Comme si cette espèce de vide qui s'est faite en vous était devenue un appel et m'avait donné la possibilité d'y répondre." (E259). For the first time, Sylvie glimpses the possibility of sharing in Antoine's faith and of committing herself freely and in total confidence to God: but she is almost immediately assailed by uncertainty. Despite recognising deep within her the need to believe, Sylvie also feels that she will never be able to free herself from doubt. Once again Antoine intervenes to guide and clarify Sylvie. No Christian can deny the uncertainty and ambiguity which form an inescapable part of man's terrestrial condition, but this fact should not be used to discount the spiritual world in which he

feels called to participate and of which he grows more assured as he commits himself with greater trust and confidence to it. "Seulement il n'y a pas que ces eaux inexplorables. Il y a le monde de la lumière; et là nous ne tirons plus, c'est nous qui sommes tirés!" says Antoine. "Car ce monde est celui de la grâce; et il devient de plus en plus direct, de plus en plus consistant à mesure que nous y croyons davantage..." (E267). Antoine insists that there can be no objective proof or certainty of such a world: the life of a believer is a journey towards Truth, the light of which he alternately glimpses and loses from sight. The spring-board for Sylvie's spiritual awakening is provided by her recognition of Antoine's humility and profound trust, and by her own readiness to respond inwardly to the appeal which she believes has been made to her through Antoine's intervention. She listens with a deep sense of wonder and gratitude as, in the final scene, Antoine explains that those close to us whom we have seen die are never absent, but remain present with us until the supreme moment when we will be reconciled and reunited in eternal love:

"Il y a une chose que j'ai découverte après la mort de mes parents, c'est que ce que nous appelons sur-vivre en vérité c'est sous-vivre, et ceux que nous n'avons pas cessé d'aimer avec le meilleur de nous-mêmes voici qu'ils deviennent comme une voûte palpitante, invisible, mais pressentie et même effleurée, sous laquelle nous avançons toujours plus courbés, plus arrachés à nous-mêmes, vers l'instant où tout sera englouti dans l'amour." (E269).

As Sylvie and Antoine turn to each other and joyfully embrace, Rogér pensively observes: "Oui. S'il y a une vérité..."(E270), and the curtain falls to end the play. The final message is clear: in the face of the anguish and uncertainty which cannot but be felt in a politically divided, if not chaotic world, the individual must turn to God. Antoine's opposition to Bertrand mirrors the contrast between Werner and Eustache in Le Dard, and reminds us that it is people who matter most and not causes. L'Émissaire demonstrates very clearly Marcel's opposition to any form of committed theatre which glorifies one particular

ideological standpoint. His horror of fanaticism and sectarianism, of which Le Dard had been the first clear example, is reaffirmed in L'Émissaire, this time with regard to a specific historical and political situation, namely that of France during the Second World War. The play is an appeal to those whose judgement is not blinded by passion and abstractions, to those who, says Marcel, "supportent de regarder en face une réalité historique infiniment complexe et douloureuse - et qui ne se laisse pas simplifier comme certains l'ont cru".⁴ But it must also be remembered that, even in a politically stable and ordered world, there will still be an acute need for faith for without a deeper understanding of suffering and death, love and fidelity, the individual's reverence for life and respect for his fellow men is seriously undermined.

With Le Signe de la Croix⁵ Marcel treats a social and political subject of no less controversial and delicate a nature than that of L'Émissaire - namely the Jewish question. Once again his play is a protest against fanaticism and an appeal to greater humility and tolerance among all men. Just as Werner, in Le Dard, and Antoine, in L'Émissaire, had refused to adopt an uncompromising political stand, so Simon Bernauer, the central character in Le Signe de la Croix, finds himself opposed to the fanatical allegiance to Jewish traditions of his wife, Pauline, although he too is Jewish. He tells tante Léna, who was at that time living with Simon and his family having been forced to leave Austria after the overthrow of the government in 1938, that his wife is "une passionnée" (SC468).

4. Postface, Vers un autre royaume, p.233.

5. All textual references are taken from Cinq pièces majeures, Paris, Plon, 1973, pp.455-551, and will be incorporated in the thesis in the following abbreviated form: (SC..). Eg. (SC451)= Le Signe de la Croix in Cinq pièces majeures, p.451.

Pauline considers herself not French but Jewish, and she believes that her race forms an intellectual élite. She has particular admiration for her brother, Léon, who is a hospital doctor, but, as Simon ironically remarks: "Dans la famille de ma femme tout le monde est remarquable." (SC468). Pauline is outraged when she learns that neither Léon nor his friend Achille will be allowed to sit a competitive medical examination because they are of Jewish origin. She angrily denounces the wave of anti-Semitic feeling which seems to be spreading through France in 1938, and when Léon is offered a post in America she sees this as an admirable opportunity for him to pursue his career elsewhere. She feels no sense of allegiance whatever to France. "Si la France nous rejette, ce n'est plus notre patrie," (SC495) she says to Simon. Pauline lives in a world where her sole preoccupation seems to be the success and reputation of the family, and where progress is evaluated in terms of exams passed and prizes won. "Je vois que vous vivez beaucoup dans les examens, dans les concours," observes tante Léna, to which Pauline replies: "C'est si important. Mais je vous assure que l'hygiène est elle aussi au premier plan de nos préoccupations." (SC461).

Pauline is particularly opposed to anything which tends to reduce or weaken the strong ties between Jews, such as mixed marriages or conversion to another faith. Thus, when she is told that one of her sons, Jean-Paul, has decided to adopt the Protestant faith, Pauline categorically declares: "Je ne sais qu'une chose: à l'heure où nous sommes, un Juif qui se convertit passe à l'ennemi." (SC503). Pauline is blinded by abstractions and categories, but her attitude is no less sinister than that of her sister-in-law, Odette, who is completely in favour of the spread of anti-Semitism and who proudly declares that she has not "une goutte de sang juif dans les veines" (SC476).

Antoine had once declared in L'Émissaire that the words a Christian should never utter were "nous autres chrétiens" (E259), and Simon experiences the same aversion to the words "nous autres juifs" (SC470).

He resents the strong ties between Jews because they create a separate community of people who refuse to become integrated with the society to which they belong. Moreover, it is this desire to remain distinct and separate which, in Simon's view, is the main cause of anti-Semitic feeling: "C'est précisément parce que vous vous obstinez à vous soutenir, à vous épauler sans cesse les uns les autres, que vous donnez barre sur vous à vos adversaires et que vous armez vous-mêmes ceux que vous appelez persécuteurs,"(SC496). He therefore believes that it is the Jews who are responsible for the oppression from which they suffer because they expect to be treated like everyone else while at the same time affirming their own special privileges and superiority. "Moi je ne fais pas partie de cette tribu,"(SC492) Simon tells Jean-Paul.

The situation in which Simon finds himself seems to be clear and unambiguous, and the attitude he has adopted totally justified. Simon's attitude to the Jewish people is changed and modified, however, by the outbreak of war and the occupation of France, for the anti-Semitism which he had witnessed previously is transformed into a fanatical and tyrannical oppression of the whole Jewish race. Simon finds his sense of solidarity with the Jews increased by the atrocities committed against them during the war, while at the same time he answers the call to offer his life in an act of expiation for his own lack of understanding and as a testimony to those who have been unjustly persecuted. As a Jew he finds a new sense of allegiance through persecution, and, as a Christian, he discovers the hope of ultimate forgiveness and reconciliation through faith.

Like Werner in Le Dard, Simon has a very deep love of music. Speaking of his experience of musical improvisation, Simon tells tante Léna: "Pour moi c'est une façon de respirer."(SC472). It is almost certain that improvisation offers to Simon the same experience of liberation which Werner feels when, as a pure medium, he interprets the songs of the composers he most admires. Another indication of Simon's basic

"disponibilité" is to be found in the deep attachment he continues to feel towards his brother who had been killed in the First World War. Simon is convinced that his brother's death was not an absurd and meaningless accident, but an event of deep significance, but, unlike Antoine in L'Émissaire, this conviction has not yet crystallised into faith. Although Simon seems to appreciate Jean-Paul's wish to be converted to Protestantism, he himself feels unable to embrace any particular religious belief. "Pour moi, vois-tu, " he says to Jean-Paul, "il y a déjà assez d'insoluble dans cette vie, sur cette terre..."(SC493). His words betray the painful nostalgia of a man who refuses to accept that suffering and conflict will be the last judgement on our life, but who feels deprived of spiritual assurance and guidance. He later admits to Abbé Schweigsam the great sense of personal deprivation and confusion caused by his complete isolation from religious circles. "Mes parents, ma femme, moi, nous étions des gens complètement détachés," he says. "Oh! je le dis sans aucune fierté, bien au contraire, plutôt avec confusion...."(SC532).

The most important single incident which affects Simon's attitude to the Jewish people in France occurs during the Occupation with the death of his son David at the hands of the Germans. Simon learns that he had insisted on wearing the star of David at a concert in Paris, and had been immediately arrested. Although Simon is opposed to any ostentatious affirmation of Semitism and had previously condemned his son's rather pretentious academic airs, he is unable to restrain a feeling of pride and admiration for his action. "Cette témérité, cette folie... Et pourtant, savez-vous, tante Léna," he says, "je suis fier de lui. Cet enfant qui a été à la mort parce qu'il ne reconnaissait pas à des brutes le droit de le priver de musique...."(SC519). Pauline, who initially is told only of David's arrest and not of his death, finds her son's action totally absurd. "Mon Dieu, quelle imbecillité!" she exclaims, while Simon, grave and reflective, retorts: "Non, Pauline, je ne trouve pas cela imbécile,"(SC527).

The imminence of further persecution and suffering convinces Simon of two things. First of all, he can no longer turn his back on the possible opportunity of ensuring his family's safety when their very lives are in danger, even if this means their leaving France altogether. And secondly, to consider oneself outside the Jewish community suddenly appears to Simon, in the situation in which he finds himself, to be an act of betrayal. Tante Léna has already experienced the same feeling of fraternity and solidarity with her people in the face of persecution and suffering. She tells Abbé Schweigsam that she had at one time thought deeply about embracing the Christian faith. "Mais à présent," she adds, "après ces persécutions, il me semblerait que je trahis." (SC512). Without in any way condoning the fanatical sense of allegiance of his wife Pauline, Simon feels, like his aunt, that it is impossible for him not to share in the trials and misfortunes which the Jewish people must now face. "Dès le moment où un Juif de Galicie qu'en temps ordinaire j'aurais évité," says Simon to the Abbé, " - peut-être pas méprisé, mais évité....Du moment qu'il vit dans ce pays et qu'il est persécuté, je n'ai plus le droit de me détourner de lui, il a reçu comme un sacrement, et je dois le partager comme on partage le pain bénit...." (SC532-3). It is this profound feeling of solidarity which leads Simon to decide that, although he must try to ensure the safety of his family, he himself is called upon to stay in France and share the destiny of other Jewish people. "Ce qu'il y a de plus étrange c'est que je ne comprends pas moi-même ce que je vous dis," he tells the Abbé, "pourtant je sais qu'il en est ainsi." (SC533). Simon experiences a need for commitment to a certain belief which is as mysterious and as absolute as the artist's sense of vocation or the convert's experience of faith. His commitment is, in fact, a deeply religious and Christian act, although he is initially unaware of this, while his spiritual awakening has been gradually prepared within him by his close attachment to his aunt, and crystallised by the realisation of his debt towards his son David.

Tante Léna has been living in exile since 1938 with Simon and his family. She is an elderly woman of great simplicity and humility. She shares with Simon a profound love of music, and their mutual admiration soon grows into a strong, deep affection for each other. Tante Léna's presence radiates warmth and generosity. "Il suffit de voir votre tante pour savoir que c'est une personne d'une très haute qualité spirituelle," (SC530) observes Abbé Schweigsam to Simon. Moreover, since David and Jean-Paul have been left in Paris while the rest of the family has come to live in the unoccupied zone, Simon has experienced a sense of deprivation and exile which, without tante Léna's presence, would have been intolerable. Tante Léna realises, however, that Simon and his family must soon leave France: but because of her age and the fact that she has not been naturalised, she knows that she will not be able to accompany them. She hopes to find refuge in one of the centres which have been set aside for Jewish people. When Simon learns of his aunt's plans, he is alarmed at the thought of being separated from her, whereas tante Léna calmly accepts her situation and prepares herself for all the horrible uncertainties of the future. "Dans ce monde-ci on ne peut en vérité que subir," she says to Simon, "même lorsqu'on proteste...et je crois qu'on garde plus de force si on s'épargne la peine ou le plaisir de protester. On conserve sa force pour quelque chose de meilleur qui se passe à l'intérieur de soi-même." (SC515). The example which tante Léna keeps before her - an example of courage, humility and faith in the face of hardship and oppression - is that of Gandhi, of a man whose life was offered in the service of his people, and in whose words and deeds burnt "la flamme de la sainteté véritable." (SC516). In his preface to Madeleine Deguy's play Les Condamnés,⁶ Marcel observes that the courage and selflessness of many French people during the Second World War was a sign of inspiration and grace which can only

6. Paris, Plon, 1945. Marcel's preface is entitled "La Parole est aux Saints".

be understood in spiritual terms. Tante Léna is like many of these martyrs who do not explicitly recognise or uphold any particular faith, but whose actions bespeak a deeply religious sense of duty and commitment. Tante Léna is dominated by a feeling of compassion and love for those around her, and by a certain detachment from the present because she feels close to death and to another world. From her own experiences she has learnt that, for those "qui sont encore en proie à l'existence" (SC519), it is not always easy to be generous and charitable towards others: but the imminence of death has liberated her from all shallow and selfish preoccupations.

Simon's decision to remain in France with his aunt, indicates the very deep sense of duty and obligation which has been growing with ever-increasing intensity and force within him. Despite the shock caused by the news of David's death, Simon experiences neither resignation nor despair because the example of tante Léna has convinced him that even such a seemingly cruel and painful loss may be of deep significance for him. "N'ai-je pas le droit de penser que ces événements ont un sens et qu'il m'appartient de le découvrir? que tante Léna m'a été donnée pour éclairer ma route?" he asks. "Pourquoi certains êtres ne seraient-ils pas placés sur notre chemin comme des lumières?" (SC533). The presence of tante Léna who is close to death and of David who has passed beyond death is the source of Simon's ultimate "prise de conscience". He feels called upon to offer his life not only so that he can share in the persecution and suffering of his fellow Jews, but also because he feels the need to atone for the injustice and intolerance he had once shown towards his son. "Voyez-vous je me sens comme en faute envers lui, j'ai le sentiment que je l'ai abandonné," he confides to his aunt and to the Abbé. "Quand il était de ce monde, je me suis laissé agacer par lui, et à partir du moment où on ne peut plus réparer humainement, il faut expier."(SC535-6).

Moreover, Simon's refusal to accompany his wife and family is made even more definite in that the man who is ensuring their escape is an

unscrupulous Collaborator, and for Simon to benefit personally from his help would be an act of outrage to the memory of his dead son. Unlike Roland de Gramoy in L'Émissaire, Réveillac has no sense of integrity or honour: he is the kind of person for whom living necessitates calculation and adaptation, and for whom death is something which, although unpleasant, can soon be forgotten. Simon, however, will never be able to forget or dismiss what has happened to his son. "On n'épongera pas la mort de David," (SC536) he tells the Abbé, affirming his belief in the value of expiation and repentance. But, paradoxically, the only way that Simon can uphold these essentially Christian values is by sharing in the suffering "des plus juifs parmi les Juifs, de ceux qu'on a livrés sans pitié à l'horreur" (SC536) and by thus identifying totally with his fellow Jews. Tante Léna is overcome with emotion at Simon's declarations, while Simon observes that even if his convictions remain foreign to her, even if she does not perceive the light which has suddenly transformed his existence, it is nonetheless she who has helped him to find his true self. "Et cependant, tante Léna," he says, "cette lumière c'est en vous et autour de vous qu'elle n'a cessé de briller depuis que nous nous sommes rencontrés." (SC537).

The first two acts of Le Signe de la Croix which take place in 1938 introduce us to the conflict between Simon and Pauline, alert us to the deep affection between Simon and tante Léna and describe the events leading up to Léon's departure for America. The third act takes place in a small town in the unoccupied zone of France in 1942 and shows Simon's change in attitude and spiritual awakening. He and tante Léna will remain in France while the rest of Simon's family will rejoin Léon in America. The play was originally published in this form together with L'Émissaire in 1949,⁷ but four years later Marcel added an epilogue prior to the play's performance in Nantes in 1954 by a small amateur company. Far from considering the epilogue as a mere afterthought or

7. In Vers un autre royaume.

appendix, Marcel writes that he sees it as "la conclusion indispensable de la pièce; c'est par lui qu'elle prend tout son sens".(SC551). The events described in the epilogue take place in 1948. Both Simon and tante Léna have died in a concentration camp while Léon, Pauline, her three children and Flora, Simon's sister, have returned from America to the house they had all originally occupied in 1938 before the outbreak of war. Shortly afterwards, Jean-Paul had met, seemingly by pure chance, the Abbé Schweigsam at an exhibition. In fact, Jean-Paul had written several letters to him while in America and, shortly before their encounter, a clear picture of the Abbé had formed in his mind during a moment of prayer and reflection. What for other people may seem to be a pure coincidence is, for Jean-Paul, confirmation of God's presence. Jean-Paul's deep religious beliefs contrast sharply with Pauline's uncompromising practicality and Léon's rigidly scientific attitude to life. The difference in outlook between, on the one hand, Jean-Paul and, on the other hand, his mother and uncle is made apparent by the sense of duty and obligation - or the lack of it - which they feel on their return to Garches, especially now that Simon is no longer living. Jean-Paul believes that they should ask themselves what Simon would have advised them to do were he still alive, whereas Léon believes that such a question no longer has any meaning. For Jean-Paul and for Flora, Simon is still present; for Léon and Pauline, Simon has ceased to exist, and to take his wishes into account would be an absurd and unnecessarily sentimental return into the past. Léon admits that Simon would probably have wanted Pauline and the children to remain in France. "Mais à parler franc, je ne crois pas que ceci puisse être pris en considération," he tells Pauline. "Simon n'est plus. Le monde qu'il a connu est disparu. Il serait irrationnel de tenir compte des idées qui ont pu être les siennes."(SC543). Jean-Paul forcefully rejects Léon's affirmations; he sees the latter's cold logic as the triumph of a barren, inhuman world where love and hope no longer have any meaning.

"Penser ainsi," he says, "c'est faire mourir papa une seconde fois." (SC543). It is this radical difference in outlook which determines their differing reaction to the news brought by Abbé Schweigsam. The Abbé is accompanied by Léon's former wife, Odette, who, even before her husband's departure for America, had decided to divorce him and marry Xavier Réveillac. Réveillac has since been tried and executed for treason, but the Abbé had spent several hours alone with him in the days preceding his execution. Réveillac had found the courage and humility to recognise his errors and to pardon those political adversaries who had taken it upon themselves to sentence him to death. On the threshold of death, he had been moved by the spirit of forgiveness and love. Without in any way condoning Réveillac's actions during the Occupation, the Abbé asks that his last wishes be remembered and that all the conflict and suffering of the past be transcended by faith in the ultimate reconciliation of all men. Significantly, however, both Pauline and Léon, dominated by passions and abstractions, are unmoved by the Abbé's appeal:

Pauline: Je n'ai pour cet homme que mépris et dégoût.
(Geste de l'Abbé.)

Léon: Je ne prendrai pas ces mots à mon compte. Mais il me reste parfaitement étranger. C'est un homme d'une autre planète.

Abbé Schweigsam, avec force: C'était un homme comme vous. Un homme de cette terre. Il était votre prochain.

Léon: Que voulez-vous, je n'en ai pas le sentiment.

Abbé Schweigsam: Parce que vous laissez des mots abstraits s'interposer entre vous et cet homme, qui a vécu, qui a aimé et souffert comme vous. Vous vous dites: c'était un fasciste. (SC546-7).

But the most important news brought by the Abbé concerns Simon. He has received a letter from one of the survivors of the concentration camp where Simon and tante Léna had been imprisoned. Tante Léna had been put to death soon after her arrival, but she had continued to be fully present in Simon's thoughts and a constant source of inspiration, with the result that he in turn had given hope and courage to his fellow

prisoners. The situation recalls that of Le Dard where Werner, inspired by the presence of Rudolf, decides to return to Germany and to almost certain imprisonment in order to serve those in greatest destitution and need. The case of Werner is, however, hypothetical since the play actually ends with his decision to leave Paris. The original version of Le Signe de la Croix also leaves an element of uncertainty as to the future of Simon and tante Léna; but the epilogue provides a moving testimony to their courage and faith. Without invoking allegiance to any specific religious faith, Simon had found assurance and hope - as his aunt had done - in reading the psalms, while he had come to look on death not as an end, but as a moment of liberation and reconciliation. "J'ai la certitude que la mort ne termine rien," he had said. "Ma tante est près de moi, elle m'attend...."(SC549). More significantly, he had, shortly before his death through exhaustion and ill health, confided in a Protestant minister, and his last thoughts were for Xavier Réveillac: "Réveillac, il faudra l'épargner....Dites que je l'ai demandé....Il a sauvé les miens." (SC548). The reality of spiritual communion and grace is testified by a succession of apparent coincidences starting from Simon's plea for pardon, leading to Réveillac's own confession and ending with the Abbé's discovery of these two significant (and, for him, inter-related) incidents, his encounter with Jean-Paul and his fervent hope that Pauline and Léon will now in turn be moved to pardon Odette despite her former hostility to the family and her infidelity to Léon. The message which the Abbé brings is one of reconciliation through faith and love: the true spirit of justice and truth is that which transcends all temporal conflict and human judgement:

"Le nom de M. Bernauer figurera en lettres d'or sur un monument - au lieu que celui de Xavier Réveillac, après avoir été honni, sera finalement oublié. Humainement ce contraste est peut-être justifié. Mais nous sommes là, ce jeune garçon (Jean-Paul) et moi, pour rappeler aux hommes que cette vérité humaine est tout à fait relative, que l'injustice est partout parce que le péché est partout, et que Dieu se moque des juges

patentés et des sentences officielles. Mais si le péché est partout, la Grâce elle aussi surabonde: la Grâce de Dieu...."(SC549).

Odette has returned to the house she once lived in when she had been married to Léon. She is now a widow, overcome with grief at Réveillac's trial and execution, and feeling hopelessly abandoned and alone. Her situation is not one to be judged, but one to be shared with compassion and understanding. The Abbé and Jean-Paul are both capable of this, but Pauline and Léon, deprived of any underlying generosity or "disponibilité", remain dominated by egoism and passion:

Jean-Paul, avec émotion: Tante Odette, moi en tous les cas, je ne t'abandonnerai pas.

Pauline: Viens, Léon, je ne peux en entendre davantage.
(Elle sort.)

Leon; à Odette, avec gêne: Si tu as besoin d'une aide matérielle, il va de soi....(SC550).

Pauline and Léon leave the room, and Jean-Paul, Flora, Odette and the Abbé are left alone together. Jean-Paul picks up a record - a choral of Bach of which Simon was particularly fond - and places it on the record player. The play ends with all four characters silent and pensive, lost in their thoughts and prayers, as the music begins to play, vividly evoking Simon's presence.

In both L'Émissaire and Le Signe de la Croix, the protagonists are confronted by an extremely complex social and political situation which arouses highly impassioned reactions. Antoine and Simon are both aware of the destructiveness of fanaticism and realise, too, that the conflict and suffering which they have witnessed cannot be resolved on an ideological level. The most important question for them, therefore, is, as Marcel observes, "de savoir comment on peut se dégager de cet inextricable"⁸. The answer, he adds, is clear in both plays: "On ne le peut ni par le raisonnement ni par le sentiment réduit à lui-même, la foi est nécessaire,

8. Postface, Vers un autre royaume, p.235.

pour autant qu'elle se suspend à une transcendance que nous affirmons mais dont nous avons à témoigner."⁹ The gradually deepening realisation of the need for faith, culminating in the spiritual awakening of Sylvie and Simon, and the reassuring testimony of Antoine, Simon and tante Léna form the basis of the dramatic movement and tone of L'Émissaire and Le Signe de la Croix. The need for faith is not, however, universally recognised. There is no change or modification in the uncompromising and intolerant attitude of people like Bertrand and Anne-Marie, or of Pauline and Léon. It is here that the absence of grace is keenly felt. When, for example, Simon angrily denounces Pauline's indifference to the shame and degradation experienced by the French during the Occupation, tante Léna observes: "Mon pauvre Simon, ce sont de beaux et nobles sentiments que vous éprouvez là; c'est une sorte de luxe qui vous a été accordé...quelque chose comme la beauté d'un regard, d'une voix. Ce luxe a été refusé à Pauline." (SC514). This luxury or privilege is a mark of grace which is mysteriously accorded to the individual and for which he should feel a very deep sense of gratitude: but for the individual deprived of grace, there should be understanding not condemnation, compassion and not judgement.

The composition of both L'Émissaire and Le Signe de la Croix is also extremely significant for here Marcel found himself confronted by a subject whose ultimate explanation or conclusion was not at first entirely clear to him. In both plays he started from a specific situation or idea; in L'Émissaire it was the unexpected return of Clément, in Le Signe de la Croix the Jewish question. The first act of Le Signe de la Croix was, in fact, written as early as 1938 at a time when the whole question of anti-Semitism was particularly acute. Although the subject as it then imposed itself on Marcel is clearly set out in the respective attitudes of Pauline and Simon, he did not have a clear idea of how it was to be developed. He wrote the second act in 1942, when the outbreak of war and the occupation of France had already greatly complicated and

9. Postface, Vers un autre royaume, p.235.

altered the nature of the questions raised by anti-Semitism. Already Marcel had begun to sense the inadequacy of Simon's initial attitude, but the play remained uncompleted. It was not until 1948 that the dénouement suddenly became clear to him. In this final act, Marcel describes the effect of the news of David's death on Simon and Simon's growing awareness of his need to declare his solidarity with other persecuted Jews. "Ce qui s' est imposé à moi au cours de ces terribles années," writes Marcel, "et ce que je n'avais pas encore aperçu distinctement en 1938, c'est que la persécution transforme tous les rapports, qu'elle crée un lien, et qu'en refusant de reconnaître ce lien on risque de glisser vers la trahison."¹⁰ Moreover, several years later Marcel felt called upon to add an epilogue with the result that almost fifteen years separate the first draft of the play from its definitive version. Nowhere, it seems, in the whole of Marcel's theatre is there a more striking example of the author's creativity, of his receptiveness or submissiveness to the subject and characters originally conceived. He did not set out to prove a certain thesis by the manipulation of certain preconceived ideas, but remained open to the possible solution or change in the subject brought about by outside events. Despite the long pause in writing between the second and third acts, Marcel did not feel that the play had proved a sterile and abortive adventure; he chose to wait rather than abandon the subject or hastily improvise a conclusion. The sudden "élan irrésistible"¹¹ with which he wrote the third and decisive act of Le Signe de la Croix is a very clear example of the mysterious role played by inspiration in an authentically creative work of art.

L'Émissaire was begun much later than Le Signe de la Croix in 1945. The original "donnée" around which the play was constructed was the situation created by Clément's sudden return from a concentration camp. The mystery surrounding Clément's return and the strange silence which he maintained even in the presence of those closest to him were essential

10. Postface, Vers un autre royaume, pp.231-2.

11. En chemin, vers quel éveil?, p.235.

to the subject and atmosphere of the play, but when the first two acts were completed Marcel felt and sensed rather than understood the behaviour of Clément. "C'est seulement plus tard," he writes, "en automne 1948 lorsque j'écrivis la dernière partie de la pièce, que je découvris les conditions très particulières dans lesquelles Clément Ferrier avait été libéré par les Allemands, et que je sus à quoi il fallait attribuer le silence étrange qu'il opposait aux questions dont l'assiégeaient les siens."¹² The situation differs here from that created by the composition of Le Signe de la Croix since, in the case of the latter, the subject was modified by concrete historical details whereas outside events played no part whatever in Marcel's sudden insight into the conduct of Clément. But both L'Émissaire and Le Signe de la Croix - and, in particular, the last act of each play - throw light on the extraordinary creative process by which the author ceases to play the role of a producer or fabricator to become instead a pure medium.

Rome n'est plus dans Rome,¹³ conceived, written and performed in 1951, first in Paris and then throughout France and Belgium, is, more than any other play written by Marcel, a "pièce d'actualité". Whereas an audience today could readily understand and accept the basic premise of plays like L'Émissaire and Le Signe de la Croix in that war, suffering and racial oppression are not limited to the events of the Second World War but are constants throughout history, the situation evoked in Rome n'est plus dans Rome may seem today rather remote and scarcely credible. Marcel depicts the state of panic and fear to which the uncertain political future of France gave rise during the early 1950's,

12. Le secret est dans les îles, p.19.

13. All textual references are taken from Rome n'est plus dans Rome, Paris, La Table ronde, 1951, and will be incorporated in the thesis in the following abbreviated form: (RR..). Eg. (RR20) = Rome n'est plus, dans Rome, p.20.

and raises the question of the course of action which the individual should take faced with the imminent seizure of power by the Communists and the invasion of Soviet troops. In France today the Communist Party, although well supported by the working-classes, has very little chance of overall political control, while the possibility of a Soviet invasion of any Western European country, although feasible, does not justify any great anxiety or panic. Such fears were not, however, out of place in the immediate post-war years in France, at a time when the Communists had suddenly emerged as a new, widely supported political force, and when the Cold War was beginning to hang threateningly over Europe. Marcel did not deny that he was concerned very much with the present, fully realising that the play could scarcely have the same immediacy and resonance twenty years later. "J'ai travaillé dans le concret," he declared. "Nous sommes au plein de la vie présente à chaque phrase de ma pièce. Les événements que j'y fais succéder pourraient arriver à chacun de nous, aujourd'hui, demain."¹⁴ In Rome n'est plus dans Rome Marcel boldly affronts the most pressing social and political issues of the time and his play is, in this respect, totally "engagé." He evokes a world of political agitation, fear and unrest, and presents a vivid picture of moral unease and disarray, thus emphasising for the French audiences in 1951 the very great responsibilities with which they were then faced. "Les personnages...sont en proie aux problèmes généraux traduits en inexorable aventure personnelle," comments Marcel. "Nul ne peut se soustraire désormais aux contrecoups, dans les foyers, de l'état du globe. J'ai voulu que chacun des auditeurs, des spectateurs, se sentisse concerné."¹⁵

The uncertain political future of France during the 1950's was not in itself the sole source of inspiration of the play, the title of which is taken from a line in one of Corneille's lesser known works.¹⁶

14. Ce Matin, 18.4.1951.

15. Ibid.

16. Sertorius, Act 3, scene 1, line 936.

The particular circumstances concerning the central character of Rome n'est plus dans Rome, Pascal Laumière, were suggested to Marcel by two incidents. The first of these was the receipt of an anonymous letter in 1950, reading: "Les Russes arrivent, vous êtes sur les listes, prenez vos précautions."¹⁷ Pascal, a university lecturer, finds himself in a similarly disconcerting position in the play since he has received an anonymous and threatening letter after writing a series of articles in a right-wing paper against the purge. He is eventually prevailed upon by his wife, Renée, to leave Paris to take up a lecturing post in a South American university, and the circumstances of Pascal's emigration immediately call to mind the second incident which influenced Marcel, namely the action taken by Étienne Gilson at this time in leaving France and settling, albeit temporarily, in Canada. It would, however, be totally misleading to compare Pascal Laumière with Étienne Gilson although there are certain obvious similarities: what Gilson's decision did suggest to Marcel was a possible dramatic situation and no more.

The first three acts of Rome n'est plus dans Rome take place in Paris at the home of Pascal and cover a period of three days. An atmosphere of social unease and unrest, together with a certain underlying cynicism are made apparent to the spectator in the opening scene of the play. A German acquaintance of Pascal, Ulrich Steinbock, is already planning to leave France and is counting on Pascal to help him find a temporary appointment in Morocco. Steinbock's concern for his own personal safety and security implies total indifference to others as well as a cynical rejection of any moral obligations. His reaction is, however, mitigated to a certain extent in that he is an exile living in a foreign country; but the situation is clearly very different in the case of someone like Renée who is French and who has lived all her life in France. Nonetheless, she totally approves of Steinbock's attitude and

17. An account of this incident and of Marcel's reaction to it is given in En chemin, vers quel éveil?, p.237.

comments: "Il est élémentaire de prendre ses précautions à temps si on en a la possibilité. Vous avez joliment raison, Monsieur." (RR6). In fact, we learn that Renée has already taken the necessary precautions to ensure the safety of herself and her family by writing to friends in Brazil to see if they can arrange for Pascal to take up a teaching post in the newly established university of San Felipe. She justifies her action, which she has undertaken without the knowledge of Pascal, by saying to her half-sister, Esther, that she can no longer stand the atmosphere of uncertainty and unrest in which the country has been living for months on end. Faced with Esther's surprise and evident disapproval, Renée spitefully reminds her about the consequences of any action involving a sense of duty or self-sacrifice. Esther and her husband, Emmanuel, had been living in Algiers during the Occupation, but Emmanuel, had been captured and deported after undertaking a dangerous mission for the Resistance. Renée sees no justification or honour in such an action:

"C'est une espèce de maladie! Une psychose. Il faudra que j'en parle au professeur Tiercelier. C'est un as. La psychanalyse doit avoir son mot à dire aussi sur ces détraquements-là...Eh bien! il ne te suffit pas d'avoir eu un mari mort en déportation. Mort pour rien, je dis pour rien..."(RR14).

In Renée's eyes no cause is so important that it justifies an act which endangers one's life, so that any form of self-sacrifice is, for her, not a sign of strength, courage or heroism, but a mental weakness or aberration. Renée's attitude is not dissimilar to that of Pauline in Le Signe de la Croix. Both characters see everything in terms of utility and self-interest; neither feels any moral degradation in fleeing at the first sign of conflict or persecution. "D'abord à qui est-ce que je me sacrifierais? à qui sommes-nous utiles ici?" Renée angrily asks Pascal. "...A quoi serviront les gens comme toi quand Paris sera écrasé sous les bombes ou livré aux forcenés de la banlieue rouge?"(RR37).

This cynicism and the collapse of certain traditional moral beliefs or values which it implies, such as duty or honour, service or solidarity,

is immediately condemned by Pascal. When Renée tells him that Steinbock has made arrangements to leave for Morocco, Pascal, having already learnt that two fellow lecturers are planning to emigrate, coldly observes: "Tout ça est bien écoeurant." (RR30). Asked to clarify this observation, Pascal merely adds: "Tout simplement parce que la frousse est en soi un sentiment ignoble." (RR30). He is even more angered when he learns that, unbeknown to himself, Renée has written to secure a post for him at San Felipe. Pascal does not deny that the thought of torture or persecution at the hands of the Communists induces in him a certain anxiety or fear, but he refuses to allow this to mask what he considers to be an issue of honour and duty. "Je ne donnerai pas l'exemple de la lâcheté; je ne contribuerai pas à proposer à qui que ce soit l'image d'une France qui se renie elle-même dans la panique et dans la honte..." (RR37-8).

At first sight, Pascal's angry outburst may seem to indicate a deep feeling of responsibility and a clear sense of moral obligation, but in fact there has already been an indication of his basic unease and uncertainty. In a previous scene with Esther, Pascal learns that Esther's son, Marc-André, will be coming to see him for advice and reassurance. Pascal immediately tells Esther that he feels ill-suited to advise or reassure anybody at all since he himself does not feel capable of ordering and directing his own life. Esther, an outside observer, sees in Pascal's life order and conviction, but Pascal, like Claude in Un Homme de Dieu, has realised that to accept and abide by certain traditional norms of behaviour and conduct may soon cease to be an active response to life and become instead a weak and passive form of conformity. He is not filled with either conviction or a sense of purpose, but experiences instead a feeling of aimlessness and of self-disgust:

Esther: Votre vie est en ordre, Pascal; et, si elle l'est, c'est que vous n'avez pas cessé de la vouloir.

Pascal: Il peut survenir un moment où cet ordre, parce qu'on ne le crée plus, on commence à le subir....La servitude peut prendre tant de formes! Il en est de si décentes, de si décoratives....La vérité, ma pauvre Esther, c'est que je suis triste à mourir. Je ne m'aime pas, je me déplaïs....(RR24).

Thus, even though the first act ends with Pascal's defiant assertion that it is his duty to remain in France and face the threat of a Soviet invasion, it is clear that he is basically unsure of himself and of his values. This uncertainty and instability is made totally apparent in the course of Pascal's long conversation with his nephew Marc-André. The latter is himself acutely distressed and disorientated. He lives in an era of social agitation in which, in the aftermath of war, suffering and death, traditional values and standards seem to have lost all weight and authority. Unrest and contention have prepared the way for a new revolutionary age, but Communism does not offer any real solution in Marc-André's eyes to the unease he feels. In fact, his problems are deeply personal: he feels stifled and frustrated because he does not experience deep within himself any sense of vocation, and is acutely conscious of his mediocrity and total deprivation of any gifts or talents. "Si j'étais poète ou musicien, je pense que je pourrais tout accepter," he says to Pascal. "Mais ces dons m'ont été refusés, comme tous les autres."(RR41). Moreover, although Marc-André has not been deprived of love and affection in his home, he is an only child and ever since the death of his father he has found himself overwhelmed by the attention and care of his mother: "Ah! si j'avais eu des frères et des soeurs! Mais sentir qu'on est tout pour un être, c'est insoutenable, ça empêche d'exister."(RR46). There is, in the situation of Marc-André, a distinct echo of Marcel's own childhood, in particular the cruel isolation which he felt at being an only child and his reaction to the over-assiduous attentions of his aunt-stepmother. Marc-André yearns for a feeling of belonging, a sense of absolute conviction and trust, and because of this deeply spiritual need he had been drawn towards the Christian faith. He had then, however, been cruelly disenchanted by the excessively liberal attitude of the local minister. A faith devoid of fervour and absoluteness, and which is not a conviction intensely lived and clung to despite the objections and protests of

reason has lost all value in Marc-André's eyes. Thus he was left totally discouraged and demoralised when, in the course of a conversation with the minister, the latter had openly declared that he did not believe literally in the Resurrection and that it could only be interpreted symbolically.

Having explained to Pascal his problems and difficulties, Marc-André declares that he is resolved to leave France and the atmosphere of unease and unrest in which he has been living to start a new life outside Europe. But, unlike Renée, his is not a selfish decision based on fear and a desire for comfort and security. The vagueness and uncertainty of Pascal's own convictions are exposed when he tries to justify his condemnation of those who prefer to emigrate rather than remain in France. To remain implies the recognition of something which it is one's duty to try to defend and save from destruction: but if Pascal believes that Western civilisation holds this esteem in the eyes of the young post-war generation, then he is soon disabused by Marc-André:

"Non, je vous en supplie, ne venez pas me parler de la civilisation occidentale. Où est-elle cette civilisation? qu'a-t-elle fait d'elle-même? quelle chance a-t-elle de survivre? et moi, qui n'en ai connu que la déchéance et la décomposition, pourquoi faut-il que je sois un de ses martyrs?..."(RR48).

When Pascal feebly invokes "(son) honneur de Français"(RR50), Marc-André points out the extreme ambiguity of such an attitude for him. "Oncle Pascal," he says, "avouez qu'au nom de l'honneur on a prétendu justifier pendant quatre ans des conduites opposées. Il faut croire que ce n'est pas une idée très claire."(RR50). Marc-André belongs to a very different generation from that of Pascal. Speaking to Pascal of his mother, Marc-André observes: "Elle vit avec papa, avec ceux qu'elle a perdus, avec vous, elle est au passé. Et moi, de toutes mes forces, je veux survivre...je veux survivre...."(RR54). Vague patriotic feeling is not likely to inspire confidence in Marc-André; he finds it possible to appreciate a sense of duty inspired by religious faith, but Pascal

admits that he has never personally experienced any religious convictions. Marc-André reflects on the faith and courage of the father of one of his friends who, faced with the terror and uncertainty of the future, places his trust and confidence in God. "Je ne présume aucunement de mes forces," he had declared. "Mais je crois en Dieu, je compte qu'il ne m'abandonnera pas, qu'il m'épargnera la suprême déchéance, et qu'ou bien il me reprendra, ou bien il me donnera la force de supporter la torture." (RR49).

The encounter between Pascal and Marc-André emphasises clearly one important aspect of Pascal's generation - its responsibility for the acute social and moral crisis apparent in Western Europe in 1950. Unlike his nephew, Pascal had spent his early days in an age of relative peace and security which had made possible a vague belief in the value of the traditions and institutions of the time. But now that these traditions and institutions have been swept away, the individual can no longer remain a passive and contented onlooker. Pascal realises that, for the first time, he is asking himself questions which he had never before been forced to ask. "Tu comprends, Marc-André," he says, "j'ai encore vécu à une époque où on n'était pas obligé de se poser ces questions-là, on était encadré, porté aussi." (RR45). Pascal now realises the terrible consequences of failing to look critically at the society to which one belonged, and at the changes which were gradually taking place within it. He openly acknowledges that it is he, together with those of his generation, "qui (ont) laissé dériver ce monde vers l'horreur et vers la folie," (RR40) and that, even if the future is not irrevocably compromised, the errors of the past remain inexcusable. Pascal's self-criticism implies a recognition of individual and collective responsibility which is, in many ways, an echo of Sartre's political theory. This is particularly striking in Pascal's admission to Marc-André that "nous avons à reconnaître que les fautes étaient évitables; on avait le choix, on a pris le mauvais tournant...." (RR40). Later he admits to Padre Ricardo that he has become increasingly aware of the importance of

political commitment and that he bitterly regrets his own former indifference and short-sightedness in this respect. But Pascal's responsibility is not only social and political, it is also moral in as much as he feels called upon to answer Marc-André's despairing appeal for guidance. He sees his nephew as the representative of "la génération la plus démunie qui ait encore paru sur la terre", (RR58) he is deeply aware of the inadequacy of his own beliefs and assertions, and believes that the conversation which they have had together is "une espèce de signe" (RR82) throwing light on his own uncertainty and heavy responsibilities. "Il est à croire," he says later to Marc-André, "si ces mots ont un sens - et je l'ignore - que je suis comptable de ta vie, et que je ne peux pas prendre sur moi de t'exposer au désespoir et au suicide." (RR82). Human beings do not live in isolation but together, and faith and hope or nihilism and despair pass freely from one person or group to another. Pascal feels this responsibility while at the same time realising that only a deep, inner conviction implying absolute commitment and fidelity to a certain belief or reality can provide the basis for the kind of assurances which both he and Marc-André desperately need. Pascal anxiously questions his innermost thoughts and feelings without in any way clarifying the situation in which he finds himself. "Ténèbres...C'est l'élément dans lequel je m'enfonce," (RR82) he says. As in the case of Marc-André who admires the words and action of Moreuil's father but feels that such faith has been denied him, Pascal experiences his lack of faith as a form of deprivation and exile, and yearns for the sense of duty, fidelity and belonging of a Christian: "Mon enfant, jamais, je te le jure, mon manque de foi ne m'a été plus cruellement sensible, car si j'étais relié, relié au Christ, il me semble qu'une certaine lumière me serait accordée, et je ne vois rien...." (RR84).

In the three days which have passed from the beginning of the play to the end of the third act, we see Pascal fighting against growing uncertainty and self-doubt. He begins to wonder if it is not after all

his duty to think first of the safety of his wife and children, and if it is not the responsibility of those who have decided to emigrate to ensure elsewhere the survival of the traditions and cultural heritage of a country which is destined to become a new Communist state. Having initially condemned all form of passivity and fatalism as regards the future, Pascal now finds himself beginning to believe that the present situation is beyond all hope of recall. "Je me suis demandé si je ne m'apprêtais pas à désertter alors que la bataille est en cours," he says to Marc-André. "Mais non, ce n'est plus qu'un simulacre de bataille. Les jeux sont faits."(RR83). Renée's half-brother, Robert, who is a Communist, is the only member of the family who views the future with hope and confidence. He accuses Pascal of treating France as though it were a corpse whose soul he believes can be transplanted to another land, whereas he and his political allies are making themselves responsible for "une France réelle et non pas posthume."(RR72). They will prepare the way for a new, revolutionary France which will not be a mere puppet in the hands of Moscow, but a powerful and independent Communist state. Robert accepts the dangers and risks of such an enterprise and recognises that ultimately the individual is less important than the cause he serves. "C'est un risque," he says to Pascal: "nous l'acceptons les yeux ouverts, et, même si nos personnes doivent être broyées, tant pis." (RR75). But, behind Robert's vague revolutionary ideal, Pascal sees the spectre of Soviet totalitarianism dressed in the guise of freedom and equality, while Robert's claim that "nos personnes ne comptent pas,"(RR75) exemplifies the kind of fanaticism and self-destructiveness which Pascal fears most. Although Pascal recognises the need for a firm and stable belief which will give meaning and purpose to life, the ideal of Communism implies for him a transitory cult based on propaganda and abstractions. Like Werner in Le Dard, Pascal sees this new, impersonal ideology as an insidious force spreading like a plague among the dis-

contented masses. "Non, lui, les siens, ce sont des possédés....," he says to Robert. "Dostoïevski avait tout annoncé...."(RR79).

The spectator has thus been gradually prepared for Pascal's change of heart and his decision to accept a temporary appointment in a Brazilian university. Even at the last moment, however, Pascal finds himself asking if the guilt which he feels at being responsible for the present political situation cannot somehow be absolved were he to stay and accept all its future consequences. But Esther asks if the belief in expiation and absolution is not linked to belief in an absolute and transcendent Being and if it has not therefore lost all real significance for someone without faith. "Etes-vous sûr de pouvoir donner un sens à ce mot-là?" she says to Pascal. "Ne vous a-t-il pas été légué avec tant d'autres, comme ces titres étrangers qu'on retrouve dans un tiroir et dont la valeur est tombée à zéro?"(RR89). Esther reminds Pascal that they cannot now think of turning their backs on the opportunity of emigrating to South America unless they experience a firm and clear obligation to remain in France. "Mais cet appel, vous ne l'entendez pas," she says, "ou vous ne l'entendez plus...."(RR91). The third act ends, therefore, with Pascal at last resigning himself to starting a new life in South America. Both he and Esther realise that, even if they are justified in their decision, neither of them will set out "le coeur léger."(RR94). They know that their action may later cause misgivings and even remorse because they recognise the uncertainty and ambiguity of the situation which confronts them. Their reaction, which is one of sombre resignation, is offset by Renée's unconcealed satisfaction and delight. She has had her own way, and she looks forward eagerly to escaping from Paris and from the atmosphere of unease and unrest in which she has been living.

The first three acts do not, however, take the form of a long, introspective debate on the part of Pascal. The issues involved are brought out in a series of confrontations between Pascal and Renée, then

between Pascal and Marc-André, and finally between Pascal and Robert. These confrontations are made theatrically effective by the inevitable contrast or conflict of the characters' personality and outlook. Thus Pascal finds himself attacked by a selfish and embittered wife and opposed by Robert's harsh, uncompromising political stand, while his advice and guidance are sought by Marc-André in a scene which, although it does not bring the two involved into conflict, does nonetheless underline the very different generations to which they belong. The scenes involving Pascal and Renée are made particularly intense by the almost constant psychological warfare employed by Renée against her husband. Her continual attacks on, and disparagement of Pascal are never entirely true, nor can they be totally discounted. Indeed, like Edmée in Un Homme de Dieu, Renée alternates between moments of lucidity and passion, clear understanding and blind confusion; and just as Edmée seems intent on destroying Claude's faith and confidence in himself, so Renée always attributes the most selfish and despicable motives to Pascal's actions in an effort to degrade and belittle him. Pascal finds himself treated with almost equal severity by Robert, and there is little doubt that his self-confidence has been gradually undermined by this constant barrage of embittered and disparaging remarks. Only Esther shows towards Pascal the trust and understanding without which the individual experiences total abandonment and solitude, and is therefore helplessly exposed to the judgement of others. She does not, however, try to prevail on Pascal to stay, and there is a totally logical and inexorable progression throughout the first three acts which leads Pascal from his initial refusal to contemplate emigration through growing uncertainty and self-doubt to his ultimate resignation and submission to Renée's wishes.

The last two acts take place in the villa owned by Renée's friends shortly after the arrival in Brazil of Pascal, Renée, Esther and their children. It soon becomes apparent that, whereas Pascal and Esther are

not at all relaxed and happy in their present situation, both Renée and Marc-André have settled down straightaway and are perfectly contented with their new life. This reaction is totally predictable on the part of Renée. She wanted material security and was prepared to make any sacrifices to obtain it. Now that she is far from the social unrest and agitation of Paris, she clearly feels relieved. There can be no moral scruples to undermine this relief as far as Renée is concerned for she would undoubtedly echo the words of Chèvremont who considers feelings of regret and guilt as "des états d'âme dont il faut se garder comme on se protège contre la grippe." (RR98). Renée's predominant characteristic is her adaptability: she is perfectly at ease changing her customs and habits to suit each new situation. Renée observes to Carlos Martins that "du moment qu'on accepte l'hospitalité d'un pays, je pense qu'il faut se conformer à ses usages." (RR102). Taken out of context this statement may not seem at all alarming, but the extent to which Renée is prepared to conform indicates a total lack of any personal convictions, fidelity or sincerity. She has, for example, no religious belief but goes to church regularly solely for the sake of form, something which she does not find either unusual or insincere. Moreover, she does not protest nor show any surprise when Carlos tells her that Pascal will not be able to teach at the university if he does not attend Mass each week. Marc-André's reaction on settling in San Felipe is, on the other hand, somewhat unexpected. On leaving Paris, he had been unsure of himself and his values, and had felt deprived of any real sense of vocation or belonging. He seems, however, to have found a perfectly satisfactory answer to his problems in the friendly welcome he has found in San Felipe and, more particularly, in the affection he shares with Teresa, Carlos' young niece. Suddenly the future seems to offer new hope and new meaning to his life. "Depuis que je suis ici," he says to Pascal, "il me semble que je me déplie et que je vais peut-être me trouver." (RR120).

For Pascal and Esther, however, peace of mind is not so easily secured. Certainly, neither the absence of political agitation nor the prospect of a new job has filled Pascal with any enthusiasm. He is, on the contrary, deeply shocked to discover that Carlos Martins and his friends are not less warm in their welcome of Chèvremont, who had been an informer in France during the Second World War, than they are of himself. Inès, Carlos' wife, tells Pascal that, in settling in San Felipe, he must forget all about his former convictions or feelings on this subject, and must be prepared to discard the past as one brushes away something superfluous or unnecessary. "Vous avez encore un peu d'Europe qui colle à la semelle de vos souliers," she says. "Mais je vous prie de vous essuyer les pieds soigneusement, comme pour entrer dans une chambre au parquet bien ciré quand il y a de la boue dans les rues."(RR108). Because of her moral shallowness Renée is capable of such conformity; but, in the case of Pascal, the situation merely makes him more keenly aware not only of a certain national heritage which he is not willing to erase from his life, but also of a certain moral stand which he is not prepared to forego. This becomes clear to the audience in the course of the conversation between Pascal and Padre Ricardo. The latter has come to formally warn Pascal about certain aspects of his private and academic life which will be under strict scrutiny. Pascal discovers that the Church is here a powerful and authoritarian institution which considers it its duty to supervise the intellectual and social life of the people of the province. Thus Pascal learns that the literary studies at the university will be subject to the approval of the Church authorities. "Dans une lutte ouverte entre l'Esprit-Saint et les puissances démoniaques qui se sont déchaînées dans le monde," observes Padre Ricardo, "il ne peut y avoir de neutralité en quelque domaine que ce soit, et surtout dans ce que vous appelez la littérature." (RR116-7). Pascal, whose programme had included works by Gide and Proust, is told that, should authorisation be given for him to lecture on these

authors, it is on the strict understanding that he denounce "les erreurs, les turpitudes qui fourmillent dans leurs écrits."(RR117). Finally, Padre Ricardo reminds Pascal that his failure to attend Mass has been noted and disapproved. Pascal will be welcome in San Felipe as someone who has rejected the crumbling values of the Western world, but only on the understanding that he ally himself with the supreme authority, the Catholic Church. This alliance may, however, be purely formal; the Padre does not expect Pascal to reveal whether or not he has any deep religious convictions. "Quand le soldat est en service commandé," he comments, "on ne s'intéresse pas à ses sentiments ou à ses réactions."(RR118).

Since his arrival in San Felipe, the tolerant attitude shown towards Chèvremont and the shallow and hypocritical values of conformity and appearance have induced in Pascal a growing sense of exile and feeling of revolt. The confrontation with Padre Ricardo, with his authoritarian, condescending attitude and the grotesque picture he paints of spiritual values, acts like a catalyst on Pascal, intensifying his feeling of revolt while at the same time illuminating for him certain beliefs or principles which were before confused and indistinct. Revolt and illumination are not, in fact, separate and independent, but closely linked. To say no, as Camus has observed, is also, where this implies revolt, to become aware of something which may be infringed upon or endangered: "Qu'est-ce qu'un homme révolté? Un homme qui dit non. Mais s'il refuse, il ne renonce pas: c'est aussi un homme qui dit oui, dès son premier mouvement."¹⁸ Pascal, who has from the outset shown himself to be weak and vacillating, suddenly becomes aware of something inviolable, something which he refuses to disown or sacrifice. "Les étrangers chez qui nous sommes, cette hideuse promiscuité avec un scélérat," he says to Marc-André, "et surtout, ça c'est pire que tout,

18. L'Homme révolté in Essais, p.423.

cette mainmise, cette confiscation...moi je ne trahirai pas...plutôt mourir...."(RR120). Esther's earlier warning that their departure from Paris would be at the same time "une faute et son propre châtement" (RR91) is almost prophetic confirmation of the situation in which Pascal now finds himself. He realises that he should never have left France and that the "guet-apens"(RR134) into which he has fallen is a just punishment for his mistake.

The first significant decision taken by Pascal concerns his refusal to accept any kind of supervision and control of his work at the university. The rather stern letter which he receives from the rector after his meeting with Padre Ricardo does not disturb him in any way. Pascal is in a situation which will enable him to affirm quite openly that he is not prepared to forego his intellectual independence in order to conform to the wishes of the authorities. Renée, in particular, is startled by Pascal's defiant attitude and tone of voice, and she tries to convince her husband that their whole future in San Felipe will be irrevocably compromised by such a decision. There does, however, remain an element of uncertainty in the minds of the spectators towards Pascal for they have already seen him, despite apparent conviction, give way on previous issues. Certainly, after her initial surprise, Renée does not expect Pascal to maintain his uncompromising attitude. She accuses her husband of having an overwhelming need for material security, a statement which past events seem to have confirmed to a certain extent. If Pascal were to deprive himself of a teaching post in San Felipe, the consequences of his action would clearly be far graver, given the stern, authoritarian climate of the province, than any similar act of conscience which he may previously have felt called upon to make in France. The situation in which Pascal finds himself constitutes the "épreuve" which will decide the strength and authenticity of his convictions. To give way on the stand he has taken would be a total and almost irrevocable recognition of failure. Meaningful revolt is not a passing cry of

anguish, suppressed and forgotten, but the springboard for firm and defiant action.

It is only in the final scene of the play, as Pascal waits to make his fortnightly radio broadcast to France, that the audience's doubts concerning him are resolved. It becomes clear not only that Pascal's attitude to the authorities has been unaffected by Renée's taunts and accusations, but also that his revolt has led to a spiritual awakening in which he sees clearly the course of action he must take and the values to which he is ready to bear witness. The rigid, unyielding clericalism of Padre Ricardo and of the authorities he represents, far from estranging Pascal from the Christian faith, has made the reality of Christ's presence all the more immediate and indubitable. Just as persecution and oppression may force upon the individual a clearer understanding of certain fundamental human values, so Pascal experiences a mysterious resurgence of religious faith when faced with the cynical and authoritarian Christianity of Padre Ricardo. "C'est, en effet, un mouvement de l'âme bien mystérieux," he says to Esther, "...ou plutôt c'est comme si avec un étrange retard derrière les paroles impies de ce religieux j'avais cru comprendre un appel infiniment discret...une réponse à ma question..."(RR142). This sudden appeal to Pascal, answering his own anguished cry for help with the assurance of divine love, provides the basis for Pascal's spiritual awakening. He feels called upon not to betray the values of duty and integrity which the Padre cynically ignores, and experiences with visionary intensity the absolute conviction that freedom and truth imply fidelity to the transcendent Being who has been revealed to him. We then learn that within hours of this awakening and illumination Pascal had met a young monk whose whole attitude and manner, radiating faith in God and love for his fellow men, bore witness to the spiritual harmony and peace which Pascal had glimpsed and of which he had before felt cruelly deprived. What, to an outside observer, may seem a chance and insignificant

encounter is, for Pascal, joyous confirmation of the reality of Christ's presence. "Vous n'imaginez pas la pureté du sourire qui illumine ce visage émacié..." he confides to Esther, "c'était le sourire du Christ." (RR143). And then, sensing Esther's astonishment and incredulity, Pascal remarks: "Comme il est dur en ce moment où je vais peut-être m'éveiller à Dieu de vous sentir si lointaine, si absente..."(RR144).

Although Pascal now realises that he should never have left France, he recognises that there would be little justification in his returning to Paris to resume his academic life there. He does not feel capable of taking sides in the complex political struggle which is being fought in France and realises with profound humility his total helplessness to act on a political level. But it is not on this level that there can be any way out of Pascal's present situation. It is in the recognition of this impasse and in the movement towards spiritual liberation and faith that Pascal can at last find his true identity. "Je suis voué à l'inefficacité, et à présent je le sais," he says. "Je dois le reconnaître avec une humilité absolue. Mais peut-être est-ce à partir de là qu'on peut monter vers Lui, être près de Lui..."(RR145).

It is at this point that Pascal recalls the humility and faith of Moreuil, the father of one of Marc-André's friends. At the time Pascal had sadly recognised that such conviction was foreign to him and that, for this reason, his life seemed to be foundering on flimsy, impermanent principles of action. Now Pascal finds himself in a situation where Moreuil's words find an answering call within him. The latter had been prepared to remain in France, confident of God's help and guidance in his hour of need. Pascal experiences the same trust and conviction, recognising God's presence in his decision to write a defiant letter of reply to the rector of San Felipe. "Ce refus de me plier à des exigences que ma conscience réprouve, c'est vraiment le Dieu véritable qui me l'a dicté..."(RR146) he says to Marc-André. This act of spiritual commitment for both Moreuil and Pascal implies a certain

material or political insecurity, but it is only on this condition that an authentic experience of transcendence is possible.

The final act is brought to an exciting and fitting climax by the radio broadcast which Pascal is asked to make. Trembling with emotion yet, at the same time, aware of the responsibility which now faces him, Pascal boldly addresses his fellow Frenchmen and denounces the error of Sertorius, a rebellious Roman general living in Spain, who had claimed that he alone incarnated Rome and all it stood for. If such a claim were to be upheld, it could be extended to justify the action of those French people whose aim it was to ensure overseas the survival of their country and of its traditions. Pascal's own experience, however, has convinced him that it was his duty to remain in his country, to defend the honour and values of Christian civilisation and to trust in the ultimate triumph of truth and justice. "L'illusion qu'on peut emporter sa patrie avec soi ne peut naître que de l'orgueil et de la plus folle présomption," he declares. "Vous, qui peut-être hésitez devant la menace de demain, restez, je vous en conjure, et si vous ne vous en sentez pas la force... si vous n'en avez pas la force...."(RR148). Pascal is, however, unable to complete the broadcast: overcome by emotion and fatigue, he suddenly loses his strength and falls to the ground. With a cry of anguish and apprehension Esther rushes forward to help him and, at this point, a young monk appears at the door and asks to be admitted. "Madame, laissez-moi aller jusqu'à lui," he says. "Je sais qu'il m'attend." (RR148). In the Paris production of Rome n'est plus dans Rome at the Théâtre Hébertot, it was decided to make the sudden appearance of the monk all the more striking while at the same time enhancing the impact of Pascal's last words, by lowering a curtain before the radio broadcast began. The spectators were then left in total darkness throughout Pascal's impassioned address as though it were they who were being spoken to by Pascal from the other side of the world. The curtain was then raised and the stage once more bathed in light as Pascal's voice

began to fail him and as, amid shouts of concern, the young monk appeared on the stage. The sudden transition from total darkness to a fully-lit stage is an interesting scenic device - relatively rare in the performance of Marcel's plays to date - adapted to what is a highly theatrical conclusion.

The spiritual journey of Pascal is clearly central to Rome n'est plus dans Rome and is characteristic of most of Marcel's "pièces éclairantes." The movement is from anguish and uncertainty to conviction and hope, while Pascal's conversion is sufficiently unexpected to be an effective coup de théâtre without it going beyond the limits of "vraisemblance". The action and intervention of grace is not something which can be rationally explained, but is nonetheless acceptable given the character and situation of Pascal. First of all, quite early in the play Pascal recognises his lack of faith and experiences this as a form of deprivation and abandonment. Faith is seen by him as a source of assurance and belonging, as a firm spiritual foundation providing a permanent and lasting basis for one's beliefs and values. In a significant remark to Renée, Pascal had once said: "Tu n'es pas un monstre, tu es terriblement normale, ma pauvre Renée....Ça veut dire qu'il ne t'a pas été donné d'éprouver des sentiments absolus..."(RR61-2). It is this experience of, or feeling for, something absolute which is totally foreign to Renée while, for Pascal, it is a deep and powerful yearning - at that time unanswered and unfulfilled - and a sign of "disponibilité" since it implies the realisation that life can only be really meaningful on a spiritual level. Pascal's reaction to the death of those he has known closely also indicates his basic "disponibilité". The death of Emmanuel, Esther's husband, for example, has convinced him that "il y a des morts miséricordieuses, des morts qui sont des grâces"(RR22), while the news of Robert's unexpected liquidation changes his whole attitude to someone who, when alive, had aroused his complete aversion. "C'est terrible, Esther," he admits with great humility, "cette lumière qui ne nous éclaire sur les êtres que lorsqu'ils sont morts..."(RR126).

Finally, the encounter with the young monk, which confirms Pascal in his new-found faith, is much less incredible when we recollect the impact of a previous encounter in Pascal's life: that of a former schoolfriend whose look alone had already convinced him of the reality of faith. The importance of Pascal's spiritual awakening is that it clarifies and strengthens certain beliefs and principles which had before remained indistinct and confused. The fact that he had already taken a firm stand on the question of the special tribunals set up after the war to try Frenchmen of treason or Collaboration, and the fact that he wholeheartedly refused Robert's Communist ideals which he saw as a threat to freedom and justice, has already provided a clear indication of his underlying sense of duty.

One of the most striking aspects of the last two acts of Rome n'est plus dans Rome is that the four main characters - Pascal, Renée, Esther and Marc-André - all react differently to their new surroundings. There is no significant evolution or change in the character of Renée or Esther, except that Renée finds the material security she had been hoping for and thus seems satisfied and contented, whereas Esther is immediately sensitive to the oppressive moral climate of the province. Unlike Pascal, however, Esther remains unmoved and untouched by grace; she finds Pascal's conversion incomprehensible and sees no real future for herself in San Felipe. The play ends with Esther contemplating returning to France to take care of Robert's child. In the case of Marc-André and Pascal, on the other hand, there is a complete transformation in their attitude and outlook which seems to offer the harmony and peace for which they had both been yearning. But whereas Pascal's awakening is spiritual, that of Marc-André is limited to his physical senses and emotions. The questions of duty and vocation which they had both been anxiously asking themselves are given a firm and clear reply in the case of Pascal, but Marc-André, as Marcel himself points out in his ^{lecture}~~conference~~ on the play, does not attain the level of awareness and reflection which would throw light

on these issues. Instead, he finds relief and contentment through "un processus de récupération vitale comparable au sommeil" (RR177). It is, however, clear that Marc-André's reaction is far less of an escape or evasion, given his age and sexual problems, than it would have been had he been in the same situation as Pascal, for example.

The characters in Rome n'est plus dans Rome are in no less precise a historical and political situation than the characters had been in L'Émissaire and Le Signe de la Croix. It would be meaningless to study the evolution of Pascal, Antoine or Simon outside this particular context; but this does not mean that the solution to their anguish and uncertainty is to be found on a social or political level. In fact, in each play the answer lies in an experience of faith and transcendence which elevates us from a temporal to a spiritual plane. The question of patriotic allegiance and duty raised in Rome n'est plus dans Rome cannot be answered by placing one's trust in a political party, be it revolutionary or reactionary. Pascal experiences and refuses both extremes, first in Paris and then in San Felipe. He finds Robert's Communism no more sinister and threatening than the insolent, authoritarian clericalism of Padre Ricardo. He recognises the importance of political commitment but the disarray of the parties in France at that time and the threatening background of fanaticism and intolerance in the world allow no real hope that man's problems will be resolved by political action. As Marcel himself observes, the play presupposes "le fait tragique...de la faillite universelle des partis" (RR174), the consequence of which is Pascal's acute awareness of his impotence to combat materially the political forces which are spreading throughout the world. It is this impotence or "dénouement total"(RR174), which explains the need to transcend one's political and historical situation by an appeal to a higher order of reality which, for Pascal as for Moreuil, becomes an appeal to the person of God. The experience and recognition of freedom and truth is indissolubly linked to the whole question of faith without which the words become empty political slogans. There is, however, nothing vague or

insubstantial about the transcendence implied in Pascal's conversion since this conversion is based on an experience of a link or union with the person of God. Perhaps the most significant remark made by Pascal is his need to be "relié, relié au Christ"(RR34). In fact, the confrontation with Marc-André emphasises to Pascal that he does not have this link and sense of belonging, and, as P.Boutang points out, he thus becomes aware "du néant de sa vie, de sa déréliction essentielle."¹⁹ But in revolting against Padre Ricardo, Pascal experiences a sudden and mysterious sense of duty and vocation, and discovers "une fidélité à soi, à son 'métier', qui rejoint la fidélité du 'manant', de celui qui reste, et, par-delà tous les espaces, le relie au Christ".²⁰

Many critics, however, failed to see the real significance of Pascal's conversion and its relevance to the political, social and moral issues with which he had been confronted. In his review of the play, for example, R.Kemp wrote: "La foi, et spécifiquement la foi catholique, joue le personnage ex machina qui, sans les résoudre, 'évanouit' les difficultés qu'on nous exposait si chaudement."²¹ And, summarising the play in a Canadian review, A.Viatte claimed that the dénouement was totally artificial, the appearance of the young Franciscan monk providing a Christian ending "sans que l'auteur donne à cette conversion in extremis une explication plausible...."²² To see Pascal's conversion as a clumsy, implausible deus ex machina is not, however, justified. The first three acts are a clear affirmation of Pascal's sense of spiritual deprivation and exile, and of his acute need for faith. His encounter with Marc-André and, in particular, his reflections on the attitude of Moreuil are central to our

19. Aspects de la France, 27.4.1951.

20. Ibid.

21. Le Monde, 20.4.1951.

22. "Rome n'est plus dans Rome" in La Revue de l'Université Laval, vol.6, no.1, septembre 1951, p.47.

understanding of Pascal's spiritual evolution. Only by ignoring these incidents can the spectator justifiably claim not to see a coherent and consistent development throughout the whole play. One is forced, therefore, to conclude with P.Boutang that R.Kemp - and, indeed, many others²³ - "n'a rien compris au drame de l'émigration",²⁴ reducing it to an act of fear or political irresponsibility when it is, in fact, an indication of unease and disarray on a moral and spiritual level. The underlying harmony and unity of the play is destroyed as soon as its political and religious elements are studied in isolation of each other. As T.Maulnier points out, the political situation with which Pascal is confronted at the outset of the play provides the concrete basis for (and is therefore not to be separated from) "l'évolution d'un conflit psychologique au cours duquel des personnages se révèlent à nous, et parfois se révèlent à eux-mêmes, dans une dimension spirituelle...."²⁵ It is important to see how this spiritual dimension is implied in the initial political situation, and thus to avoid the mistake of seeing exclusively political questions in the first half of the play and unrelated religious answers in the final two acts. The nature of Pascal's awakening was also grossly misrepresented. J. Lemarchand, for example, explained Pascal's final act of defiance and revolt as "l'expression d'une fatigue, ou d'une faiblesse, - peut-être le simple mouvement d'humeur d'un universitaire irrité de l'intrusion d'un inspecteur dans son enseignement".²⁶ There is, however, nothing whimsical or impermanent about Pascal's sudden convictions which can, in fact, be comprehended only within the context of a spiritual experience irreducible to any simplistic psychological or physiological laws of cause and effect.

23. See, for example, reviews of the play by J.-J.Gautier in Le Figaro, 20.4.1951, and by C.Mauban in Rivarol, 26.4.1951.

24. Aspects de la France, 27.4.1951.

25. Combat, 27.4.1951.

26. Le Figaro littéraire, 28.4.1951.

The real weakness of the play lies not in its overstatement of the gravity of the political atmosphere of the time, a bone of contention for many critics,²⁷ nor in the inevitable impermanence of such a precise historical setting, but in the proliferation of questions and problems which it raises and which, in performance, clearly lead to confusion and difficulties of comprehension. Carried away by one level of interpretation, the spectator can easily find himself missing a far deeper and more significant level of meaning. Certainly influential drama critics like R.Kemp did not help matters by totally misinterpreting the circumstances of Pascal's conversion and by failing to see how the transition is effected from the political to the spiritual plane. On the other hand, some misconceptions are perhaps understandable given the diversity of the situations and themes. Apart from the attacks on Communism and on extreme reactionary measures such as those enforced in San Felipe, Rome n'est plus dans Rome raises the very wide-ranging questions of political responsibility and of political commitment which are matter enough for a play on their own. More particularly, there is the question of the political and moral climate of France in the 1950's, and the inevitable conflict in outlook of two generations - that of Pascal and that of Marc-André. To this is added the highly charged situation within the Laumière family, ranging from Pascal's bitter conflict with Renée to his rather ambiguous relationship with Esther. Finally, we are left to reflect on the significance of Pascal's conversion which, like the testimony of Moreuil, exemplifies a religion of personal conviction and trust in contrast to the impersonal and institutionalised religion of an authoritarian church. "Dramatiquement, on n'est guère habitué à en demander tant," observed A.Frank of the play. "C'est une mêlée, et une mêlée demeure toujours confuse."²⁸ This criticism may be discounted after a careful reading of the text but, within the context

27. See, for example, reviews of the play by L.Estang in La Croix, 23.4.1951, and by H.Engelhard in Réforme, 5.5.1951.

28. Le Populaire de Paris, 27.4.1951.

of a performance - which is, after all, the ultimate test of the value of a play as theatre - it is both pertinent and valid.

It would be quite wrong, however, to write off the theatrical qualities of Rome n'est plus dans Rome. Many critics admired the structure and development of the opening acts which concentrate on the gradual unfolding of Pascal's unease and disarray paralleled by Renée's increasing jealousy and hostility. It is in the open conflict between these two characters that Marcel's technique as a dramatist is seen at its most effective. Here the dialogue is sharp and incisive, the conflict between them simmering precariously as the emotions are checked by cold and biting irony or suddenly exploding in an outburst of anger and jealousy. These confrontations are balanced by the scene involving Pascal and Esther where the tone is one of mutual sympathy and understanding. Pascal thus finds himself divided between two women, degraded and abused by Renée, comforted and uplifted by Esther. "Il n'est donc que déchiré," writes P. Boutang; "il est une déchirure, par où passe l'angoisse, la faute, puis la grâce."²⁹ It is a situation of this nature which gradually attaches us to Pascal. He is neither a model of perfection nor a totally despicable figure, but, like Claude Lemoyne or Christiane Chesnay, a deeply human person with whom we can totally identify. "Ce Pascal," writes J.-F. Reille, "est l'un des rares personnages, proposés ces dernières années, qui mériterait d'aller rejoindre les Alceste ou les Monsieur Jourdain dans le panthéon des héros familiers et profondément vivaces."³⁰

Above all, Rome n'est plus dans Rome is a play which sets out to awaken the audience to certain contemporary problems and issues without in any way proposing a clear-cut answer or solution to them. We are presented with a complex situation in which each character acts according

29. Aspects de la France, 27.4.1951.

30. Arts, 11.5.1951.

to his own conscience and temperament, and it is left to us to reflect on our own position or attitude and to come to our own conclusions. "Elle incite le spectateur à considérer sa propre inquiétude," writes G.Garampon of Rome n'est plus dans Rome. "Elle ne lui propose pas une leçon. Elle l'invite à s'interroger et à répondre dans les termes qu'il choisira. N'est-ce pas aussi le propre d'un art authentique, au théâtre, que de laisser à chacun la liberté de conclure?"³¹ Rome n'est plus dans Rome is, indeed, a good example of "théâtre engagé" dealing with contemporary moral and political problems without going to the extremes of dogma or propaganda.

31. "Rome n'est plus dans Rome" in Esprit, no.6, juin, 1951, p.913.

CHAPTER 5

The early plays: freedom and the burden of personal responsibility

Whereas the occupation of France, followed by the overthrow of Hitler and the rise to power of the Communists were events to which Marcel turned his attention in the final period of his work as a dramatist, they provided the starting point for the theatre of Sartre. The latter's first abrupt awakening to the political realities of the world in which he lived came with the outbreak of war in 1939. In fact, soon after the German invasion of France, Sartre was himself captured and sent to a P.O.W. camp at Trier. It was during his captivity that he wrote his first play, Bariona. The play is significant for two reasons. First of all, it was Sartre's first elaboration of a theme - action as a force of liberation and self-determination - which was to become central to his whole thought whether as dramatist, philosopher or political pamphleteer; and secondly, it was his first real contact with the theatre and with its potential as a medium of artistic expression. "Voilà le vrai théâtre, avait pensé Sartre," recalls Simone de Beauvoir: "un appel à un public auquel on est lié par une communauté de situation."¹ After his release from captivity, Sartre set to work writing another play which, like Bariona, would draw on a common, unifying experience, and in 1943 Les Mouches was staged in Paris. In this work, Sartre was initially inspired to write about the insidious propaganda of remorse and submission preached by the Vichy government, a far more specific aspect of the Occupation than that dealt with in Bariona (which had merely alluded to the oppressive presence of

1. La Force de l'âge, p. 499.

foreign powers in a defeated country), but it was nonetheless a situation common to all French people living in France during the war. Having found a suitable subject, Sartre immediately began to work on a plot which would be sufficiently veiled to avoid censorship and yet, at the same time, clear and unambiguous in its implications. He had first, however, to find the money to finance the play and a director willing to produce it and, in this, Sartre was extremely fortunate in being able to call on the help of Charles Dullin.²

Les Mouches³ is basically a play about freedom, and it is the experience of this freedom which marks the first step in the individual's revolt against the forces that threaten to reduce him to a submissive and malleable object, and thus deprive him of any meaningful identity. In Les Mouches, the horrifying reality of such a state is apparent in the cowed and passive attitude of the inhabitants of Argos, while the forces that have helped to produce it are represented by Jupiter and Égisthe, spiritual and temporal ministers of "l'ordre moral".(M 16). Jupiter defines himself as the principle of absolute good which regulates the life of the universe and which is visible in the fixed, orderly harmony of the natural world; but the deeply personal freedom which Oreste has experienced is incompatible with, and distinct from the order Jupiter has promoted. Man is seen to have renounced his freedom when he identifies totally with the natural order of life, seen in the ebb and flow of the

2. For Sartre's debt to Dullin, see Un théâtre de situations, pp. 225-8.

3. All textual references are taken from Théâtre, Paris, Gallimard, 1947, pp. 11-109, and will be incorporated in the thesis in the following abbreviated form: (M ..). Eg. (M 11) = Les Mouches in Théâtre, p. 11.

tide or the process of continuing self-perpetuation. Oreste exists as concretely as the sea or the plants around him, but his freedom defines a domain of existence which lies beyond the control of Jupiter. "Tu es le roi des dieux, Jupiter," says Oreste, "le roi des pierres et des étoiles, le roi des vagues de la mer. Mais tu n'es pas le roi des hommes." (M 99). Natural order and individual freedom are thus seen to be in direct opposition to each other and mutually self-exclusive. This self-exclusiveness is equally apparent in the confrontation between Oreste and Égisthe, the king of Argos, whose reign depends on a rigid and uncompromising political order. Égisthe is presented as Jupiter's temporal counterpart. "Tu me hais, mais nous sommes parents," Jupiter reminds him; "je t'ai fait à mon image: un roi, c'est un Dieu sur la terre, noble et sinistre comme un Dieu." (M 17). Égisthe's reign on earth is thus limited in time and space, but, more significantly, his authority and power are gradually being threatened by his own disenchantment and weariness. Whereas Jupiter is an impersonal deity, Égisthe is not immune to doubt and, unlike Jupiter whose power can only be challenged from the outside, Égisthe's order is gradually being eroded from within himself. Despite an appearance of strength, Égisthe feels totally empty: he would gladly relinquish his power and authority and, despite Jupiter's warnings, he makes no attempt to prevent Oreste from performing an act of retribution which will bring about his death and thus end fifteen years of order and discipline in Argos. Égisthe's weariness is a clear indication of the inevitable decay of a temporal institution or system which seeks to suppress human freedom.

The order represented by Jupiter and Égisthe is an oppressive and destructive force because it implies total conformity and passivity. It is possible to envisage a natural and harmonious order of life which depends on active participation on the part of each individual - such is the very positive spiritual order evoked in Marcel's plays - but this is very different from the order presented in Les Mouches. Jupiter con-

gratulates himself on the attitude adopted by the people of Argos - "de la bonne piété, à l'ancienne, solidement assise sur la terreur" (M 18) - while Égisthe reflects that throughout his fifteen years as king he had sought to impose on each of his subjects the image of his power and severity. In other words, their order implies fear, resignation and complete enslavement. Thus, when Électre tells Jupiter that she prefers his law to the freedom offered her by Oreste, she must also agree to become "(son) esclave et (sa) chose" (M 104). She renounces her individuality and accepts the identity of an object whose behaviour is to be determined by an impersonal and, indeed, inhuman power. But, although the order of Jupiter and Égisthe is oppressive, it is also precarious and vulnerable. "Nous faisons tous les deux régner l'ordre, toi, dans Argos, moi dans le monde," Jupiter reminds Égisthe; *Yet le même secret pèse lourdement dans nos coeurs.*" (M 77). The secret is that men are free, and only by deliberately concealing such a fact from his subjects can Égisthe continue to rule unchallenged. "Voilà quinze ans que je joue la comédie pour leur masquer leur pouvoir," (M 77) he reflects. For fifteen years the true identity and power of the people of Argos has remained hidden from them; but the whole meaning of their life can change overnight once they become aware of their basic freedom. Freedom is not something to be slowly acquired by a long process of political change: it is a fact of life which may be ignored for many years but is, nonetheless, an instantaneous force of self-renewal once apprehended.

Although the freedom experience by Oreste is incompatible with any state which denies the autonomy of the individual, it is not to be equated with freedom from constraint: rather it is the power to choose and to act, and therefore to bring changes into the world. A free man in a state governed by an oppressive tyrant such as Égisthe is not someone who withdraws from the material world to find inner peace of mind; it is someone like Oreste who chooses to actively oppose and reject the order with which

he is confronted. Oreste's own evolution is most significant in this respect. He had been brought up by his teacher to value "la liberté d'esprit" (M 22), and to develop a sceptical and inquiring mind. His is the illusory freedom of independence and detachment which refuses all form of choice, commitment and action. "A présent vous voilà jeune, riche et beau, avisé comme un vieillard," says Oreste's teacher, "affranchi de toutes les servitudes et de toutes les croyances, sans famille, sans patrie, sans religion, sans métier, libre pour tous les engagements et sachant qu'il ne faut jamais s'engager..." (M23-4). Although, in the eyes of his teacher, he is "un homme supérieur" (M 24), Oreste feels uneasy and dissatisfied. His existence seems unreal and weightless like the thread of a spider's web floating above the ground: but, above all, he feels exiled from the inhabitants of Argos because of his lack of involvement in their difficulties and problems. His state of detachment is contrasted with that of a man faced with a specific situation and series of choices who defines his identity according to the choices and decisions that he is compelled to make. The desire to belong, and to have a place in the life of a certain community increases in Oreste as the play progresses. He was born in Argos and feels that it is not by detachment that he can ever hope to be integrated among the people, but only by a concrete act, "un acte qui (lui) donnât droit de cité parmi eux".(M 26). At this stage, however, he envisages no specific course of action. Oreste's sister Électre had been living in the hope that one day her brother would return to Argos and avenge the assassination of their father; but when Oreste reveals his true identity to her, she disowns his detachment from the world. "Je n'ai que faire des belles âmes," she says: "c'est un complice que je voulais." (M 60). Her disdain merely increases Oreste's desire to remain in Argos and unite himself with the people. Instead of drifting from town to town, "étranger aux autres et à (lui)-même" (M 61), Oreste is intent on becoming "un homme de quelque part, un homme parmi les hommes". (M 61). He is in momentary disarray

when he asks Jupiter for a sign to indicate the path he should follow; but he suddenly realises that it is he alone who can interpret the sign he has been given, and that he must choose his own path and make his own decisions. For the first time, Oreste sees that there is every possibility of his securing for himself a place among the citizens of Argos, especially if he were to perform an act which would enable him to assume responsibility for all the crimes they had committed, thus exposing himself to an even greater degree of fear and remorse than they had experienced during the reign of Égisthe. Then Oreste will feel as much at home in Argos as a butcher in his shop surrounded by freshly slaughtered bullocks. He bids farewell to a youth in which he had learned to remain a distant and innocent spectator, and embraces an adulthood of commitment and action. The act that now awaits him is the assassination of Égisthe and of his mother Clytemnestre: his sense of weightlessness and unreality disappears in the face of this act, the burden of which he alone must bear.

The very decisive steps taken by Oreste to overthrow the régime of fear and enslavement set up by Égisthe is contrasted not only with his former indifference, but also with the attitude of Électre whose apparent revolt is seen to be little more than a pose. It is true that she is less cowed and passive than most of the citizens of Argos, and Oreste's first sight of his sister is when she angrily abuses the statue of Jupiter and makes an offering of rubbish - a stark contrast with the silent prayers of the old women and their gifts of wine. She returns during the ceremony for the dead to incite the people to revolt, but is silenced by Jupiter's intervention. The reaction of the people to Jupiter's magic convinces her that change can only be brought about by deeds; not by words. "C'est par la violence qu'il faut les guérir," she admits to Oreste. "Car on ne peut vaincre le mal que par un autre mal." (M 56-7). The test of the reality and authenticity of her revolt comes when Oreste takes it upon

himself to perform the act of which Électre had dreamed for so long. "Tu es donc venu, Oreste," she says, "et ta décision est prise, et me voilà, comme dans mes songes, au seuil d'un acte irréparable, et j'ai peur - comme en songe." (M 66). For years Électre had enjoyed the thought of revenge, but the thought of revenge belongs not to the world of reality but to that of the imagination. Commenting on Électre's attitude, F. Jeanson writes that "cela fait quinze ans qu'elle assouvit dans l'imaginaire son désir de vengeance et qu'elle vit de cette fiction; elle s'est installée dans cette révolte passive, elle y a trouvé son équilibre"⁴. Her reason d'être had not been revenge, but the thought or hope of it. This is confirmed by her reaction once Oreste has killed Égisthe and Clytemnestre. Électre tries to pretend that she is overjoyed but, whereas Oreste calmly accepts the reality of his action, Électre is uneasy and disturbed. "Celui-ci est mort," she observes, staring at the corpse of Égisthe. "C'est donc ça que je voulais. Je ne m'en rendais pas compte." (M 81). Were she to accept full complicity in Oreste's act of retribution, Électre would dispel doubts about the defiant attitude she had adopted towards Égisthe and Clytemnestre; but by allowing herself to be comforted by Jupiter and by disclaiming all responsibility for what has happened, she merely confirms these doubts. The meaning of the last fifteen years of her life is thus, to Oreste's consternation, resolved by an act of fear and resignation. "C'est à présent que tu es coupable," he says. "Ce que tu as voulu, qui peut le savoir si ce n'est toi? Pourquoi renier cette Électre irritée que tu fus, cette jeune déesse de la haine que j'ai tant aimée?" (M 96).

Freedom implies, therefore, the power to choose for oneself and to constantly redefine one's life; and it also implies complete responsibility

4. Sartre par lui-même. p. 16.

for the acts one has performed. In this respect, freedom makes man the master of his destiny and not the victim of some extraneous force or agent. One cannot be free and, at the same time, believe that one's life is predetermined or moulded by fate. In replacing freedom by fate, acts are no longer the responsibility of any one individual or group: they are unfortunate accidents over which man does not have complete control. Oreste's act of revenge, for example, is contrasted with the murder of Agamemnon by Égisthe, "un meurtre aveugle et sourd, ignorant de lui-même, antique, plus semblable à un cataclysme qu'à une entreprise humaine". (M 76). The individual also renounces his freedom and responsibility when, overcome by feelings of guilt, he adopts an attitude of repentance and self-mortification. Such an attitude is necessitated by the religion of remorse upheld by the people of Argos. A valuable insight into the nature of this religion is given by Clytemnestre. She explains to Électre how one act - in this case the abandonment of her baby son Oreste - has poisoned the last fifteen years of her life. She is unwilling to accept that she was totally responsible for having allowed Oreste to be handed over to the mercenaries, but that she does recognise some degree of responsibility is shown by her feelings of guilt on this subject and by the penitent attitude that she has in consequence adopted. Her penitence, however, merely underlines her fascination with the past, with an action for which she feels she must seek atonement during the rest of her life. As a result, she relinquishes her freedom and powers of self-determination, feebly invoking the cruel twists of fate of which the individual is an unfortunate victim. "Et tu sauras enfin que tu as engagé ta vie sur un seul coup de dés, une fois pour toutes." she tells Électre, "et que tu n'as plus rien à faire qu'à haler ton crime jusque'à ta mort." (M 37). By the end of the play, we know that Électre will follow the same path as her mother and allow her life to become determined by another "crime irréparable" (M 37) - the

murder of Égisthe and of Clytemnestre. Significantly, Clytemnestre had told Électre that what she hated in her was not her daughter but herself, and she reminds Électre that she too had once possessed "ce visage pointu, ce sang inquiet, ces yeux sournois" (M 34). The resemblance between the two is confirmed by their reaction to their respective "crimes": indeed, after killing Égisthe and Clytemnestre, Oreste notices the same blank, lifeless eyes in his sister that had first struck him in his mother.

The religion of remorse, which is a powerful and insidious source of mystification and enslavement, is practised not only individually, but also on a large collective scale. This is shown by the behaviour of the citizens of Argos during the day of mourning for the dead and, in particular, during the special ceremony on the mountain side, a scene apparently inspired by the account of the funeral rites of the Etruscans given to Sartre by Simone de Beauvoir⁵. "Au début du drame," observes R. Campbell, "nous voyons les habitants d'Argos privés de tout sentiment de responsabilité individuelle, dépossédés d'eux-mêmes, plongés dans une hypnose collective, à un point tel qu'ils prennent les crimes d'autrui pour les leurs...."⁶ The crimes for which the people have been made to suffer in addition to their own acts of infidelity or selfishness are those of Égisthe and Clytemnestre. It is, however, misleading to suggest that they had played no part whatsoever in the plot to assassinate Agamemnon since they had virtually sealed the fate of their former king by the silence with which they had greeted his return from the Trojan war and the friendly welcome extended to him by Clytemnestre. "A ce moment-là il aurait suffi d'un mot, d'un seul mot," recalls Jupiter, "mais ils se sont tus, et chacun d'eux avait, dans sa tête,

5. See La Force de l'âge, p. 521.

6. Jean-Paul Sartre ou une littérature philosophique, Paris, Pierre Ardent, 1946 (2nd. edition), p. 230.

l'image d'un grand cadavre à la face éclatée." (M 16). They had then tried to dispel the lingering doubts and feelings of guilt which the assassination of their king induced in them by seeking absolution in a doctrine of repentance and self-mortification. Jupiter tells Oreste that the people of Argos are "engagés dans la voie du rachat" (M 20), but the price of such redemption is a state of total abjection. Theirs is a religion based on fear and a guilty conscience - "un fumet délectable pour les narines des Dieux" (M 20) - and their complete subjugation to the rites ordained by Égisthe and the high priest brings cries of horror from Oreste's teacher. Draped in black and with pale, lifeless faces, their outer appearance matches an existence based on self-disgust. "Je pue ! Je pue!" cries one man, throwing himself to his knees. "Je suis une charogne immonde." (M 44). They have long ceased to have any real personal identity, but constitute an abject, dehumanised collectivity, whom Égisthe appropriately treats as dogs. Their sense of sinfulness is so great that life has become an ordeal of suffering and regret which compares unfavourably with the quiet oblivion of death.

It is clear that the religion depicted in Les Mouches has no real common ground with the Christian faith despite superficial similarities, notably in the doctrine of original sin and in the belief in the need for repentance. Christianity does not seek to degrade the individual by enslaving him and depriving him of responsibility, nor does it seek to cultivate fear, self-disgust and horror of life. In fact, the object of Sartre's criticism was not Christianity - something confirmed by him in conversation with Marcel⁷ - but the doctrine of "mea culpa" propounded during the war by the Vichy government and described by Sartre in "Paris sous l'occupation"⁸.

7. See L'Heure théâtrale, Paris, Plon, 1959, p. 183.

8. In Situations, III, pp. 15-42.

Speaking of his play several years after it had been performed in Paris, Sartre referred to this doctrine as "cette maladie du repentir, cette complaisance au repentir et à la honte"⁹. He also affirmed that, in Les Mouches, he was alluding not only to the situation of Frenchmen confronted by such insidious and defeatist exhortations, but also to the situation of those who, having opposed the Nazis by acts of violence which had led to reprisals and the death of innocent people, would then be subject to remorse of a rather different nature inducing them to give themselves up. On both points Sartre's attitude was firm and categorical: "J'y disais aux Français: vous n'avez pas à vous repentir, même ceux qui en un sens sont devenus des meurtriers; vous devez assumer vos actes même s'ils ont causé la mort d'innocents."¹⁰ In keeping with these sentiments, Oreste triumphantly proclaims responsibility for the act he has performed and refuses to acknowledge any sense of guilt or shame. "Je ne suis pas un coupable," he tells Jupiter, "et tu ne saurais me faire expier ce que je ne reconnais pas pour un crime." (M 94). The most cowardly assassin, in his eyes, is "celui qui a des remords" (M 98). Oreste refers to himself as a "voleur de remords" (M 65), but the remorse of the people of Argos is something he is prepared to assume in order to liberate the town and not something which will become a burden of penitence. Moreover, his action, since it is based on a free and responsible choice, carries with it its own justification. "Je fais ce qui est juste," (M 80) Oreste calmly announces to Égisthe after stabbing him. He creates his own justice through an act which he refuses to allow to be defined by predetermined, objective values of good and bad. The gods cannot decide if Oreste's act is good: only

9. Un théâtre de situations, p. 231.

10. Ibid., p. 232.

Oreste himself can decide its value, and on this issue his mind is clearly set. "J'ai fait mon acte, Électre," he says, "et cet acte était bon." (M 84).

There is nothing remotely abstract or intellectual about the freedom experienced by Oreste in Les Mouches: it is, on the contrary, a very concrete and dramatic experience. This is because Sartre defines freedom in terms of choice and commitment: it is not, he says in an introduction to the play, "je ne sais quel pouvoir abstrait de survoler la condition humaine" but "l'engagement le plus absurde et le plus inexorable"¹¹. He does not, however, set out to establish a universal guide to action for he is concerned with how the individual relates to the outside world in a specific historical context. Freedom is a basic, unchanging fact of human existence, but not so the situation with which the individual is confronted. Oreste's discovery of freedom also emphasises that we remain free irrespective of political or social constraints: we may be in chains or oppressed by an invading army, but in each case we can choose between resignation or defiance, submission or revolt. "Jamais nous n'avons été plus libres que sous l'occupation allemande,"¹² wrote Sartre, referring to man's constant need to define himself as each new situation threatened his life and beliefs, making indifference or detachment quite impossible. Oreste's commitment shows us, however, that freedom is not lightly assumed. He tells Électre that in discovering his freedom he is at one with himself, but this means no more than that he is prepared to live and act in accordance with the freedom which constitutes his identity as a human being. It does not mean that he has achieved contentment and peace of mind. Indeed, Oreste admits to Jupiter that there is a heavy price to pay for freedom: exiled from the

11. Un théâtre de situations, p. 223.

12. Situations, III, p. 11.

peace and tranquillity of the natural world, man is left in total solitude to forge his destiny and define his identity. He is left entirely to his own resources for there is no transcendent reality to guide him and to give order and meaning to his life. For this reason Oreste knows that his freedom implies the absence of any comforting belief in some ultimate harmony or truth, but this is a condition of action and not a negation of it. Finally, although it is Oreste's intention to liberate the people of Argos from the fear and remorse to which they had been subjected during the reign of Égisthe, and although his action may have made the people aware of their freedom, he cannot ensure that they will accept all its consequences. That is ultimately the responsibility and choice of each individual, just as Électre is alone in deciding how she will react to Oreste's act of revenge. "Je l'aime plus que moi-même," Oreste tells Jupiter. "Mais ses souffrances viennent d'elle, c'est elle seule qui peut s'en délivrer ..." (M 94). Indeed, despite Oreste's intervention, there is no reason to suppose that life in Argos will be radically changed.

The main criticism of Sartre's conception of freedom as it is presented in Les Mouches is based on either moral or political objections. Oreste's affirmations of freedom and responsibility would seem logically to lead to a deeply personal and anarchic morality. Superficially, Sartre's view of action may seem very close to Gide's "acte gratuit", since in both cases there is no prior rationality or justification. "A man changes himself by acting," writes A. Manser in support of this comparison, "but no reasons for acting are suggested."¹³ There is, however, a very great difference between the capriciousness implied in Gide's "acte gratuit" and the burden of responsibility which accompanies Sartre's notion of freedom. Oreste does not kill Égisthe and Clytemnestre on the spur of the moment, nor is his act something which will be lightly dismissed from his mind. "Les gémissements

13. Sartre: A Philosophic Study, London, Athlone Press, 1966, p. 228.

de ma mère," Oreste tells Électre, "crois-tu que mes oreilles cesseront jamais de les entendre?" (M 92). His act is assumed and none of the consequences is evaded. This does nothing, however, to dispel the charge of anarchy justified by the absence of any recognisable harmony or order for which to strive. Indeed, one is led to ask if, as Marcel points out, "Oreste ne répudie pas à l'avance tout ordre quel qu'il soit; car, de cet ordre, s'il était le promoteur, il risquerait aussi de devenir le prisonnier"¹⁴. Oreste's departure from Argos at the end of the play lends weight to Marcel's criticism, for Oreste has used his freedom not in order to create a new order, but solely to bring down the established order by an act of defiant revolt. He tells the people of Argos that, although he now feels that he belongs to their community, he has no wish to take the place of Égisthe: he prefers, instead, to be "un roi sans terre et sans sujets". (M 108). One of the most favourable reviews of Les Mouches when it was first performed came from M. Leiris. He finds Oreste's decision perfectly acceptable, but in fact merely corroborates Marcel's objection that such freedom seems to consist in the power to rebel and destroy rather than in the power to create. "Mais il ne saurait être question, pour lui," he writes, "d'une prise de pouvoir: libre, Oreste a rompu le cercle et n'a donc pas à dominer les autres, à traiter autrui comme une chose; parce qu'il est sans chaînes, il n'a pas besoin d'enchaîner."¹⁵ It should, on the other hand, be remembered that, since the play was in part conceived as an allegory of the situation in France in 1943 and as a call to active resistance against the Germans, there is an implied morality in Oreste's

14. L'Heure théâtrale, pp. 184-5.

15. Les Critiques de notre temps et Sartre, (ed. J. Lecarme), Paris, Garnier, 1973, p. 76. M. Leiris' review of Les Mouches originally appeared in Les Lettres françaises, no. 12, 1943, and was entitled "Oreste et la Cité".

action, based on the recognition of certain human rights and values, while the refusal of injustice and oppression also implies the will to create if not an order, at least a better state of things.

Sartre's critics are, however, equally severe in judging Les Mouches from a political standpoint. F. Jeanson was quick to emphasise the idealism and immaturity shown by Oreste at the end of the play. "Contre la patience du travail, il a choisi l'exaltation de la fête et l'absurde générosité qui se consume dans l'absolu," he writes, "immédiatement, pour n'avoir pas à s'exercer dans le relatif, à se compromettre en recourant à des moyens."¹⁶ From a purely practical point of view, it is clear that F. Jeanson's criticism outweighs M. Leiris' attempt to justify Oreste's departure. Moreover, because Oreste's action seems so unrealistic, it has been suggested that, far from being an authentic act, it is, in fact, a gesture intended to establish a heroic image of himself in the eyes of the people of Argos. "By his departure," observes K. Gore, emphasising another issue raised by F. Jeanson, "he in effect hopes to leave behind an image which will remain clear and stable and which will serve as a point of reference for himself."¹⁷ Such criticism implies that, although freedom and commitment provide the basis of authentic self-expression, Oreste misuses the freedom he has discovered; he becomes the object or victim of the image of himself which he seeks to project, not the subject or agent of action and change. If this were true, Oreste could not therefore be considered a spokesman for authentic freedom, and the play could then be seen to end on a dual note of failure, Électre relinquishing her freedom

16. Sartre par lui-même, pp. 27-8.

17. "The Theatre of Sartre: 1940-65" in Books Abroad, no. 2, spring, 1967, pp. 138-9. Cf. Sartre par lui-même, p. 27 .

by turning for comfort and reassurance to Jupiter, and Oreste glorying in a freedom which turns out to be pure self-indulgence. Indeed, in an interview in 1960¹⁸, Sartre agreed with much of F. Jeanson's criticism of the play, acknowledging the spectacular, but unrealistic and impractical nature of Oreste's departure. Sartre's attitude to Les Mouches some seventeen years after it had first been written and performed clearly allowed him to situate the play in the broad spectrum of his work and thought, and thus form a judgement he would not have made at the time it was composed. Similarly, Marcel's attitude to Jean Deschamps' production of Un Homme de Dieu in 1951 allowed him to accept an interpretation of the last words and gestures of the play which is justified seen in the context of his work as a whole, but would scarcely have been envisaged by the author when the play was first composed. It should also be remembered that, at the time Les Mouches was written and performed, Sartre thought of Oreste as someone in good faith who performs an exemplary and responsible act. This is made clear in the interviews given to the press in 1943¹⁹ and, indeed, even some years after the war Sartre defended his main character quite emphatically. "Oreste se décide finalement pour la liberté," he stated in the course of a debate on Les Mouches in Berlin in 1948, "il veut se libérer lui-même en libérant son peuple, et par cette libération il veut retrouver son appartenance à son peuple."²⁰ Clearly, Oreste was intended as a spokesman of freedom and commitment, but it is also clear that many

18. "Sartre répond aux jeunes" in L'Express, no. 455, 3.3.1960.

19. See, for example, interview with Y. Novy in Comoedia, 24.4.1943.

20. Un théâtre de situations, p. 234.

more difficulties of a practical nature will have to be faced and resolved before the individual can claim to be fully committed to the social and political issues of his age. Oreste's commitment in Les Mouches is highly individualistic, and this reflects Sartre's own attitude to society and to politics at that time - in other words his attitude to the Resistance movement in France. If Sartre had chosen to emphasise in Les Mouches the reaction not of society as a whole, but of one isolated individual, it was, as F. Jeanson points out, because "la Résistance lui apparaissait d'abord comme l'aventure personnelle de chaque résistant et ... à cette épreuve de la liberté il n'envisageait encore d'autre réponse qu'une sorte d'hérosisme de la conscience"²¹. Sartre's articles on the situation of France during the Occupation²² confirm this basic individualism, an attitude which naturally meets objections from those who believe that political action and change can only be realistically envisaged on a collective scale. It is true that by assuming the fears and remorse of the people of Argos, by taking the flies away from the city, and by thus leaving the people with the opportunity of starting a new life for themselves, Oreste is involving himself in the life of the community. But this involvement is vague, fanciful and theoretical and leaves unanswered many of the practical issues of commitment.

Les Mouches raises, therefore, numerous points of contention both on a moral and a political level. These objections should not, however, be magnified to the exclusion of some of the more positive and challenging ideas. We are presented through Oreste with a philosophy of freedom and responsibility which places the individual firmly in the present, orientates his choice towards the future and thus makes his life one of action and

21. Sartre par lui-même, p. 151.

22. See Situations, 111.

and change in stark contrast with the passivity and resignation engendered by a belief in determinism and in man's inability to alter either himself or the course of history. Les Mouches clearly offered a fresh and challenging picture of life to Frenchmen in 1943, and by emphasising the individual's freedom and responsibility was equally appropriate to the mood in France in the immediate post-war years, for, as Sartre himself observed, the end of the war brought with it the demise of many comforting, but ill-founded assumptions about social and political stability. "La guerre, en mourant laisse l'homme nu, sans illusion," he wrote, "abandonné à ses propres forces, ayant enfin compris qu'il n'a plus qu'à compter que sur lui."²³ Moreover, when Les Mouches was first performed in Germany in 1947, Sartre emphasised its relevance to the situation facing the German people at that time. They were presented with a choice between, on the one hand, a feeling of guilt and remorse, and submersion in the past, or, on the other hand, "un engagement total et sincère dans un avenir de liberté et de travail"²⁴ which, without in any way erasing the events of the past, would nonetheless encourage them to actively redefine themselves and their future.

It is, perhaps, somewhat paradoxical that, to dramatise his conception of freedom, Sartre should resort to the use of a Greek myth which deals with a family whose destiny is predetermined by the gods. Part of Sartre's originality lies in neatly inverting the significance and implications of Oreste's act without in any way modifying its circumstances. Les Mouches has turned out to be Sartre's only borrowing from classical mythology in his theatre with the exception of Les Troyennes²⁵, his recent adaptation

23. Situations, III, p. 71.

24. Un théâtre de situations, p. 229.

25. Paris, Gallimard, 1966. The play was first performed at the Théâtre du Palais de Chaillot in 1965.

of a play by Euripides. As he was to confirm in 1944, Sartre turned to the Orestes legend in writing Les Mouches mainly to disguise the political implications of the play. "Le véritable drame, celui que j'aurais voulu écrire," he declared, "c'est celui du terroriste qui, en descendant des Allemands dans la rue, déclenche l'exécution de cinquante otages."²⁶ Nevertheless the allegory, as in Bariona, was sufficiently transparent for the public to be in no doubt as to the real situation to which Sartre was alluding. Égisthe, Clytemnestre and Oreste can be readily equated with the German invader, the Collaborator and the Resistance fighter, while the people of Argos are recognisable as the people of France who are free to cast off their chains and defy their oppressor and, more generally, as the people of Europe whose silence and submissiveness allowed Hitler a relatively straightforward and unobstructed rise to power. The allegory is strengthened by the play's structure, revolving as it does around a series of comparisons and contrasts. Oreste's final commitment, for example, is set against his initial detachment, his desire to liberate the people of Argos is contrasted with Égisthe's need to subjugate and enslave them, and the confrontation between the two serves to underline the deep resurgence of life in Oreste and the fatigue and weariness with life in Égisthe. Oreste's defiance is also balanced by Électre's pose and by the totally passive attitude of the inhabitants of Argos.

There are, however, points at which the necessity of conforming to the original myth would seem to be at variance with the basic allegory. In Sartre's play, for example, the furies of classical mythology have become, as P. Thody points out, the flies sent by Jupiter to "batten on the remorse

26. Un théâtre de situations, p. 225.

of the citizens of Argos"²⁷. They symbolise the sickness and destructiveness of guilt and repentance. In the second play of Aeschylus' trilogy, Orestes leaves Argos pursued by the furies as punishment for the murder of his mother and of Aggisthus; similarly, at the end of Les Mouches, Oreste leaves the stage pursued by the flies. This dénouement raises two objections. First of all, by killing Égisthe and Clytemnestre, Oreste succeeds in overthrowing the oppressive régime which had tyrannised the people of Argos and which had sought to enslave them by a religion of guilt and repentance. He thus removes for the people the external obstacle to freedom, but ultimately only they can liberate themselves from their fear and remorse. Why then should they suddenly find themselves free of the flies without having had time to digest Oreste's declarations and act in accordance with them? Secondly, the fact that Oreste who clearly does not feel any guilt for the act he has committed should be able to take the flies away with him is clearly unsatisfying, especially since Électre does heartily repent of her part in the two murders but is left unaffected by them. It is, however, the presence of the flies which plays a very important part in creating an atmosphere of decay and death from which Oreste's discovery of freedom emerges as the one ray of life. This atmosphere is prepared with great effect in the opening scene in which Oreste and his teacher have just arrived in Argos. The set depicts a square in the city with, at the rear, a statue of Jupiter, "dieu des mouches et de la mort" (M 11), whose face is smeared with blood, and around whom groups of old women dressed in black gather to make sacrificial offerings. From the outset, therefore, Jupiter is presented not as the traditional god of justice and light, but as a rather sinister prince of darkness whose worshippers are clothed in black. Oreste and his teacher are greeted not with warmth and hospitality,

27. Sartre: A Biographical Introduction, p. 63.

but with fear and distrust. The old women shrink away from the visitors, spitting and then finally running off rather than answer any questions. Off-stage, there are frequent shouts and lamentations, while on-stage the relentless buzz of the flies is continually heard as they beseege each passer-by. The deserted streets and the references to the oppressive heat also add to the overall effect. Oreste's teacher stares with horror at the local idiot who is sitting quietly on the ground, grinning contentedly despite the flies which are crawling over his face. Jupiter explains that the flies were first attracted to Argos by "une puissante odeur de charogne" (M 14) and this image of rotting flesh vividly sets the tone of the opening scene. The tone is also emphasised by the language of Oreste and his teacher. The latter, for example, speaks of "cette maudite bourgade qui r ssole au soleil" (M 12) and of "les lourdes courses noires dans les rues aveuglantes" (M 12), while Oreste describes the citizens of Argos as "des larves terroris es" (M 19) and complains of "cette maudite chaleur".(M 15).

Although this stifling atmosphere is not maintained at such a high pitch throughout the play, it does nonetheless remain an essential aspect of the overall performance, harnessing language and the auditive presence of the flies with the visual effects of set, costume and gesture to evoke a strong sense of desolation, fear and servitude. "The abiding impression made by the play is one of physical infirmity and suffering inflicted by a capricious and contemptuous deity," writes R. North; "its overall hight-marish feeling forcefully presents Sartre's vision of humanity in bondage to fear and false ideas."²⁸ Despite this element of spectacle, Les Mouches has always been considered one of Sartre's least effective plays. In performance, it is clearly weighed down by long moralising or explanatory

28. Introduction to Les Mouches, London, Harrap, 1963, p. 48.

speeches, and this is particularly apparent in the final confrontation between Jupiter and Oreste which is, at times, little more than a verbal battle between two philosophers, one standing for order and the other for freedom. The conclusion is redeemed somewhat by the theatricality of Oreste's final exit as he passes through the crowd and disappears pursued by the flies, but the play as a whole does not really come "alive" on stage. G. Ricou, reviewing Les Mouches when it was first produced in Paris, emphasised this lack of sustained theatrical effect and the difficulty in assessing "une oeuvre, certainement intéressante à lire qui laisse, à la représentation, une pesante impression d'ennui"²⁹. In fact the only really favourable press review came from M. Rostand³⁰, and Sartre recalls that the fifty or so performances at the Théâtre de la Cité in 1943 took place "devant des salles à demi vides"³¹. When Les Mouches was revived after the war by Raymond Hermantier, first at the Nîmes Festival in 1950 and then at the Vieux-Colombier in Paris the following year, the critics, although praising the effort and care that had gone into Hermantier's production, were nonetheless unanimous in declaring the play to be heavy and philosophical.

There has been no major production of Les Mouches in France since 1951 in marked contrast to the immediate success and numerous revivals of Huis clos, Sartre's second play which was first produced in 1944, less than a year after Les Mouches. A cursory appraisal of these two plays may suggest that they have little in common: whereas Les Mouches is concerned with action in a concrete historical situation, Huis clos is set

29. France socialiste, 12.6.1943.

30. In Paris-Midi, 7.6.1943.

31. Un théâtre de situations, p. 226.

in hell, and the three characters, although able to see, touch and judge each other, are dead as far as those on earth are concerned and are thus for ever deprived of the chance of involving themselves in the events that take place there. Sartre is not, however, preoccupied in Huis clos with the possibility of life after death and with the form that it may take; he is, in fact, as concerned with attitudes to life and human situations as he had been in Les Mouches. The essential difference between the two plays is that Huis clos deals with such attitudes and situations in a general and not a particular context, and concentrates on the negative as opposed to the positive results of human action. Oreste's experience of freedom had led him to oppose the natural order and the religion of guilt and remorse upheld by Jupiter and the oppressive political order represented by Égisthe, and to stand by his own decisions. To be free, he realised, meant the right to self-determination. In contrast, the people of Argos have become enslaved to the very order which Oreste rejects. They have lived in fear of Égisthe for fifteen years, delivering into his hands the control and manipulation of their lives: similarly, Électre, having initially feigned defiance and revolt, eventually renounces a life of free and responsible action by choosing to repent of the part she had played in the assassination of Égisthe and Clytemnestre. Huis clos underlines two further obstacles to freedom and self-determination: the first arises where action is vitiated by the individual's concern for appearances, for the image he or she will assume in the eyes of an onlooker; the second is brought about through death, for at this point of time the individual is not only deprived of any further action in the world, but is also, in Sartre's view, condemned to forgo his or her status as a subject and become instead a helpless and malleable object, irremediably exposed to the judgement of others. These are the basic preoccupations which lie behind the composition of

Huis clos and explain why the play was originally entitled Les Autres, since it is the gaze or judgement of others which is a constant threat to individual freedom. The chance circumstances which Sartre also claims are involved in the composition of a play³² arose from his friendship with Marc Barbezat. Barbezat suggested that Sartre write a short play involving two or three characters which could be easily staged and performed in various provincial towns. "L'idée de construire un drame très bref, avec un seul décor et seulement deux ou trois personnages, tenta Sartre,"³³ recalls Simone de Beauvoir. Although Barbezat's original suggestion fell through, Sartre went ahead with the project and the play was eventually performed with an entirely new cast at the Vieux-Colombier in Paris. Sartre was intrigued by the technical problem of keeping together three actors on stage "sans avantager aucun d'eux"³⁴, and it was this which led him to imagine a situation in hell where the three would be locked up together for eternity. It would be wrong, however, to infer, as P. Thody does, that Huis clos "was apparently written with purely aesthetic considerations in mind"³⁵, for it has already been established that the play provided Sartre with the means of analysing further the nature of human freedom, a subject which raises important moral and political issues.

In the opening scenes of Huis clos³⁶, the presence of the other, either

32. See Un théâtre de situations, p. 237.

33. La Force de l'âge, p. 568.

34. Un théâtre de situations, p. 237.

35. Sartre: A Biographical Introduction, p. 64.

36. All textual references are taken from Théâtre, Paris, Gallimard, 1947, pp. 115-168, and will be incorporated in the thesis in the following abbreviated form: (HC ..). Eg. (HC 115) = Huis clos in Théâtre, p. 115.

as a singular or collective unit, is seen to induce within the individual an overwhelming feeling of insecurity and doubt, for the latter's sole concern is the image he or she assumes in the eyes of other people. Garcin's immediate reaction on being introduced into the Second Empire drawing-room is to try and collect his thoughts, and put his life on earth into some kind of perspective. "Je mets ma vie en ordre," (HC 129) he says to Estelle: but this perspective or order depends entirely on the point of view of Garcin's fellow journalists. It is seemingly they and not he who hold the key to his past. Garcin is angered by the frequent interruptions of Estelle and Inès which prevent him catching the words uttered by Gomez, words which he feels to be of the utmost importance in establishing his real identity. He is tormented by the thought that he is a coward, and this is something which he feels only others can ratify or dispel. When he is finally prevented from seeing events on earth, he turns in desperation to Estelle. Estelle, however, does not offer the confirmation that Garcin is seeking. "Mais je n'en sais rien, mon amour, je ne suis pas dans ta peau," she declares. "C'est à toi de décider." (HC 158). Her comments merely serve to accentuate further Garcin's uncertainty and insecurity, a reaction which underlines his hopeless dependence on other people. Garcin's despairing efforts to achieve self-knowledge recall those of Claude Lemoyne in Un Homme de Dieu: moreover, like Claude, Garcin finds the motives of his past actions dense and inscrutable. "Il me semble que j'ai passé une vie entière à m'interroger, et puis quoi l'acte était là," he says. "Je ... J'ai pris le train, voilà qui est sûr. Mais pourquoi? Pourquoi?" (HC 158). The difference lies in the basic mystery of Claude's identity, a mystery which points to a form of spiritual transcendence, while Garcin feels that his identity lies exclusively in the hands of those he has known on earth and of those he now confronts in hell.

Whereas Garcin is basically concerned by the moral condemnation or approval of the other, Estelle is far more concerned by physical appearances. Reality, for Estelle, must be decorously and attractively clothed. She is therefore shocked by the crude, unadorned language of Garcin and Inès, reproaching them with the use of words like "mort" - for which she substitutes "absent" (HC 127) - and "damné". She is also horrified by the physical reality of men in shirt-sleeves, while one of the first things she notices on entering the drawing-room is the ugliness of the furniture. "Tout est si laid, ici, si dur, si anguleux," (HC 130) she says to Inès. Thus Estelle lives in a world of appearances, a world in which she herself has a place as a physical object which comes into evidence at the look of the other. She is, for example, immediately conscious of the inappropriateness of being seated on a dark green settee when she is wearing a light blue dress. Estelle can see and assess the appearance of those around her, and is conscious that they in turn see her as an object. Estelle readily accepts an aesthetic mode of being provided that she is able to see herself as others see her, and for this she relies on the use of mirrors. But the room in which she now finds herself has no mirrors of any kind, and the small mirror which was in Inès' handbag has been taken away. Deprived of the sight of her own reflection, Estelle feels devoid of reality. In fact, Estelle has reduced her identity to a mere appearance ; thus, as she says to Inès, "quand je ne me vois pas, j'ai beau me tâter, je me demande si j'existe pour de vrai". (HC 135-6). She momentarily glimpses her now empty bedroom surrounded by six enormous mirrors and remembers how she needed to be reassured by the sight of her reflection. "Quand je parlais, je m'arrangeais pour qu'il y en ait une où je puisse me regarder," she tells Inès. "Je parlais, je me voyais parler. Je me voyais comme les gens me voyaient, ça me tenait éveillée." (HC 136). Estelle was able to capture her image in this way, to change or modify her

appearance in a way which would be apparent to others but which she herself could judge. She is made to suffer when she realises that, without the means of self-scrutiny offered by a mirror, she is entirely dependent on the judgement of those around her. Thus she is forced to rely on Inès' assessment of how well she is made up, a situation which causes Estelle growing concern because she cannot be sure that Inès' approval is the approval which she herself would endorse. "Mais avez-vous du goût? Avez-vous mon goût?" (HC 137) she asks anxiously. The situation becomes even more intolerable for Estelle when Inès playfully pretends that she has a red mark on her cheek. Estelle is horrified, and although she is relieved to hear that Inès was lying, she is clearly aware how precarious and fragile her beauty is: "Si le miroir se mettait à mentir?" Inès asks her. "Ou si je fermais les yeux, si je refusais de te regarder, que ferais-tu de toute cette beauté?" (HC 138).

The ordeal of Garcin and Estelle is accentuated by the fact that, since they are now dead, they are no longer able to intervene and modify the image which others may have of them on earth. While he lives, the individual has the opportunity to confound the opinion which others have of him, but at death he is for ever deprived of this opportunity and is condemned without any hope of reprieve by their judgement. Garcin's reaction when he realises this is one of complete horror. How can he forget those who have known him and who will perpetuate his memory not as a hero and man of principle but as a coward? "Ils ne m'oublient pas, eux," he tells Estelle. "Ils mourront, mais d'autres viendront, qui prendront la consigne: je leur ai laissé ma vie entre les mains." (HC 160). He now knows that his identity has assumed an objective reality over which he has no control. "Fait comme un rat," he observes bitterly. "Je suis tombé dans le domaine public". (HC 160). Estelle experiences the same powerlessness when she sees one of her admirers, Pierre, dancing with her friend, Olga. She

realises that all her authority and powers of attraction are gone, but she tries to console herself with the thought that Berre still holds her in esteem. As long as Pierre remains ignorant of Estelle's infanticide, her image is preserved from universal condemnation. She will still, for at least one person, be the gay, attractive, desirable woman she had set out to be. "Pense à moi, Pierre," she cries, "ne pense qu'à moi, défends-moi; tant que tu peuges: mon eau vive, ma chère eau vive, je ne suis ici qu'à moitié, je ne suis qu'à moitié coupable ..." (HC 151-2). Estelle hopes that appearances will mask reality, something which she would probably have been able to ensure had she still been living. But now she is powerless to prevent the truth being revealed and her identity being totally and irrevocably fixed by those who remain on earth. "Ha! Il m'appelait son eau vive, son cristal," she declares. "Eh bien, le cristal est en miettes." (HC 152).

For Garcin and Estelle the only escape from the judgement that has been passed on them seems to lie in an effort of mutual acceptance and approval. They are prevented from acting on earth, but they can act in hell. Of Estelle's tarnished image nothing remains except, as she says to Inès, "une peau" (HC 154), but her body can still prove an effective means of reinstatement. Although she may not obtain Garcin's respect - "Je ne t'aimerai pas: je te connais trop," (HC 155) he says - she feels capable of absorbing him physically by arousing his sexual desire, thus re-establishing herself as a powerful object of seduction. Garcin, however, needs Estelle for a totally different reason. He is haunted by the moral condemnation which is hanging over him. Estelle wants Garcin's sexual desire, and Garcin wants Estelle's approval: Estelle wants to be reinstated physically, Garcin morally. "S'il y avait une âme, une seule, pour affirmer de toutes ses forces que je n'ai pas fui, que je ne peux pas avoir fui, que j'ai du courage, que je suis propre," says Garcin to Estelle, "je ... je suis sûr que je serais sauvé!" (HC 160).

The complicity established between Garcin and Estelle draws a shout of relief and triumph from the former. "Alors je les défie tous, ceux de là-bas et ceux d'ici," he declares. "Estelle, nous sortions de l'enfer." (HC 161). Their reinstatement is, however, clearly illusory: it is a conscious effort to blind themselves to the reality of their past and to the judgement of those who had known them on earth. There is also considerable self-delusion on the part of both Garcin and Estelle: the latter cannot have failed to notice Garcin's initial coolness towards her, while Garcin himself has already had clear evidence of Estelle's indifference to his moral anguish. She wants a man, irrespective of his status or standing, "pourvu qu'il embrasse bien". (HC 159). But, by allowing himself to be intoxicated by Estelle's reassuring caresses and declarations that his chin, mouth, voice and hair "ne sont pas ceux d'un lâche" (HC 161), Garcin is ready to believe in the authenticity of Estelle's approval. Their complicity, although precarious, seems therefore to have ensured escape from the hostile condemnation that had begun to weigh oppressively on them. But at this point the presence of Inès becomes crucial as the other re-emerges in the look of the "tiers" - the third person who stands outside the make-believe world which Garcin and Estelle would readily build around themselves.

The last vestige of hope is swept away from Garcin and Estelle by Inès' intervention. She refuses to allow Garcin to close his eyes to Estelle's real purpose. Although Estelle may continue to deny Garcin's cowardice, her sole interest is "un désir d'homme dans des yeux d'homme". (HC 161). "Pour le reste ... Ha! elle te dirait que tu es Dieu le père, si cela pouvait te faire plaisir," (HC 161) Inès harshly reminds Garcin. By thus sowing the seeds of doubt in Garcin's mind again, she also effectively deprives Estelle of the comfort she was seeking, for Garcin turns away from her in disgust. "Tu me dégoûtes encore plus qu'elle,"

(HC 162) he says to Estelle. The invitation to succumb to bodily desire suddenly becomes a horrible nightmare for Garcin because it represents total absorption in flesh and identification with matter when it is the motives behind his choices and his identity as a conscious being of which he desperately seeks confirmation. "Je ne veux pas m'enliser dans tes yeux," he cries. "Tu es moite! tu es molle! Tu es une pieuvre, tu es un marécage." (HC 162). But, more than the fear of self-absorption, it is the presence of Inès and the knowledge of her accusing stare which breaks any possible pact between Garcin and Estelle. "Elle est entre nous," he says to Estelle. "Je ne peux pas t'aimer quand elle me voit." (HC 168). Inès is like the indestructible eye of conscience which haunts Cain even in sleep. For Garcin, as for Cain, there will never be silence, oblivion or darkness. Life becomes interminable suffering at the hands of another, whether it be the accusing finger of God or the mocking reminders of Inès. "En vain tu me fuis, je ne te lâcherai pas," she cries. "Que vas-tu chercher sur ses lèvres? L'oubli? Mais je ne t'oublierai pas, moi." (HC 167). Exposed and tormented, Garcin is left nostalgically reflecting on the massive fixity and completeness of the bronze statuette, an inanimate object which stares back impassively at him while he, a conscious being, feels his own vulnerability to the piercing stares of Inès. It is at this moment that the reality and significance of hell becomes apparent to Garcin. "Pas besoin de gril," he announces, "l'enfer, c'est les Autres." (HC 167).

The play thus ends by confirming what Inès had already foreseen from the outset. "Le bourreau, c'est chacun de nous pour les deux autres," (HC 134) she had told Garcin and Estelle. Inès is the agent at the hands of whom Garcin and Estelle suffer, a role which Inès seems to have adopted with great relish. Her sadism is a sign of her power

and authority, but also contains the key to her vulnerability. "Inez's power over others existed to the extent that her victims recognized that power," observes D. McCall. "Thus, as with Sade himself, she was far from self-sufficient; her power depended upon others - upon their acceptance of the role of victim."³⁷ Garcin is made to suffer when he feebly entreats Inès to reconsider the motives underlying his actions; but he soon discovers that his own presence can become an instrument of torture for Inès. Garcin had initially suggested that each try and forget the existence of the other by remaining in silence on his or her own settee; but after a few moments Inès had abruptly rejected Garcin's suggestion. "Vous avez beau vous rencoigner sur votre canapé," she had told Garcin, "vous êtes partout, les sons m'arrivent souillés parce que vous les avez entendus au passage." (HC 140). Inès' greatest weakness, and the one which Garcin can most easily exploit, is her pursuit of Estelle, for this pursuit is frustrated by Garcin's mere presence. "Vous resteriez là," Inès cries, "insensible, plongé en vous-même comme un bouddha, j'aurai les yeux clos, je sentirais qu'elle vous dédie tous les bruits de sa vie, même les froissements de sa robe et qu'elle vous envoie des sourires que vous ne voyez pas..." (HC 146). Thus, at the end of the play, Garcin can revert from victim to executioner by turning his attention away from Inès to Estelle. Each caress and embrace is a bitter and humiliating reminder to Inès of her vulnerability. "Tu me tiens," Garcin says to her, "mais je te tiens aussi." (HC 166). The play revolves around a hopeless triangular or circular pursuit in which one character needs another, only to find that all possible complicity or

37. The Theatre of Jean-Paul Sartre, p. 118.

reciprocity is destroyed by the presence of the one remaining onlooker. "Nous nous courrons après comme des chevaux de bois, sans jamais nous rejoindre," (HC 149) observes Garcin. Estelle pursues Garcin but is frustrated by Inès; Garcin pursues Inès but is, in turn, frustrated by the presence of Estelle; and Inès pursues Estelle and is frustrated by Garcin. The irony of this situation - or perhaps the justice of it - is that it reflects a similar three cornered relationship which Estelle, Garcin and Inès had each experienced separately in their life on earth. Estelle's life had revolved around her husband and lover, that of Inès around Florence and her cousin, while Garcin's private as opposed to his public life centred on his wife and mistress. Each had caused unhappiness and suffering without experiencing any pain or remorse. Their life in hell is thus like a continuation of their life on earth with their role extended so that they are both agents and victims of frustration and despair.

In fact, hell would seem to be just retribution for the misused lives of Garcin, Estelle and Inès. One of Garcin's first reactions on being introduced into the Second Empire drawing-room was to remark on the ugliness of the furniture, and then to reflect that he had always lived "dans des meubles qu'(il) n'aimait pas et des situations fausses".(HC 115). From the outset, therefore, we are aware that Garcin had always been at odds with the situations in which he had found himself in life. His is not a feeling of authenticity and fulfilment, but one of falsity and dissatisfaction. This becomes even more apparent to the audience when Garcin learns that in hell there is no night and no sleep. Sleep on earth had been a form of escape for Garcin, an escape from his own inadequacy into a comfortable dream world which he had never been able to find in real life. "J'avais le sommeil douillet. Par compensation," he says to the doorman. "Je me faisais faire des rêves simples. Il y

avait une prairie ... Une prairie, c'est tout. Je rêvais que je me promenais dedans." (HC 118). By the end of the play we know exactly how empty Garcin's life has been. He had lived with one aim in mind. "Je voulais être un homme," he tells Inès. "Un dur." (HC 165). He had tried to prove his identity in the eyes of other people, to create the image of a tough, unflinching hero. Because his wife had idolised him, he had found it easy to humiliate her and make her suffer, but when real acts of determination and courage were needed he had failed miserably. He had tried to be something of a hero but had, in fact, done very little of which he could be proud. "Tu as rêvé trente ans que tu avais du coeur," Inès reminds him. "... Et puis, à l'heure du danger, on t'a mis au pied du mur et ... tu as pris le train pour Mexico." (HC 145). Garcin's situation is similar to that of Électre in Les Mouches: both had feigned an attitude of strength and defiance, and both had failed to prove the reality of such an attitude by concrete acts. Garcin is punished for his cowardice by a premature death, and there is a marked contrast between his anxiety to know the truth about the fate that awaits him in hell - "Je ne crierai pas, je ne gémirai pas, mais je veux regarder la situation en face," (HC 117) he tells the doorman - and the way he evades the truth about his life on earth. He at first suggests he was a man who died for his principles, then admits he had treated his wife badly, but only towards the end does he speak of the unfavourable circumstances that belie his heroic image. In short, Garcin is a man who does not want to acknowledge that his life has been a total failure.

Estelle, too, has little cause for satisfaction. She is presented as an extremely unperceptive and superficial woman who had lived in an unreal world of appearances where pretence and pretension counted for more than critical self-appraisal. Estelle is not long on stage before

her bourgeois pose is unmercifully ridiculed in a short exchange with Inès:

Estelle: Vous ne connaissez pas les Dubois-Seymour?

Inès: Ça m'étonnerait.

Estelle: Ils reçoivent le monde entier.

Inès: Qu'est-ce qu'ils font?

Estelle, surprise: Ils ne font rien. Ils ont un château en Corrèze et ...

Inès: Moi, j'étais employée des Postes.

Estelle; avec un petit recul: Ah? alors en effet?... (HC 129-30).

Estelle felt nonetheless totally at home in this hollow, hypocritical world where even her best friend, she recalls, did not cry at her funeral "à cause du rimmel". (HC 126). But the dignified and respectable pose which she had tried to maintain is not borne out by her acts (since she is guilty of infidelity and of infanticide) with the result that, like Garcin, she tries to evade the truth about herself. "Est-ce qu'il ne vaut pas mieux croire que nous sommes là par erreur?" (HC 131-2), she asks. But, as Inès points out, none of them is in hell without a reason; and the truth about Estelle's life is soon laid bare.

It has been claimed by P. Thody that it is Inès "who throughout the play represents Sartre's point of view"³⁸. It is true that unlike Garcin and Estelle she is lucid and self-critical. She is not reluctant to speak openly about her past, nor does there seem in her case to be any discrepancy between intention and fact, image and reality. There is no torment of self-doubt concerning her life on earth. "Elle s'est mise en ordre d'elle-même, là-bas," she says to Garcin, "je n'ai pas besoin de m'en préoccuper." (HC 128). Inès is also remarkably perceptive in her analysis of the situation which confronts her in hell. Garcin would like to believe that chance has brought the three of them together, Estelle thinks it may even be a mistake, but Inès knows that their punishment has been carefully planned. Garcin and Estelle are evasive,

38. Jean-Paul Sartre: A Literary and Political Study, p. 82.

whereas Inès entertains no false hopes about their situation. "Pour qui jouez-vous la comédie?" she asks Garcin and Estelle. "Nous sommes entre nous Entre assassins." (HC 133). She is certainly to be respected for her uncompromising clear-sightedness, but it would clearly be inaccurate to infer that the life she has led is in any way representative of Sartre's point of view. In fact, although Inès claims responsibility for her acts (unlike Garcin and Estelle), it is not the act itself as a means of renewal and change which she values, but its effect on other people. Indeed, Inès, no less than Garcin and Estelle, is a slave to a certain image - in her case an image of evil. The adoption and pursuit of this image is based on Inès' belief that she is by nature evil, hence statements like: "Je suis pourrie." (HC 148), or: "Je suis sèche." (HC 148). But to believe that one inherits a fixed and unchanging essence is to tie one's future to one's past, to accept that one's life is largely pre-determined and therefore to relinquish one's freedom. Authentic self-determination is not conditioned, as it is for Inès, by pre-conceived values or ideas; it is, as Oreste discovers, an unfettered and creative process for which no external justification either in the eyes of a transcendent Being or in the look of other people can be sought.

Not only have Garcin, Estelle and Inès all sought to exploit or appropriate the feelings or judgement of others in their life on earth, they have also been the cause of widespread suffering. "Il y a des gens qui ont souffert pour nous jusqu'à la mort et cela nous amusait beaucoup," says Inès. "A present, il faut payer." (HC 133). Of the three characters Inès is, however, the only one to have consciously sought and delighted in the suffering of other people. When she is no longer able to torment those she had known during her life on earth, she

pursues the same ideals in hell, refusing Garcin's pleas that they work out a way to live harmoniously together. She is intent on possessing Estelle and turning her against Garcin. "Je l'aurai," she tells Garcin, "elle vous verra par mes yeux, comme Florence voyait l'autre." (HC 149). She may never succeed, but she declares that she will never give up trying and, in her words, there is a premonition of the hopeless, endless pursuit that awaits her: "Je vais brûler, je brûle et je sais qu'il n'y aura pas de fin; je sais tout: croyez-vous que je lâcherai prise?" (HC 149).

The relevance of Huis clos to the question of freedom first outlined in Les Mouches is completely masked when the play is seen either as a reflection on the possibility of life after death, or as a symbolic representation of the hellish conflict which all inter-personal relationships necessarily imply. Garcin, Estelle and Inès are not representative of the totality of the human condition but, like Électre or the citizens of Argos in Les Mouches, they reflect certain negative aspects of it (and therefore help to delimit more precisely its positive aspects). M. Beigbeder is fully justified when he claims that the description of life in Huis clos, far from having any universal validity, "Waffectede, comme on ne le remarque pas assez, des damnés, au sens sartrien évidemment, c'est-à-dire trois personnes qui ont manqué leur vie et qui voudraient bien penser ne pas l'avoir manquée ...". "Le thème de la responsabilité," he adds, "est aussi essentiel, dans Huis clos que la description de l'altérité."³⁹ Although the individual's powers of free self-determination are necessarily ended by death, they are only negated in life when he allows his acts to become dictated by pre-conceived ideas or by what others may think and feel. The play emphasises the dangers of such enslavement and evokes,

39. Les Lettres françaises, 21.5.1953.

more generally, the hold of certain fears and preoccupations which prevent the individual from taking it upon himself to modify the course of his life. In such circumstances, life is no longer directed by free and responsible decisions and choices but is submerged by the force of habit and the weight of social custom and opinion. "Huis-Clos, ne serait-ce pas le drame de tous ceux qui vivent une vie close, repliée sur soi, tout entière préoccupée de soi et retournée contre soi, "comments F. Jeanson, "une vie toujours sur la défensive à l'égard d'autrui et par là totalement livrée au regard d'autrui?"⁴⁰ It is when we realise the extent to which each of the three main characters has misused his or her life on earth that Huis clos assumes its real importance, not as a sombre portrayal of humanity, but as an exhortation not to allow one's life to become what Sartre terms "une mort vivante"⁴¹.

Moreover, such is the dramatic intensity and resonance of the play that, as Marcel points out, the spectator can in no way remain a cold and detached observer. He feels that it is his freedom and identity which are at stake, "que c'est d'une certaine manière son destin qui lui est présenté, comme dans une boule de cristal noire..."⁴² One of the reasons for such a powerful impression is the play's obvious theatricality, for the audience is made conscious of itself as the onlooker whose gaze encloses Garcin, Estelle and Inès on stage and decides their identity while realising that it too can be looked at and judged. In this respect, the fate of Garcin, Estelle and Inès is representative of the fate of all social beings: the one basic difference as far as we, the spectators, are concerned is that,

40. Sartre par lui-même, p. 33.

41. Un théâtre de situations, p. 239.

42. L'Heure théâtrale, p. 197.

unlike the three characters on stage, we have not yet been finally judged. Whatever their ultimate fate has been, we are still living with an open and undecided future ahead of us. "Comme toutes les grandes oeuvres, Huis clos ne nous désespère pas, mais nous fortifie," observes P. Gaillard: "Garcin, Estelle, Inès nous obligent à nous scruter sans illusion et à découvrir jusqu'au fond ce que nous sommes, mais ils nous poussent par cette connaissance même sur la voie du salut, car nous, nous pouvons encore agir, nous ne sommes pas en enfer, nous sommes libres, nous sommes vivants."⁴³

There is, however, one point in the play when the three characters seemingly have restored to them the power to break with past and present, and to change the course of their future. At this point the door which had ensured that Garcin, Estelle and Inès remain shut up together without hope of escape suddenly swings open as though answering Garcin's despairing cry for release. A long and pregnant silence ensues during which all three characters are faced with a free and unconstrained option: to leave or to stay "Alors? Lequel? Lequel des trois?" cries Inès. "La voie est libre, qui nous retient?" (HC 163). But the opportunity is rejected and we realise that each character has freely condemned himself to live pursued by one, and in pursuit of the other for the rest of time. The analogy with life on earth is strikingly apparent. "Quel que soit le cercle d'enfer dans lequel nous vivons," observes Sartre, "je pense que nous sommes libres de le briser. Et si les gens ne le brisent pas, c'est encore librement qu'ils y restent. De sorte qu'ils se mettent librement en enfer."⁴⁴ J. Chiari has argued that the end of the play is unconvincing as is "the idea that human beings can be condemned to an eternity

43. Les Lettres françaises, 27.9.1946.

44. Un théâtre de situations, p. 239.

of mutually imposed suffering"⁴⁵; but such an idea surely is conceivable in the case of the three characters on stage preoccupied as they are with the exploitation of the other purely for their own ends.

It is, however, the whole question of man's relationship with other people which has caused the greatest confusion among critics of Huis clos. It has been assumed that Garcin, Estelle and Inès are representative of the entire human race, the implication being that the same fate would attend three different people locked up together. "Remplaçons Garcin par un général glorieux," writes R. Campbell, "Estelle par une bonne mère dévouée, Inès par une Carmélite, et rien n'est modifié."⁴⁶ R. Campbell is here reading the play exclusively within the light of Sartre's philosophical work L'Être et le Néant where, in the section devoted to human relationships, the author writes: "L'essence des rapports entre consciences n'est pas le Mitsein, c'est le confit."⁴⁷ This could be taken as evidence that, in Sartre's mind, our relations with others are never anything but hellish. Certainly it is on this point that a Christian like Marcel finds the greatest divergence between his own beliefs and those of Sartre. "Nulle part, notons-le en passant," writes Marcel, "n'apparaît plus nettement l'incompatibilité radicale entre la position de Sartre et de ses disciples - et une métaphysique ou une éthique chrétienne quelle qu'elle soit."⁴⁸ Such criticism, however, is based on the assumption that, at the time L'Être et le Néant and Huis clos were conceived and written, Sartre was categorically rejecting the possibility

45. The Contemporary French Theatre: The flight from naturalism, London Rockliff, 1958, p. 150.

46. Jean-Paul Sartre ou une littérature philosophique, p. 137.

47. L'Être et le Néant, p. 502.

48. L'Heure théâtrale, pp. 190-1.

of harmonious human relationships. Certainly L'Être et le Néant provides a sombre commentary on the attitudes people adopt towards one another, but the fact that such a commentary is neither all-embracing nor definitive is indicated by Sartre's allusion to "la possibilité d'une morale de la délivrance et du salut"⁴⁹ implying a radical conversion which fell outside the scope of his treatise. Indeed, Sartre has on numerous occasions acknowledged the inadequacy and incompleteness of certain aspects of L'Être et le Néant, although critics may feel that his later works have never satisfactorily resolved these particular issues. This, however, merely leads us into a long and complex philosophical digression which has little relevance to Huis clos. The main point, as A. Manser observes, is not to dismiss Sartre as someone who has always believed that human conflict is a permanent and unavoidable part of life. "Though he nowhere gives details of the nature of this radical conversion," writes the former, "it is clear from both his personal relations with Simone de Beauvoir and from his later commitment to certain forms of political action that Sartre does believe in the possibility of genuine human relationships."⁵⁰ These important considerations should help us to see that, if Garcin, Estelle and Inès are in hell, it is not because such a fate was unavoidable, but because "they are prevented by their own choices from establishing any proper relations with those around them"⁵¹. What happens to them would not necessarily happen to three other people, and Sartre would agree with A. Lang who claimed that it would have been equally possible to write a play "où trois êtres, arbitrairement réunis et condamnés à vivre ensemble,

49. L'Être et le Néant, p. 484.

50. Sartre: A Philosophic Study, pp. 97-8.

51. Ibid., p. 98.

parviendraient à créer un climat salubre de compréhension et d'amitié"⁵². In an interview with D. McCall, Sartre has said that such a climate can be created among people united through "praxis" in a common cause⁵³.

Despite the misunderstandings to which it has given rise, Huis clos is certainly one of Sartre's best and most effective plays. Not all the critics hailed it enthusiastically when it was first produced in Paris during the Occupation, but in retrospect it constitutes, as M. Rostand originally suggested, "une date du théâtre"⁵⁴. Few plays written and produced in France during the war years have had anything like the impact of Huis clos which has been frequently revived since the original production in Paris, as well as being performed abroad and adapted for both television and the cinema. It is a short one-act play which runs for little more than an hour: but in that time, it succeeds in creating an exceedingly powerful and intense atmosphere of endless confinement and conflict, an atmosphere which, while it is theatrically fascinating, is also a stark appeal to a greater critical awareness of our real life situation.

There are many reasons why such an atmosphere will be missed in reading the play. However imaginative the reader may be, it is unlikely that he will come anywhere near to capturing the anguish and torment of Garcin, Estelle and Inès, - something which will be immediately conveyed in performance by the voice, gestures and facial expressions of the actors.

52. Concorde, 10.10.1946.

53. See The Theatre of Jean-Paul Sartre, p. 124. A definition of "praxis" and a concrete example of the kind of solidarity to which it can give rise are given in chapter 6. See above pp. 274-7.

54. Paris-Midi, 4.6.1944.

It is interesting, in this respect, that Sartre himself should have been so enthralled by the interpretation of the four actors with whom the play opened in Paris that he is unable to imagine his own characters "autrement que sous les traits de Vitold, de Gaby Sylvia, de Tania Balachova et de Chauffard"⁵⁵. The play also lends itself naturally to performance in its reliance upon the effect of décor. The three characters are enclosed in a room without hope of escape, surrounded by plain, drab furniture: three large settees and, on the mantelpiece at the rear of the stage, a heavy bronze statuette. There are no mirrors, no windows, no variation in light. Only Inès seems initially unmoved by the cold, impersonal setting which clearly adds to the atmosphere of intolerable confinement. Symbolically, too, the décor is of fundamental importance. The bronze statuette symbolises not only "cette banalité stylisée au plan du social qui inspire à l'auteur un dégoût particulier"⁵⁶ suggested by Marcel, but also the existence of brute, unconscious matter unaffected by the anguish, fears and frustrations of living beings. The absence of mirrors implies, as P.H. Simon points out, that in hell we are no longer able to seek in our own reflection a solid, reassuring image of ourselves. When our life of images and appearances has come to an end, "nous ne pouvons nous voir qu'en nous-mêmes, en approfondissant notre conscience, et dans la conscience des autres qui nous condamnent à être pour l'éternité ce qu'ils jugent que nous sommes"⁵⁷. We then contemplate the reality not of what we have tried or intended to be, but of what we are, that is to say the sum of our acts.

55. Un théâtre de situations, p. 240.

56. L'Heure théâtrale, p. 191.

57. Théâtre et Destin, pp. 170-1.

Huis clos also relies for much of its effect on the realisation that the three characters in hell are not only together for eternity, but are allowed no temporary release or escape from their torment. There is no sleep to break the sense of timelessness; and, as P. Larthomas observes, the same relentless light which shines down on them without change or variation "marque le caractère inexorable d'un au-delà constant et clos, de cette pseudo-vie sans sommeil, sans même un clignement d'oeil, c'est-à-dire sans obscurité et 'sans coupure'"⁵⁸

The atmosphere which the play creates points unquestionably to its obvious theatrical qualities, but its effectiveness depends on a very traditional "mise en scène." This has been clearly demonstrated by the comparative failure of Michel Vitold's production of the play in the round, and of the film adaptation made by Jacqueline Audry. In both cases, it was the powerful feeling of imprisonment and confinement which was undermined by experimentation with the physical setting of the play. Although C. Sarraute found Huis clos well suited to a performance in the round⁵⁹, most critics clearly felt the absence of "le poids des murailles qui limitent pour l'éternité l'univers de trois damnés ..." ⁶⁰. A similar criticism was made of the film in which a screen is introduced to allow the three characters to see moments of their past as well as those people still living who continue to think of them. Again a breach is made in the physical setting which in turn affects the atmosphere of confinement on which the play, as its very title suggests, largely depends.

Huis clos has been aptly described by R. Saurel as being "pleine comme un oeuf, lisse comme un caillou, d'une rigueur et d'une nécessité extraordinaire"⁶¹. It is, indeed, a work rich in themes and symbols, and yet the

58. Le Langage dramatique, Paris, Armand Colin, 1972, p. 119.

59. See Le Monde, 31.3.1956.

60. Le Figaro, 3.4.1956. See also reviews of Vitold's production in Paris-Presse-L'Intransigeant, 31.3.1956, and in Arts, 25.4.1956.

61. Information, 31.3.1956.

ideas expressed are strikingly simple, and the action unfolds with great clarity and coherence. In some respects, one could apply to Huis clos the title of a scenario written by Sartre at about the same time as the play, namely Les Jeux sont faits⁶², since, at death, the self-determination of Garcin, Estelle, and Inès ceases, and their identity becomes, in the eyes of those who remain on earth, an objective reality which they cannot in any way challenge or contest. Sartre succeeds, however, in sustaining the interest of the spectators by withholding certain important facts or incidents so that only gradually does the audience become aware, first that Garcin, Estelle and Inès are in hell, and secondly that they have been condemned for a specific reason. This gradual unfolding of the truth coincides with a growing sense of their abandonment and hopeless confinement, a movement which is also reflected in the alternation between the characters' situation in hell and their view of what is happening on earth. This alternation between hell and earth gradually comes to an end as, one by one, Inès, then Estelle, and finally Garcin find themselves condemned by their friends and then forgotten about altogether. Their sentence of unending, mutually inflicted torment only becomes irrevocable, however, at the point where each refuses to leave the room after the door has unexpectedly swung open. It is when Garcin has closed the door that we realise that the game is up and that, as he says to Estelle and Inès, there is nothing left for them to do but "continue".

Although both Les Mouches and Huis clos are closely related to L'Étre et le Néant, neither is totally encompassed by it. Whereas the philosophical

62. Paris, Nagel, 1947. The scenario traces the adventures of a man and woman who meet in an after-life although they had never met each other in their life on earth. The essential difference between the situation of Pierre and Eve and that of Garcin, Estelle and Inès is that, because of their love for each other, the former gleefully accept the chance to return to life on earth (although their love does not survive this test), whereas the latter, because they cannot accept each other as they are, turn down the opportunity of escape.

treatise is concerned with a purely ontological description of action based on freedom, choice and responsibility, Les Mouches shows Sartre's concern for the particular course of such action in the precise historical situation in which he found himself in 1943. It is not pure chance that leads Oreste to overthrow the tyrannical régime of Égisthe and exhort the citizens of Argos to begin life anew. His action clearly implies a belief in the inherent value of social democracy: indeed, any action which was not an open and total rejection of Égisthe's authority would clearly not be acceptable. In other words, Les Mouches contains important moral implications which lie outside the scope of the treatise.⁶³ In Huis clos, the criticism is directed against those who are preoccupied with appearances and whose actions are exclusively self-centred. If Sartre were simply trying to say that all human relationships were bound to result in conflict, he would surely have sought to demonstrate the universality of such a belief by choosing as his protagonists not a coward, a sadist and a vain, insensitive young woman, but people whom, initially at least, we could hold in esteem. Both Les Mouches and Huis clos, are an appeal to a greater critical awareness of the social or political situation in which we find ourselves, an appeal to our powers of free and responsible self-determination as opposed to the passive acceptance of an external authority or to enslavement to a pre-conceived essence or image. In contrast to Marcel, therefore, Sartre seems to provide in his earliest plays a fairly clear indication of the path which will lead the individual to a true sense of personal identity. There are,

63. In his conclusion to L'Être et le Néant, Sartre announced a forthcoming work on ethics, but this work has never been published.

however, several important factors which have yet to be taken into account before Sartre's theory of freedom can be seen as an effective and realistic answer to all the questions and problems with which the individual is continually confronted in his day-to-day social existence. There is clearly a need not only to define with far greater precision the moral or political implications of freedom, but also to consider its conditions and limits when effective action can only be envisaged on a collective scale, thus necessitating a certain order or discipline imposed by a party or leader. These are some of the questions to which Sartre turns his attention in Les Mains sales and Le Diable et le Bon Dieu, both of which reflect his concern for the social and political future of Western Europe in the immediate post-war years, and his realisation that, as Simone de Beauvoir notes, "il n'y a pas de salut individual possible, mais seulement une lutte collective"⁶⁴.

64. La Force des choses, Paris, Gallimard, 1963, p. 261.

CHAPTER 6

The middle period: the beginning of collective political action

In a recent interview, Sartre indicated that the subject of Les Mains sales¹ was inspired by the assassination of Trotsky and also by "les difficultés que des élèves à moi, bourgeois de bonne volonté, avaient avec le Parti communiste"². He was basically concerned not with writing a play for or against a political party, but with presenting in dramatic form the problems and difficulties of political action. His choice of subject, reflecting as it does his concern not with individual acts of heroism but with the prolonged, collective fight for liberation, clearly represents a significant advance on Les Mouches. "Il ne s'agit plus de se libérer du remords et contre les dieux, dans une attitude héroïque et grandiose," observes F. Jeanson, "mais de travailler parmi les hommes à la libération de tous les hommes. Il ne s'agit plus de révolte mais de révolution."³ The transition from revolt or resistance to revolution is prefigured in the final act of Morts sans sépulture, a play which shows the reaction and attitudes of a small group of Resistance fighters captured and tortured by French "miliciens". At the end of the play, the three remaining members of the group have the opportunity of giving false information to the "miliciens" which, although seeming to indicate that they have been finally broken by torture, will also secure the promise of their release. Pride and the refusal to compromise are set against the question of utility, that is to say the necessity of sacrificing personal glory to the cause of social justice. It is Canoris who finally persuades Henri and Lucie to agree to passing on the false information to the "miliciens", arguing that there

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1. All textual references are taken from Les Mains sales, Paris, Gallimard, 1948, and will be incorporated in the thesis in the following abbreviated form: (MS ..). Eg. (MS 11) = Les Mains sales, p. 11.
 2. "Le théâtre de A jusqu'à Z" in L'Avant-Scène Théâtre, no. 402-3, 1-15 mai, 1968, p. 34.
 3. Sartre par lui-même, p. 38.

is no justification in a glorious but premature death when they are "encore parfaitement utilisables"⁴.

There is, however, a certain similarity in the basic evolution of the central character in Les Mouches and Les Mains sales since both Oreste and Hugo pass from a feeling of unreality and weightlessness to a sense of authenticity and commitment. In Hugo's case, his inner transformation enables him to assume complete responsibility for an act which had before seemed little more than an accident, even though his new identity can only result in death at the hands of the party's henchmen. The similarity between Oreste and Hugo also extends to their initial sense of solitude and exclusion from a certain group or community. Just as Oreste wants to become involved and integrated in the life of the people of Argos, so Hugo yearns to be accepted and trusted by other members of the Communist Party. Despite the efforts he has made to reject his class of origin and to turn his back on his bourgeois upbringing, Hugo continues to feel the hostility and suspicion of those within the party. The reaction of Georges and Slick typifies the attitude adopted towards Hugo by non-intellectuals who had been driven to join the party through basic material needs. "Tu n'as jamais eu faim," observes Slick, "et tu es venu chez nous pour nous faire la morale comme les dames visiteuses qui montaient chez ma mère quand elle était saoule pour lui dire qu'elle ne se respectait pas." (MS 97). Hugo's apparent commitment in joining a revolutionary party is seen by Georges and Slick as the gesture of a dilettante and not as an act of solidarity with the oppressed working classes. The attitude of the party organisers is no more favourable. Louis, for example, describes Hugo as "un petit

4. Théâtre, p. 244.

anarchiste indiscipliné, un intellectuel qui ne pensait qu'à prendre des attitudes" (MS 27), a view endorsed by Olga although, with a far deeper and more sympathetic understanding of Hugo's inner needs and aspirations, she adds that he is also "un désespéré" (MS 29) - a man desperately trying to find his true self in political commitment. Hugo has had, however, little opportunity for direct political action. He has so far been restricted to routine clerical duties and help in the publication of the party newspaper. He feels that he will only be able to dispel the doubts about his true worth as a revolutionary if he is entrusted with a mission of great importance to the party. Like Oreste, Hugo yearns for a decisive act that will unite him with those whose fate he wants to share. He is eventually entrusted with such a mission, - the assassination of Hoederer, - but unlike Oreste who approaches his task with deep inner conviction, Hugo continues to find his existence bathed in unreality. "Bon Dieu quand on va tuer un homme," he exclaims, "on devrait se sentir lourd comme une pierre." (MS 120). Instead of a sense of impending commitment, Hugo feels light and detached from events. He is far more at home in the playful, make-believe world in which he indulges with his wife, Jessica, than when he is confronted with Hoederer and his bodyguards. Referring to the latter, Jessica remarks that, for the first time, she has seen her husband "aux prises avec de vrais hommes" (MS 115) and Hugo himself emphasises the gulf that separates him from the world in which they move. He envies Georges and Slick their seemingly uncomplicated existence, free from intellectual torment, and he reflects on the reality and conviction of Hoederer's movements and actions. "Tout ce qu'il touche a l'air vivant," (MS 132) he tells Jessica, while Hoederer's whole person is "dense" and "vivant" (MS 120). Jessica, too, experiences the same fascination for Hoederer. "Hugo, il est si fort," she says "il suffit qu'il ouvre la bouche pour qu'on soit sûr qu'il a raison." (MS 190).

Whereas Oreste had clearly made up his mind to kill Égisthe and Clytemnestre, Hugo is still trying to convince himself and Jessica that he intends to shoot Hoederer. Like Électre, there is a divorce between what Hugo would like to believe and what he does, and like Garcin he feels increasingly conscious of the inauthenticity and unreality of his situation. "Je vis dans un décor," (MS 132) he admits to Jessica. His reluctance and, indeed, inability to accomplish the act with which he had been entrusted merely prompts Olga to intervene on his behalf, thus discouraging Hugo even further by emphasising his own inadequacy and the party's short-lived confidence in him. "Je suis de trop," he tells Hoederer, "je n'ai pas ma place et je gêne tout le monde ..." (MS 230). When Hugo does shoot Hoederer, the act of which he had dreamed for so long is at last committed, but in circumstances totally different from any he may have imagined. It is the sight of Hoederer embracing his wife Jessica, and not the knowledge that politically he represents a danger to the party, which enables Hugo to overcome all his previous lack of conviction and purpose. He thus finds himself confronted with an unforeseen, instantaneous act of passion rather than with a calculated political assassination, and he therefore experiences none of the feelings of commitment and responsibility which accompany Oreste's act of revenge. After his release from prison, Hugo is disappointed to find that Olga's room is no more real than the memory he had of it in his cell. "La cellule aussi, c'était un rêve," he adds. "Et les yeux d'Hoederer, le jour où j'ai tiré sur lui." (MS 31). His life, devoid of reality and purpose, is made up of events and actions for which he feels no responsibility. When asked by Olga if he feels any pride in having killed Hoederer, Hugo replies: "Ce n'est pas moi qui ai tué, c'est le hasard." (MS 245). Like the people of Argos, Hugo is prepared to see his life take on a shape and meaning over which he has no control, to reduce his acts to mere accidents, and to see himself as the helpless victim of fate.

Hugo's whole attitude to his political past and to the death of Hoederer, in particular, is, however, suddenly transformed when he is told by Olga that the party prefers him not to feel any responsibility for Hoederer's assassination since the latter has now been reinstated and his policies adopted. The man who did claim responsibility for Hoederer's death would be an embarrassment to the party, and his presence a mocking reminder that the man the party had once labelled a traitor has now been made into a hero. Thus, only by disclaiming all responsibility for his part in Hoederer's death and by erasing the whole incident from his mind can Hugo continue to work for the party. It is when he is confronted with these facts that there is the first indication of Hugo's change of attitude. "Alors, moi, je suis récupérable," he reflects, having listened to Olga's explanations and defence of the party. "Parfait. Mais tout seul, tout nu, sans bagages. A la condition de changer de peau - et si je pouvais devenir amnésique, ça serait encore mieux." (MS 257). Just as Oreste, presented with a sign by Jupiter encouraging him to adopt an attitude of resignation, had suddenly realised that he was free to change the whole course of his future and give it the meaning he alone had chosen, so Hugo suddenly realises that he is free to prevent Hoederer's death from becoming "une erreur sans importance" (MS 257) and Hoederer himself "un cadavre anonyme, un déchet du parti". (MS 259). Hugo can do nothing to change the nature and circumstances of Hoederer's death; but, by assuming complete responsibility for his act, by refusing to allow his past to become an amorphous agglomeration of events whose meaning can be manipulated to suit the changing political situation, by recognising in Hoederer a man he respected but one who nonetheless deserved to die because of his acceptance of political compromise, Hugo can change the whole significance of the past three years of his life. His new found sense of commitment and responsibility will ensure that the political ideals in which he believed are upheld and that

Hoederer's death does not survive as an unfortunate accident to be conveniently forgotten. "Si je revendique mon crime devant tous," he declares, "si je réclame mon nom de Raskolnikoff et si j'accepte de payer le prix qu'il faut, alors il aura eu la mort qui lui convient." (MS 259). Although Hoederer has been dead for two years, Hugo feels that it is only at this moment of time, by shouldering responsibility for his act, by thus defying the party and passing a sentence of death upon himself, that he can claim to be his assassin. "C'est à présent que je vais le tuer et moi avec," (MS 259) he tells Olgo, as he prepares to open the door of her flat and surrender himself to the party henchmen.

In complete contrast to Les Mouches, Les Mains sales was recognised as the work of a mature and gifted dramatist; but, whereas the basic political implications of Les Mouches were apparent to almost everyone, the basic political message of Les Mains sales was clearly not understood by the majority of critics when the play was performed in Paris in 1948. The Communist press in France did not hesitate to dismiss Les Mains sales as the work of a bourgeois reactionary. "C'est Sartre qui a les mains sales,"⁵ wrote P. Gaillard in his review of the play, while M. Duras commented: "Ce choix d'un jeune intellectuel sur-le-gril, de ce candidat-homme, est un choix, très profondément, très sûrement humoristique."⁶ This swift and unfavourable reaction helped to situate the play politically and, despite Sartre's attempts to clarify the subject of Les Mains sales before it opened at the Théâtre Antoine, it came to be seen as an indictment of the cynicism and ruthlessness of the Communists and an outright rejection of their methods and policies, - this at a time when relations between East and West were exceedingly tense. Less than a year after opening in Paris,

5. Les Lettres françaises, 8.4.1948.

6. Action, avril, 1948.

Les Mains sales was produced on Broadway, freely and also somewhat tendentiously translated as Red Gloves. Sartre found himself powerless to prevent his play assuming an objective political meaning which he had certainly not intended, and thus becoming something of a pawn in the Cold War. In 1952 he decided to withdraw consent for a performance of Les Mains sales in Vienna and, since that time, the play has only been produced in special circumstances agreeable both to Sartre and to the Communist party of the country concerned.

It would be false to suggest that the critics were totally unjustified in interpreting Les Mains sales as they did and to pretend that the play contains no criticism of the Communists. It is clear, for example, that the individual freedom exalted by Oreste in Les Mouches is incompatible with the kind of strict political organisation associated with the Communist Party. It is not a belief in individual freedom, but obedience and discipline which are the prime requisites of a party member. In this respect, Sartre's presentation of the party in Les Mains sales is at times almost caricatural. Hugo, is, from the outset, reproached by Olga for being "trop curieux" (MS 44), for asking too many questions about the organisation and policies of the party. His attitude represents a total contrast with the blind, unquestioning obedience of Georges and Slick for whom a "consigne" is something absolute and sacred. Moreover, to ensure that he receives the best possible protection, Hoederer insists that his two bodyguards have no opportunity for sexual indulgence and thus develop into "des bêtes sauvages". (MS 78).¹ This portrait of the party member is an obvious blemish on a play which sets out to evoke as realistically as possible the life and workings of a revolutionary organisation. Even Hoederer, by far the most "human" of the established party figures, contributes to the caricature. "Hegel, Marx, très bien," he says, flicking through the books on Hugo's table. "Lorca, Eliot, connais pas." (MS 109). Almost apologetically Hugo replies: "Ce sont

des poètes." (MS 109). Seen in this light, the party of which Hugo is a member is almost as authoritarian and repressive as the moral order against which Oreste rebelled in Les Mouches: in both cases the individual seems to be a mere object in the hands of a powerful, impersonal deity. The smothering of individual freedom and subjectivity is emphasised in Les Mains sales by the attitude of the party to questions of discipline and service. Its outlook is totally impersonal and utilitarian, and the words that recur to express this outlook illustrate quite unambiguously the extent of individual reification. Hugo's survival, for example, depends on whether or not the party considers him "récupérable" or "utilisable." "Utiliser", "employer", "supprimer" and "reprendre" are other words which evoke the impersonality of the party system. The party member seems to have sacrificed all personal identity to become a mere number or function whose value or worth depends on his total submissiveness and malleability. When he is not prepared to "tow the line", he can expect no sympathy or hearing, only a swift and ruthless liquidation. There is no recognition of human rights, no sense of the deep reality or mystery of death. Reflecting on the mission with which he has been entrusted, Hugo observes that "quand ils décident qu'un homme va mourir, c'est comme s'ils rayaient un nom sur un annuaire..." (MS 187).

Not only is there a conflict between strict party discipline and a deep sense of individual freedom and autonomy, there is also a basic contradiction between the party's readiness to accommodate a change of policy by falsifying the past and individual commitment and responsibility. Hugo is confronted with a deliberate and cynical distortion of the truth when he is told that the circumstances of Hoederer's death are to be disguised lest it become known that he had once been held in disfavour. This is something which Hugo refuses to accept; indeed, it is very difficult to see how he could assume complete responsibility for an act undertaken for a specific political purpose and then recognise that the act was misconceived

and best forgotten. Howderer's assassination cannot be both an act and an accident: Hugo is faced either with an affirmation of total responsibility for his action, or with an abdication of this responsibility in the face of a supreme authority. Commenting on this situation J. Bermiez observes: "Quand Hugo apprend in extremis que son crime, qui lui a presque ôté la vie en le privant de la vie d'Hoederer, est inutile, que le parti vient précisément d'adopter sa politique, il pourrait courber la tête, acquiescer, s'anéantir dans la volonté du dieu; mais ce mysticisme est trop absurde."⁷ Moreover, Sartre has made it clear that, on this specific issue, he readily upholds the attitude taken by his central character. "C'est justement contre cette falsification du passé," he declared in an interview with P. Caruso, "que Hugo a raison dans ses dernières répliques."⁸ It is, indeed, ironic that the situation in which Hugo finds himself is such that the affirmation of freedom and responsibility should amount to no more than an act of suicide.

Generally, the critics have tended to see this conclusion as an indication of the basic incompatibility between Sartre's theory of freedom and responsibility and political support for, and action within the Communist Party. Marcel, whose later plays like L'Émissaire and Rome n'est plus dans Rome emphasize man's confrontation with a historical situation which, in purely human or political terms, offers no apparent solution, sees Hugo's tragic plight as a dramatisation of this confrontation. "Les formules d'Oreste dans les Mouches," he writes, "ne répondent absolument plus à la complexité d'une situation qui peut sembler inextricable..."⁹. Certainly

7. "A propos des Mains sales," in Les Temps modernes, no. 36, septembre, 1948, p. 575.

8. Un théâtre de situations, p. 257.

9. L'Heure théâtrale, p. 206.

Sartre himself believed that, whereas the individual had been presented with a clear-cut choice of action in 1940 - "Le choix était alors facile On était pour ou contre les Allemands."¹⁰ - the situation facing the left-wing intellectual in France in 1948 was infinitely more complex. Whereas the war had brought together both the left and the right in a united stand against the Germans, post-war France merely emphasised political differences not only between left and the right, but also within the left itself. Thus Les Mains sales could be seen as the author's recognition of a political situation which frustrates the course of action he had once whole-heartedly adopted. In this, Marcel is supported by P. Thody who sees the optimism of Les Mouches and the pessimism of Les Mains sales as the natural literary expression of two distinct periods in French history, the first "a reflection of the brief period in which the left-wing intellectual could wholeheartedly espouse a political cause"¹¹ and the second in which he felt unable to support with the same passionate commitment any one political party.

Such an interpretation depends to a large extent, however, on the assumption that Hugo is ^{the} dramatist's mouthpiece representing, as does Oreste in Les Mouches, the only valid point of view. But, whereas Les Mouches centres on one person whose confrontations with Jupiter and Égisthe merely serve to underline his freedom and the abject servitude of the people of Argos (including Électre), Les Mains sales is built around a confrontation between two opposing and balanced points of view. Les Mouches is essentially a monologue and a demonstration of ideas, Les Mains sales is a dialogue

10. "Deux heures avec Sartre" in L'Express, no. 481, 17.9.1959.

11. Jean-Paul Sartre: A Literary and Political Study, p. 76.

which seeks to raise questions rather than provide answers. Ultimately, however, Sartre's own attitude, although sympathetic to Hugo's basic sincerity and integrity, is far more favourable to the position adopted by Hoederer. This, in itself, clearly shows that the play could not have been intended as condemnation of support for the Communists since Hoederer is a Communist leader who accepts all the risks and compromise of political commitment. The only really positive aspect of Hugo's character is his refusal of the party's cynical manipulation of facts and his defiant assumption of responsibility for Hoederer's assassination. This, together with other isolated aspects of the party system, such as its unquestioned authority and the strict discipline imposed on its members, emphasise not Sartre's opposition to the Communist Party but his criticism of it. In 1948 the Communist Party represented the only organised revolutionary force in Western Europe and was, as such, the only political party to which Sartre, given his own very radical political views, was likely to pledge his support. Just as there is a strong note of anti-clericalism in Rome n'est plus dans Rome without the deeply Christian tone of the play being in doubt, so Sartre in Les Mains sales adopts a critical point of^{view} which is directed not against revolutionary politics, but against the rigid, institutionalised form of the Communist Party in the immediate post-war years. Interviewed by P. Caruso in 1964, Sartre defined his position in relation to the Communists as that of a critical "compagnon de route"¹²; and it is just such a position adopted by him in Les Mains sales at a time, when, faced with a form of Communism largely dominated by the uncompromising figure of Stalin, he had chosen to support the Rassemblement Démocratique Révolutionnaire¹³

12. See Un théâtre de situations, pp. 254-5.

13. An account of the policies of the R.D.R. and of Sartre's relatively short-lived support for the movement is given by M.-A. Burnier in Les Existentialistes et la politique, Paris, Gallimard, 1966, pp. 63-75.

in the hope of restoring to the left a renewed sense of the true aims and methods of socialism.

The negative and quite unheroic side to Hugo's character is, in fact, recognised by Marcel and P. Thody. "What Hugo asks," writes the latter, "is that blind obedience to the party shall free him from his perpetual self-questioning, that its purity shall satisfy his idealism, and that it shall give him tasks to perform whose difficulty will satisfy his own desire for self-perfection."¹⁴ Hugo's longing for strict party discipline and for political action highlights the inauthenticity of his commitment. He wants the discipline not because he recognises it as necessary for the efficient running of the party, but as a cure for his personal problems, that is to say his intellectuality and his solitude. In this respect, he clearly represents for Sartre the position of many middle-class intellectuals and their flirtation with extreme political action. Commenting on the deep, inner conflict of such a person, Sartre maintains that, even by entering the Communist Party, "il n'a guère de chances d'y trouver la solution de ses conflits: ce sont des problèmes personnels; il ne veut pas qu'on lui fasse cadeau d'un Moi de rechange, il demande seulement qu'on guérisse le sien"¹⁵. In Les Mains sales, it is clear that Hugo never finds an answer to this inner conflict. He tries to use the party for his own ends, but at the same time it is by no means certain that he wants to be cured of his self-questioning. He tells Hoederer, for example, that at certain moments he feels he would do anything "pour devenir tout de suite un homme" (MS 142), but he also admits that at others "il me semble que je ne

14. Jean-Paul Sartre: A Literary and Political Study, pp. 95-6. Cf. L'Heure théâtrale, p. 210.

15. Situations, VI, p. 10.

voudrais survivre à ma jeunesse". (MS 142). There is here an indication of Hugo's propensity for self-pity which takes the form of a morbid indulgence in his isolation and inadequacy as an intellectual. Hugo's preoccupation with his own self is even more striking in his desire to be involved in political action. By seeking justification in his own eyes and in the eyes of others, he acts to create a certain comforting image of himself. "Tu as voulu te prouver que tu étais capable d'agir," Hoederer tells him, "et tu as choisi les chemins difficiles: comme quand on veut mériter le ciel; c'est de ton âge." (MS 234). In fact, Hugo would probably have undertaken any action requested by Louis provided that it entailed personal risk and the assurance that the eyes of the party would be momentarily fixed on him. When, for example, he first learns what his mission is to be, he gleefully evokes in his imagination the anxiety and concern of Louis and Olga as they wait for news of the attempted assassination. "Avant la fin de la semaine, vous serez ici, tous les deux, par une nuit pareille," Hugo tells them, "et vous attendrez les nouvelles; et vous serez inquiets et vous parlerez de moi et je compterai pour vous." (MS 56). When Hugo hesitates too long, thus prompting Olga's intervention, one of his first concerns is the extent to which his image has been tainted, and throughout his imprisonment he continues to be preoccupied with the party's judgement of him. "Quelquefois, la pluie me réveillait," he tells Olga; "je me disais: ils auront de l'eau; et puis, avant de me rendormir: c'est peut-être cette nuit-ci qu'ils parleront de moi." (MS 18). Like the three protagonists of Huis clos, Hugo is, to a large extent, enslaved by the look and judgement of others.

The real failure of the critics who see Les Fains sales as an anti-Communist play lies in centring their comments exclusively on Hugo and on the situation with which he is confronted, thus ignoring the dialogue between Hugo and Hoederer which exposes the obvious inadequacies of the

former's attitude and also underlines how, far from presenting an insuperable barrier to authentic political commitment, they are resolved or answered by the latter. The comparison between Hamlet and Hugo, made initially by J.-J. Gautier¹⁶ and Marcel¹⁷, is based on certain similarities but is ultimately misleading. Hamlet is, after all, an undisputed hero and there is no question of Laertes, for example, or Fortinbras taking anything other than second place. Hugo does not, however, occupy the same position in relation to Hoederer. Initially, Sartre had hoped the dialogue to be perfectly balanced along the lines of a Greek tragedy where "tous les personnages ont raison et tous ont tort ..." ¹⁸. Certainly, neither Hoederer nor Hugo holds the key to any absolute political or moral truth, but it is Hoederer whose position is far more coherent and realistic than that of Hugo. Humanly, our sympathies may be equally divided, but the positive moral and political aspects of the play are almost exclusively incarnated in the person of Hoederer. Taken in isolation some of his comments may appear cold and inhuman, in keeping with a ruthless and impersonal party. He describes the Revolution, for example, as a question of "efficacité" (MS 234) and states even more categorically: "Tous les moyens sont bons quand ils sont efficaces." (MS 209). These remarks should, however, be seen in the context of a heated exchange of opposing political beliefs in which abruptness and over-simplification are inevitable. Hoederer is totally committed to the cause of socialism which he sees not as a rigid set of rules and precepts, but as something which represents the deepest aspirations of men in a given time and place and

16. In Le Figaro, 3.4.1948.

17. In Les Nouvelles littéraires, 13.5.1948.

18. Combat, 31.3.1948.

which is therefore living and evolving. Far from advocating a passive acceptance of party dogma and from treating the party executive as an infallible divinity, Hoederer realises that mistakes are unavoidable and that the task of a party leader involves a heavy burden of responsibility as well as a certain degree of anguish and uncertainty. The socialism to which Hoederer is committed has nothing in common with the strict political order of Égisthe, but, like Oreste's act, it is something to be created without reference to external principles that will justify decisions and offer protection from doubt. "Nous autres," he tells Hugo, "ça nous est moins commode de tirer sur un bonhomme pour des questions de principes parce que c'est nous qui faisons les idées et que nous connaissons la cuisine: nous ne sommes jamais tout à fait sûrs d'avoir raison." (MS 228). Consequently, Hoederer has no real sympathy or respect for the political assassin who blindly carries out orders without the slightest compunction or hesitation. "Ce sont des types sans imagination," he declares: "ça leur est égal de donner la mort parce qu'ils n'ont aucune idée de ce que c'est que la vie." (MS 230). There is no question of Hoederer opposing murder and other forms of violence as necessary political weapons, but he clearly does not think that those who resort to violence with cold and clinical detachment really understand that the social ideals for which the party is fighting are based on a deep appreciation of life and not contempt for it. "Je préfère les gens qui ont peur de la mort des autres," he admits: "c'est la preuve qu'ils savent vivre." (MS 230). Similarly, although he recognises the need for firm discipline and although he treats Georges and Slick without warmth or indulgence, Hoederer has no desire to change the party members into an army of unthinking robots. Thus, when Hugo tells him that he had accepted the job as his secretary out of discipline, Hoederer retorts: "Je me méfie des gens qui n'ont que ce mot à la bouche." (MS 111).

In short, Hoederer belongs to a revolutionary socialist party not because he loves vague ideas or principles drawing on a theory of justice and freedom, but because he loves life as a concrete reality and men as they really are. His desire for change does not conceal a secret hatred of life or a reckless and irresponsible passion for destruction, but is based on the belief that by freeing society from the chains of oppression and exploitation life can take on a deeper and richer meaning for all people. Moreover, because life is not an abstraction, the struggle towards greater happiness cannot be reduced to a mathematical calculation where lives saved or lost become mere numbers. Each individual life is to be respected and valued. "Pour moi, ça compte un homme de plus ou de moins dans le monde," Hoederer tells Hugo. "C'est précieux." (MS 213). Hugo, on the other hand, like Eustaché in Le Dard is committed to a political action based on abstract theories and principles which is ultimately self-defeating, for any ideal, be it religious or political, is meaningless in human terms if it is not inspired by the real state of man and those qualities of life which can be enhanced and shared by all. The real depth of Hoederer's character is brought out in his relationship with Hugo. Although critical of Hugo's attitude, Hoederer shows genuine concern for him as an individual. He understands Hugo's problems, his need for guidance and, above all, for trust: moreover, he believes that, with his help and encouragement, Hugo can become an active and respected member of the party. Thus, when he learns that Hugo has been sent to kill him, he refuses to call on his bodyguards to dispossess Hugo of his revolver. "Ça l'humilierait," he tells Jessica. "Il ne faut pas humilier les gens." (MS 224). By a cruel twist of fate, however, Hoederer's work is undone by Jessica's intervention and, in a moment of anger, Hugo shoots the man who had been at great pains to help him. This totally unexpected turn of events merely

serves to underline Hoederer's magnanimity. Although all his recent efforts both for the party and, on an individual level, for Hugo have been suddenly frustrated he feels no resentment or bitterness towards the latter. In fact, he tells his bodyguards that he had been sleeping with Jessica with the result that he conceals the political reasons behind his assassination, thus safeguarding the unity of the party, and, at the same time, saves Hugo's life. It is a genuinely selfless act without the slightest hint of self-indulged heroism. Hoederer's death also ends any possible political future for Hugo: for, whereas the party as an abstract, impersonal entity had failed to provide a solution to Hugo's personal problems, Hoederer had come close to saving him by treating him with sympathy and understanding on a person to person basis. "Ce qu'un parti sans visage ne peut faire," comments J. Bermiez, "un homme le peut pour un autre homme."¹⁹

In contrast to Hugo, Hoederer provides the basis for a coherent and effective course of political action. He also gains our sympathy and admiration because he is not a cold, ruthless party leader. Les Mains sales does cast a very critical light on aspects of the party's organisation, its impersonality, rigid authority and cynicism; Hoederer, without resolving all these objections, does nonetheless reveal another face of socialism, - one which is creative and constructive. In this respect, Hoederer redeems the image of a party which, in the hands of someone like Louis, would be a grotesque distortion of the political ends which it is intended to serve. At the same time, Hoederer's position reveals all the difficulties, hardships and contradictions of political activity. Oreste experienced no real compromise or conflict in acting to liberate the people of Argos because he limited himself to action on a purely individual level, whereas action within a political party entails the recognition of common aims and collective responsibility and thus necessarily restricts the

19. "A propos des Mains sales" in Les Temps modernes, no. 36, septembre, 1948, p. 576.

kind of freedom exalted by Oreste. Where the interests of the party and of the individual conflict, the former must take precedence. Hoederer's attitude to Hugo shows how much he values personal relationships, but he also knows that impersonality, however, unpleasant, is inevitable to a certain degree if the party is to function efficiently. In the desperate struggle for power, individuals will at times become mere numbers, denied any real freedom or autonomy, and this is a sacrifice which Hoederer has clearly accepted. The conflict between individual and collective interests is seen in the scene in which Hoederer comes to see Hugo and Jessica after Olga's abortive attempt on his life. After the hard bargaining with Karsky and the Prince which had shown him to be cold and ruthless when necessary, Hoederer feels a sudden need of human warmth and comfort. He is torn between the need to continue his work and thus deprive himself of this human contact and the desire to sit and talk with Hugo and Jessica. We have a banal but nonetheless significant situation in which a realistic balance has to be found between a total preoccupation with political activity which would gradually erode all personal life and a half-hearted form of commitment in which politics would matter less than personal comforts. Hoederer is a man who has found such a balance; he recognises the sacrifices that are necessary in political life but he also ensures that his political commitment stops short of fanaticism and intolerance.

Hoederer's attitude to politics is mature and realistic. There can be no doubt of his complete superiority over Hugo in this respect. Isolated aspects of Hugo's political outlook, notably his refusal to accept the party's manipulation and reinterpretation of the past, are justified and laudable. When confronted with Hoederer, however, Hugo's political beliefs are seen to be generally naive and impractical. As abstract moral values, virtue and purity are fine; in a concrete political situation they are

totally useless. Hoederer's position implies a certain morality of political action since he refuses to accept a rigid doctrinaire form of socialism, but he totally rejects the kind of moral stand adopted by Hugo which debars any kind of compromise. "La pureté, c'est une idée de fakir et de moine," (MS 210) he tells Hugo. There is an initial choice to be made between a world of social peace and spiritual tranquillity and a world of political action, violence and contestation, between the pure ethics of an ideal state and the restricted morality of revolutionary socialism. Hugo's position is all the more contradictory and unacceptable in that, having chosen to involve himself politically in the world, he wants to preserve the absolute purity that can only be safeguarded by a rejection of political action. Socialism can only remain pure as an idea. "En attendant, son incarnation dans un pays particulier implique qu'il doit se faire," writes Sartre, "et qu'il se définit par une infinité de rapports avec le reste du monde. Par là, si la réalité se forge, la pureté de l'idée s'altère."²⁰

Hoederer knows that he will often be manoeuvring for positions of greater strength for his party and that, at times, he will not reveal the exact nature of the compromise he has been forced to accept. He agrees with Hugo that, in itself, deceit is not admirable; but, in a political context, it is inevitable. "Le mensonge, ce n'est pas moi qui l'ai inventé," he declares: "il est né dans une société divisée en classes et chacun de nous l'a hérité en naissant." (MS 209). The situation confronting the individual here assumes a far more concrete social and political meaning than it had for Oreste: for, according to Hoederer, man is born in a society subjected from the outset to forces of oppression and exploitation

20. Situations, VIII, Paris, Gallimard, 1972, p. 137.

which, by creating conflicting interests among men, are the real cause of an immoral and divided world. These are the forces to which our attention should be drawn through political commitment before we can engage an ideal, unified society in which moral precepts have a meaningful role to play. "Ce n'est pas en refusant de mentir que nous abolirons le mensonge," adds Hoederer: "c'est en usant de tous les moyens pour supprimer les classes." (MS 209). Until such a situation has been achieved, Hoederer accepts the reality and inevitability, within reasonable limits, of compromise, deceit and even of political assassination. By setting Hugo's idealism against Hoederer's realism and practicality, Sartre was able to present dialectically and dramatically "le problème des exigences de la praxis à l'époque"²¹, and to an attentive and impartial spectator, the political implications of Les Mains sales should be fairly clear. Sartre himself suggested as a suitable epigraph for the play a sentence from Saint-Just on the impossibility of governing innocently. "Autrement dit," he continued, "on ne fait pas de politique (quelle qu'elle soit), sans se salir les mains, sans être contraint à des compromis entre l'idéal et le réel."²² In this respect, Sartre's play confirms the political message of L'Engrenage, a scenario written in 1946, two years before Les Mains sales²³. The opposition between Jean Guerra, the revolutionary leader who is continually forced to dirty his hands to safeguard his country's independence and hopes of socialism, and

21. Un théâtre de situations, p. 259.

22. Franc-Tireur, 23.3.1948 .

23. It is interesting to note that the original title of the scenario was to have been Les Mains sales, and that, although it has never been used as the basis for a film, it has been adapted on several occasions for the stage both in France (Théâtre de la Ville, February, 1969) and abroad.

his close friend Lucien, an intellectual who refuses violence under any circumstances, prefigures that between Hoederer and Hugo. Although both Jean and Hoederer are killed for political reasons, it is ultimately their tactics and policies which will be adopted by those who follow them. There is no justification in H. Hobson's view that Sartre "intended Les Mains sales to end with a flourish, and on a note of triumph" and that, for the author, "Hugo won a spiritual victory"²⁴. The "triumph" of Hugo's purity is, in fact, a tragic end to the life of a mature, responsible and heroic leader, while it also underlines the part that contingency can play in severely restricting the range and scope of the individual's freedom. Some years later, Sartre did, in fact, confirm that Hoederer's position was the one with which he himself most closely identified. "Hoederer est celui que je voudrais être si j'étais un révolutionnaire," he declared, "donc j'ai suis Hoederer, ne serait-ce que sur un plan symbolique."²⁵ In the same interview he also reaffirmed that in Hugo he had tried to present some of the problems and difficulties experienced by several former students of his in coming to terms with the politics of the extreme left, adding that he himself had at no time in his life been at the same level of idealism as Hugo.

From a purely theatrical point of view many critics believe Les Mains sales to be, by far, Sartre's most successful play. P. Thody, for example, describes it as a work of great intellectual interest which is also "the most exciting of Sartre's plays to watch"²⁶. This excitement stems from

24. The French Theatre of Today, London, Harrap, 1953, p. 107.

25. Un théâtre de situations, p. 259.

26. Jean-Paul Sartre: A Literary and Political Study, p. 94.

the suspense created by Hugo's intended assassination of Hoederer. Although by the end of the first tableau we know that Hoederer has been killed the exact nature and circumstances of his death are not revealed to us, and the spectator is constantly wondering when and how the assassination will **take** place. There are several skilfully contrived moments of suspense before Hugo does in fact shoot Hoederer. The first of these occurs when Georges and Slick arrive to search Hugo's room. Hugo succeeds in preventing the search and the almost certain discovery of his revolver and then, quite unexpectedly, Jessica insists that the search take place after all. It is only later that we find out that she had taken the revolver which we had thought to be in Hugo's suitcase and hidden it in her dress. After this initial fright for Hugo, there are several points at which it seems that he is about to overcome his uncertainty and shoot Hoederer: during the scene involving Karsky and the Prince, during his violent argument with Hoederer about political action, and, finally, when Hoederer deliberately turns his back on him, seemingly offering Hugo his last chance to act. In fact, the assassination takes place at the most unexpected time and in the most unexpected situation; but the final coup de théâtre is reserved for the last tableau when Hugo suddenly decides to assume responsibility for Hoederer's death and thus defy the party. From the point of view of plot and dramatic movement, Les Mains sales is far superior to a play like Les Mouches while it is no less rich in ideas. In Les Mouches, however, Sartre had made the mistake of expressing his ideas too directly, making use of long, demonstrative speeches; in Les Mains sales the ideas are expressed through the confrontations between Hugo and Hoederer, where the dialogue is sharp and incisive. The characterisation, too, is far better than that of Les Mouches. Although the secondary figures like Louis and Hoederer's two bodyguards have been considerably oversimplified, the main characters are boldly and convincingly portrayed. "Les personnages

de Hugo , avec ses complexes de jeune bourgeois qui ne rejoindra jamais le peuple," writes T. Maulnier, "d'Olga (sic), inconsciente et habile petite femelle, et surtout de Hoederer - un beau et grand personnage de théâtre - ont une admirable épaisseur humaine."²⁷ The dialogue between Hugo and Hoederer is a fascinating and powerful theatrical experience which holds the attention of the audience both in the character of the two people involved and in the political issues which they raise. Whereas in Les Mouches the philosophical and political ideas, although interesting in themselves, had seemed contrived and therefore detached from the situation in which they were presented, the ideas in Les Mains sales are inseparable from the characters and from the political situation in which we find them. Thus the spectators of Les Mouches may well find themselves reflecting on order and freedom without any direct relation to the figures of Jupiter and Oreste, but political realism and intellectual idealism in Les Mains sales are so powerfully incarnated in performance by Hoederer and by Hugo that such a confrontation is far more readily and closely related to the two main characters in the play.

Sartre's only cause for dissatisfaction with Les Mains sales is simply that it has been interpreted in a way which distorts the play's intended meaning, a meaning which an attentive reading of the text does not belie. Sartre attributed the hostile reaction of the Communists to the fact that under Stalin all criticism of the left was a sign of opposition, and also to his part in the formation of the R.D.R., something which he himself admitted to being a political mistake.²⁸ He also recognises that, although the play revolves around the dialogue between Hugo

27. Spectateur, 6.4.1948.

28. See Un théâtre de situations, p. 259.

and Hoederer and thus treats the question of political commitment dialectically, the events are all seen through Hugo's eyes with the result that he becomes the central character with whom one identifies. It is this identification which can blind the spectator to the real implications of the play especially since, from a purely human point of view, one tends to have particular sympathy for the plight of someone young who is basically sincere but lacking in confidence and feeling estranged from the world around him. The ambiguity of Les Mains sales stems from the fact that, unlike Les Mouches, the meaning of the play does not coincide with the point of view of its central character. In this respect Sartre's next play, Le Diable et le Bon Dieu, (the theme of which was originally conceived the day after the dress rehearsal of Les Mains sales²⁹) is far closer both in tone and structure to the bold, clear-cut affirmations of Les Mouches, and thus resolves any doubts as to the progress and development of Sartre's thought. The evolution of Goetz, the central figure in Le Diable et le Bon Dieu³⁰, states quite unambiguously the nature of political commitment in an oppressed and divided society, and represents a positive movement away from the individualism of Oreste and the idealism of Hugo. "Hugo est un jeune idéaliste bourgeois qui ne comprend pas les nécessités de l'action concrète," observes Sartre. "Goetz, c'est un Hugo qui se convertit."³¹ It is natural, therefore, that Sartre should see Le Diable et le Bon Dieu as a sequel to Les Mains sales despite the apparent dissimilarity in the social and political background to each play. Le Diable et le Bon Dieu is set in

29. See Opéra, 25.4.1951.

30. All textual references are taken from Le Diable et le Bon Dieu, Paris, Gallimard, 1951, and will be incorporated in the thesis in the following abbreviated form: (DD ..). Eg. (DD 20) = Le Diable et le Bon Dieu, p.20.

31. Paris-Presse-L'Intransigeant, 7.6.1951.

sixteenth century Germany at the time of the Reformation, a period of widespread social as well as religious unrest culminating in the Peasant uprising of 1525. It was, however, clear that Sartre had chosen this particular period not from any great historical interest, but simply because it offered a ready-made framework into which he could transpose the political issues of the time. Although he was at pains to ensure that the period he had chosen was presented as accurately as possible, the plot itself was entirely fictitious, inspired in part from a play by Cervantes (El Rufian dichoso) which Sartre had not in fact read but had heard recounted by J.-L. Barrault³².

Goetz's itinerary resembles the journey of Oreste in Les Mouches far more than that of Hugo in Les Mains sales. Hugo does briefly experience a new sense of commitment and responsibility, but unlike Oreste and Goetz there is no basic change in his outlook and ideals since he remains faithful to the moral values he had tried to defend in front of Howderer. Both Oreste and Goetz, however, discover a new identity and vocation incompatible with their previous attitude. Oreste progresses from an attitude of detachment and indifference towards a life of action, while Goetz starts from a life of action which is falsified by a concern for appearances and moves towards an authentic form of political commitment based on a more modest and more practical approach to reality. The inauthenticity of Goetz's conduct, first as a tyrannical military leader and later as a servant of God, is shown by his obsession with a certain fixed identity or essence. Like the three characters in Huis clos, Goetz tries to capture this identity in the reaction of those around him. In the first part of the play (act 1), for example, he has assumed the mantle of evil, valuing each of his acts not as an end in itself but as a means of arousing horror and loathing in others. "Ce que j'aime en toi," he tells Catherine, "c'est

32. See La Force des choses, p. 256.

l'horreur que je t'inspire." (DD 52). Later, when Goetz learns that his brother Conrad is dead, he announces that he will take immediate possession of the lands and the family chateau. This announcement, so soon after the news of Conrad's death, reveals a total lack of respect and compassion for his dead brother, and Goetz then thinks of the most outrageous action he can perform to show his contempt for family ties and tradition - to sleep with a prostitute in the bed once slept in by his mother. Naturally, he imagines the chateau haunted by indignant ghosts and Catherine tartly observes: "C'est vrai, cabotin, que ferais-tu sans public?" (DD 74). When, in the second part of the play (acts 2 & 3), Goetz sets out to overcome evil and to teach the value of Christian love, the nature of his actions has changed but not the basic intent. He is still preoccupied with his identity, with the success or failure of his efforts to create a certain image. He thus attaches great importance to his encounter with Heinrich for the latter has promised to decide whether or not Goetz has succeeded in his enterprise. "Va, fouille-moi jusqu' à l'être," Goetz tells him, "puisque c'est mon être qui est en cause." (DD 259). Vitiated by the concern for appearances, all Goetz's actions, whether aimed at good or evil have been mere gestures. "Un acte qu'on accomplit pour être," writes Sartre, "ce n'est plus un acte, c'est un geste."³³ The same criticism can be made of the three characters in Huis clos, but, whereas Garcin's gestures, for example, had been intended for his friends in Mexico, Goetz, although testing his image on people like Catherine and Heinrich, is ultimately concerned with an identity of absolute good or evil, and thus sees himself in confrontation with the supreme judge of all - God. "Je ne daigne avoir affaire qu'à Dieu," he proudly declares to Heinrich, "les monstres et les saints ne relèvent que de lui." (DD 66).

33. Saint Genet, comédien et martyr, p. 75.

An overwhelming pride and an exalted feeling of solitude are the direct consequences of Goetz's self-objectification in the eyes of God. When he is intent on evil, he remains unmoved by the misery and suffering for which he is responsible because he is indifferent to the world of men. Thus, when Nasty tries to persuade him to ally himself to the peasant army instead of performing indiscriminate acts of violence which merely reinforce the established order, Goetz reveals his complete contempt for humanity. "Dieu m'entend, c'est à Dieu que je casse les oreilles et ça me suffit," he replies, "car c'est le seul ennemi qui soit digne de moi." (DD 105). He delights in imagining God's fear and apprehension as he prepares to attack Worms and raise it to the ground. He sees himself as "l'homme qui met le Tout - Puissant mal à l'aise" (DD 115), and glories in being without equal among other men, believing himself to be the only person who does evil for the sake of evil and against God. Moreover, the vision he has of himself, unlike the façade of heroism with which Garcin had tried to impress his friends, is not a hollow pretence but is supported by actions for which he claims total responsibility. Evil, he declares, "c'est mon seul empire et je suis seul dedans: ce qui s'y passe n'est imputable qu'à moi". (DD 115). Goetz's sudden conversion to the cause of absolute good is brought about when he is told by Heinrich that evil reigns naturally in the world and that it is impossible to realise a perfect state on earth. Goetz cannot resist such a challenge for his whole aim in life is to prove his uniqueness and superiority over other men. Heinrich is at first reluctant to bet against Goetz achieving what he claims to be impossible. "Tu as tort; tu m'apprends que le Bien est impossible, je parie donc que je ferai le Bien," declares Goetz: "c'est encore la meilleure façon d'être seul." (DD 119). Although he pretends that his decision depends on the chance result of a game of dice with Catherine, Goetz ensures that he loses the game and thus takes on Heinrich's challenge by deliberately cheating. Moreover, just as he had accepted no compromise

in his pursuit of evil, so he intends no half measures in his pursuit of good. "Je ne ferai pas le Bien à la petite semaine," he tells Nasty, "... Grâce à moi, ayant la fin de l'année, le bonheur, l'amour et la vertu régneront sur dix mille arpents de terre." (DD 139). Although Goetz's original intention in turning to good, and the manner in which he sets out to accomplish his aims reveal his underlying pride, his failure to sustain an isolated, peace-loving community in the midst of the peasants' growing unrest and rebelliousness seems to have had a salutary effect on him. He decides to withdraw from the world and embrace a life of penitence and self-abnegation, thus abandoning further spectacular and grandiose attempts to save his fellow men. There is, however, in Sartre's eyes, no radical difference between Goetz's defiance of God and his humility before God. "L'homme se croit beaucoup trop intéressant quand il se confronte avec Dieu ...; beaucoup trop intéressant encore quand il se prosterne devant Dieu," he declared in an interview with J. Duché: "Jean Genet a très bien dit que le pire orgueil est l'humilité."³⁴

Goetz's pursuit of the absolute is not dissimilar to Hugo's refusal of political compromise and concern for purity; both characters are, in fact, out of touch with the social and political reality of the world in which they live. Unlike Hugo, however, Goetz eventually discovers the futility of his life's efforts. He realises that, whether he has tried to achieve good or evil, his action has had the same long-term consequences: he has merely contributed to greater violence and suffering. The basic structure of society and the collective problems of humanity are unaffected by Goetz's spectacular feats of cruelty and benevolence. Nasty had been the first to underline the results of Goetz's evil. "Tu sers les grands, Goetz", he had declared, "et tu les serviras quoi que tu fasses: toute

34. Le Figaro littéraire, 30.6.1951.

destruction brouillonne, affaiblit les faibles, enrichit les riches, accroît la puissance des puissants." (DD 102). Goetz's attempts to overcome man's suffering by creating the "Cité du Soleil", a community where there is no material inequality and where each is taught to love his neighbour, are only successful in the short-term. Karl denounces the absurd idealism of Goetz's project, of trying to remain isolated from the rest of society and from the bitter confrontation between the barons and the peasants. "Si les paysans remportent la victoire, craignez qu'ils ne brûlent la Cité du Soleil pour vous punir de les avoir trahis," he cries. "Quant aux Seigneurs, s'ils gagnent, ils ne toléreront pas qu'une terre noble demeure aux mains de serfs." (DD 205). It is, in fact, the peasants who destroy Goetz's community when it refuses to join them in their armed uprising against the barons. Goetz's efforts to achieve good thus end in total failure while, far from having remained outside the bitter struggle that is going on around him, he learns through Nasty that, by banishing the priests from his community, he has weakened the authority of the Church in other areas and has thus paved the way for militant and undisciplined prophets of Revolution like Karl. He is therefore indirectly responsible for the peasants' premature uprising, and when he tries to warn them of the rout that awaits them he finds that he is powerless to change their minds. Gradually Goetz awakens to the realities of a world of widespread social disorder and unrest, a world to which, in his pride and isolationism, he had at first remained stubbornly blind.

Goetz's relationship with the absolute has not only failed to change the basis of society, it has also made him into a totally inhuman figure. This seems perfectly consistent with the desire for evil, but not with the desire for good. Certainly, the construction of the "Cité du Soleil" seems, in itself, to be a laudable and charitable project. It is the

failure of this project and Goetz's sudden realisation of human frailty and sinfulness which mark the turning point in his pursuit of good. He now believes that man, with all his imperfections, is an obstacle between himself and God, and that only by renouncing the imperfect world in which he had hitherto struggled can he attain ultimate perfection. "Ah! je n'aurais jamais dû m'occuper des hommes: ils gênent," he decides. "Ce sont des broussailles qu'il faut écarter pour parvenir à toi." (DD 235). This decision to concentrate on a life of total communion with God also leads Goetz to fight even more ardently against the frailties of his own person and to pursue a life of extreme asceticism. He has a sudden premonition that the path to absolute good, like the path to absolute evil, passes through the same experience of hatred for human life. "Cette haine de l'homme, ce mépris de moi-même," he asks himself, "ne les ai-je pas déjà cherchés, quand j'étais mauvais?" (DD 236). But Goetz is determined that nothing shall now divert him from the end he has in sight. His dedication to God is so complete that he feels no attachment to the things of the earth. "Je n'aime que Dieu et je ne suis plus sur terre," (DD 238) he tells Hilda. He assumes the faults and sins of mankind in punishing and tormenting his own body, and equates absolute good with the purification of man, a purification which glorifies the spirit and sees the body as "une chiennerie" (DD 250) or "le sac d'excréments" (DD 253). Goetz's path towards what he believes to be spiritual salvation thus leads him to declare with cold, implacable logic that he is nothing, but that God is everything, and that he must destroy himself as a man to attain the purity of a saint.

Goetz's rejection of the absolute and awakening to relative human values is precipitated by the arrival of Heinrich. The latter has come to bear judgement on Goetz's proud boast that he would succeed in doing good where all others had failed. First of all, Goetz is forced to acknowledge

the basic pretence underlying his good intentions. "Ainsi donc tout n'était que mensonge et comédie?" he asks. "Je n'ai pas agi: j'ai fait des gestes." (DD 262). He makes no attempt to hide the truth from himself; he readily acknowledges his failure to bring peace and happiness into the world, and then admits that the same destructiveness and inhumanity have marked his efforts at evil and at good, for, in both instances, his ultimate concern had been not his fellow men, whom he had treated with either indifference or contempt, but God. "Autrefois je violais les âmes par la torture, à présent je les viole par le Bien ce n'est pas le Bien qui est sorti du comet à dés: c'est un Mal pire," he says. "Qu'importe d'ailleurs: monstre ou saint, je m'en foutais, je voulais être inhumain." (DD 263). But the sudden realisation that the path to absolute good had been the result of his own initiative and invention and not the will of God leads Goetz to question the existence of the one Being he had either challenged or served throughout his adult life. Goetz's personal experiences have taught him that man finds himself in a world in which he is left to forge his own destiny, alone and without guidance. Moreover, if man is alone in the choice of his identity, he must also be alone in attributing guilt or according absolution to himself. Goetz therefore concludes that the certainty of his own existence and powers of self-determination is proof that God does not exist, and that the absolute which had so fascinated him is a man-made mirage. The disappearance of God marks the first step in Goetz's liberation and return to reality. "Il n'existe pas," he declares triumphantly to Heinrich. "Joie, pleurs de joie! Alleluia. Fou! Ne frappe pas: je nous délivre. Plus de Ciel, plus d'Enfer: rien que la Terre." (DD 268). He is forced to kill Heinrich who refuses to live in a world devoid of spiritual absolution, and the transformation Goetz has undergone is shown by the way he reacts to Hilda's presence. "Nous n'avons plus de témoin," he tells her, "je suis seul à voir tes cheveux et ton front. Comme tu es vraie depuis qu'il n'est plus." (DD 271).

Goetz's awakening is thus heralded by a very clear and strong sense of reality and marks the emergence of an authentic relationship between himself and the outside world: it remains for him, however, to define the nature of his commitment in that world. The most important discovery he has made in this respect is that, without a God to defy or obey, all action is limited to man's concrete, historical situation and has no meaning outside that situation. Goetz can no longer try to stand outside history and remain indifferent to the political issues which reflect the struggles and aspirations of the men of his time. He knows that he is now as deeply involved in these issues as the barons who are trying to protect their lands and as the peasants who are trying to wrest the wealth and power from them. In the open and violent confrontation between the barons and peasants, Goetz knows that he must choose to support one side or the other, and that, in choosing, he will lay the foundations for a course of political action. His efforts at good and evil had merely exacerbated the hardships and difficulties of the peasants; now, however, it is their cause that he chooses to support by joining their army and by opposing the social order represented by the Church and the nobility. This choice and political commitment signals the end of Goetz's pride and aloofness, since he now recognises the need for modesty and the value of solidarity, and the end too of his inhumanity, since in joining the peasants' army he recognises the specifically human issues which are at stake and identifies with the peasants' demands for social justice. Goetz's role as a superman is over. "Je veux être un homme parmi les hommes," (DD 275) he tells Nasty, echoing the words of Oreste in Les Mouches, and asks that he be enlisted in the peasant army as a private without special powers or privileges. Nasty, however, refuses, pointing out that Goetz can serve the peasants far more effectively by taking over the leadership of the army, and that the difference between a leader and an ordinary soldier is one of function and not of status. Goetz hesitates

but finally accepts Nasty's proposals, realising that he is not only the most experienced and competent person to lead the peasant army, but that he will be readily accepted by the peasants themselves. This acceptance of Goetz by the peasants together with his attitude to the position that he will occupy reflects Sartre's own personal ideal of political leadership³⁵.

The paradox of Goetz's position is that his new-found humanity and solidarity do not exclude the use of violence and cruelty as necessary political weapons in working towards a more tolerant and human society. Goetz has passed through a stage of idealism in which, like Hugo, he had refused all forms of compromise. The experiment of pure love, exemplified by the "Cité du Soleil", had failed. Now, like Hoederer, he adopts a mature and realistic approach to the situation. In a society where men are divided and interests are directly opposed, force is inevitable if this opposition is to be overcome and if a new society is to be created where the interests of all are recognised and respected. "Je voulais l'amour pur: maiserie; s'aimer, c'est haïr le même ennemi," Goetz announces to Nasty: "j'épouserai donc votre haine j'accepte d'être mauvais pour devenir bon." (DD 275-6). Goetz's first experience of this realism is soon forced upon him; he must cold-bloodedly stab a rebellious soldier in order to maintain discipline in the army and safeguard the peasants' interests in the forthcoming war with the barons. He thus proves his solidarity with the peasants by an act of murder, a situation which recalls that of Oreste who only feels an integral part of the community of Argos after murdering Clytemnestre and Égisthe and exposing himself to the vengeance of the furies. Commenting on this point, Marcel writes: "Le crime apparaît comme la condition d'une communion réelle entre les hommes, le sang versé peut seul cimenter une union véritable."³⁶

35. See "Sartre répond aux jeunes" in L'Express, no. 455, 3.3.1960.

36. L'Heure théâtrale, p. 218.

Goetz's answer, and indeed that of Sartre himself, to this objection is that one can only achieve solidarity with one's fellow men by actively involving oneself in their problems and contradictions, and this means entering a criminal world and joining the bitter political struggle for a just and free society. "Les hommes d'aujourd'hui naissent criminels," observes Goetz, "il faut que je revendique ma part de leurs crimes si je veux ma part de leur amour et de leurs vertus." (DD 275).

Goetz's political commitment is not just an example of authentic action as opposed to the spectacular gestures aimed at good and evil: it should be seen more specifically as a form of "praxis", of man's confrontation with material need, - experienced above all by the peasants in their poverty and deprivation -, and of his efforts to transform his social condition by concrete, political action. Although sympathetic to the political implications of the play, F. Jeanson does contest the authenticity of Goetz's final declarations. He suggests that his desire to return to reality and to become "un homme parmi les hommes" (DD 275) indicates his lingering preoccupation with being, and therefore concludes that the real motivation underlying Goetz's decision to lead the peasant army is not the hope of change but "le rêve d'être l'Homme à force de se fondre dans la Réalité humaine, - comme il avait d'abord tenté de s'identifier, tour à tour, au Mal, puis au Bien, puis à l'absolu néant d'une créature de Dieu"³⁷. It was certainly not Sartre's intention to present Goetz in this light since this would rob the play of any significant movement or ultimate illumination by reducing the plot to an unchanging succession of gestures. In fact, Goetz's final words are clearly intended by Sartre to indicate the humility of a man who, without reference to any predetermined values or outside observers, commits himself

37. Le Problème moral et la pensée de Sartre, suivi de Un quidam nommé Sartre, Paris, Éditions du Seuil, 1965, p. 323.

freely and totally to a certain course of action.³⁸ If there is a hint or trace of inauthenticity in Goetz's political commitment it should be seen as an unavoidable element of action in as much as to perform an act almost invariably implies consciousness of performing an act. It is, however, only when this consciousness allows itself to become fascinated and guided by the attitude and reaction of others, as in the scenes before Goetz's awakening, or as in Huis clos, for example, that action ceases to be an "acte", a source of liberation and fulfilment, and becomes a "geste", a force of enslavement and self-estrangement. From a political point of view, Goetz's position represents a move not only towards collective, organised action, but also towards a radical and revolutionary outlook. The experiment of the "Cité du Soleil" was destined to fail because it concentrated on an isolated effect of social exploitation with no regard for its underlying cause, and the same short-sightedness is evident in Hilda's devotion to the poor. By leading the peasants in a long, bitter and violent struggle against the barons, Goetz is effectively tackling the fundamental causes of poverty and inequality, since he hopes to bring about the downfall of a class-structured society whose wealth, together with the privileges and influence that it ensures, is the exclusive prerogative of the class in power.

Le Diable et le Bon Dieu thus ends by confirming the realism and coherence of Nasty's political stand. Throughout the play he had stood by certain beliefs and ultimately these are the beliefs which Goetz adopts. All Nasty's efforts have been directed towards the preparation of "Wla cité de Dieu" (DD 103)³⁹, a perfect society in which there will be

38. See "Sartre répond aux jeunes" in L'Express, no. 455, 3.3.1960.

39. An echo of St. Augustine whose work La Cité de Dieu (in Oeuvres de Saint Augustin, 5^e série, vols 33-7, Paris, Desclée de Brouwer, 1959-60) opposes the spiritual city of God to the temporal city of man. In Le Diable et le Bon Dieu, however, Nasty's project implies a revolutionary and not a Christian morality, and St. Augustine's opposition between God and man is reversed in the play to underline the superiority of human values over spiritual values.

equality and fraternity; but he knows that there will have to be violence to achieve such an end, and that the peasants will have no chance of overthrowing the barons unless they are disciplined, organised and united in the recognition of their common aims and interests. Goetz is an adventurer, standing aloof from the rest of society, who is converted to the beliefs of a hardened revolutionary. The initial opposition between Goetz and Nasty reflects, to some extent, the opposition between Hugo and Hoederer in Les Mains sales. The conclusion of Le Diable et le Bon Dieu, is, however, far more optimistic since Goetz learns to accept the compromise which Hugo had refused. The acceptance of compromise necessitated by political action does not, however, mean a cynical disregard for suffering, nor an end to personal responsibility and anguish. This had been clearly visible in the attitude of Hoederer in Les Mains sales, while at the end of Le Diable et le Bon Dieu, Nasty finds himself in an unenviable and humiliating situation which brings home to him some of the bitter realities of revolutionary commitment. The premature revolt of the peasants has resulted in heavy losses and Nasty now discovers, to his horror, that the morale of the troops can only be sustained by recourse to magic and superstition. "Connais-tu plus singulière bouffonnerie," he asks Goetz: "moi , qui hais le mensonge, je mens à mes frères pour leur donner le courage de se faire tuer dans une guerre que je haisGoetz, je ne connaissais ni la solitude ni la défaite ni l'angoisse et je suis sans recours contre elles." (DD 280). The setbacks experienced by both Nasty and Goetz make them into more understanding and mature political leaders in contrast to the blind revolutionary fervour of Karl. The latter's lack of patience and discipline represents a potentially dangerous and divisive force which will ultimately jeopardise the success of the peasants' uprising.

Goetz's political conversion does not mean the end of morality but, as M.-A. Burnier observes, indicates "que la morale ne se définit qu'au niveau d'une praxis concrète, engagée dans l'Histoire et attentive à la situation et à ses nécessités"⁴⁰. Since History is not fixed and static, man is constantly confronted with ever-changing situations and problems, and cannot therefore act according to permanent, unchanging moral principles. He does, however, act with a certain end in view and this provides the basis for the general orientation of each act. In political terms, this means working towards a self-regulating, classless society in which no individual or group of individuals can be used or exploited by another. "Notre liberté aujourd' hui," declared Sartre in reply to a letter by Camus, "n'est rien d'autre que le libre choix de lutter pour devenir libres"⁴¹. In this respect, Sartre's political outlook is far broader than it had been during the war years, when the aim of the Resistance was the overthrow of the Germans and not social revolution, and far closer to the aims and policies of the Communists, a development which is reflected in the change from the individualism of Oreste to Goetz's belief in collective action. "Le contraste entre le départ d'Oreste à la fin des Mouches et le ralliement de Goetz", comments Simone de Beauvoir, "illustre le chemin parcouru par Sartre de l'attitude anarchiste à l'engagement."⁴² Many critics are, however, more guarded on this point. P. Thody, for example, recognises the development in Sartre's ideas but claims that the political implications of Le Diable et le Bon Dieu remain exceedingly vague.⁴³ Marcel even goes as far as to contest the whole

40. Les Existentialistes et la politique, p. 83.

41. Situations, IV, Paris, Gallimard, 1964, p. 110.

42. La Force des choses, p. 261.

43. See Jean-Paul Sartre: A Literary and Political Study, p. 108.

political basis of Goetz's position. "L'espèce de prométhéisme qui s'affirme dans la dernière déclaration de Goetz," he writes, "permettrait de justifier n'importe quoi, y compris les horreurs nazies ou staliniennes."⁴⁴ This is not, in fact, a fair critical judgement since Goetz's final déclaration - "Il y a cette guerre à faire et je la ferai." (DD 282) - only becomes a glorification or justification of violence and tyranny when seen in isolation from the specific situation confronting him. Goetz does not choose to support the existing social order and ruthlessly stamp out all opposition or dissension, but decides to join the fight against such an order by defending the interests of a large and grossly underprivileged section of the community. Clearly Sartre is affirming his support for the activity of a revolutionary political party, but it is unreasonable to expect him to explore or analyse the exact nature of such activity in a work of fiction written for the stage. Nor does he examine in Le Diable et le Bon Dieu the exact nature of political morality although all forms of pure or absolute morality are clearly rejected. Exponents of the latter, like Hugo for example, are condemned by their very vision of life to remain enclosed in an unreal world totally unrelated to the basic facts of human existence. "Goetz succeeds where Hugo failed," writes A. Manser, "because he comes to terms with himself and the real world, reaches authenticity by a realistic assessment of his own situation."⁴⁵ Political commitment also means the end to the kind of idealism which persuades the individual that he will always be safe from unpleasant choices since he will always be free to base his choice on something of which he

44. Les Nouvelles littéraires, 26.12.1968.

45. Sartre: A Philosophic Study, p. 237.

approves. Goetz's support of the peasants explodes this form of idealism because it involves accepting all the unpleasant risks and consequences of a long, drawn out war. In this respect, the play mirrors very closely Sartre's own political experiences in the years following the Liberation. The failure of the R.D.R. and the ineffectual agitation of the non-Communist left had convinced Sartre that no real progress was possible towards socialism outside the Communist Party. "A partir de 1950", he declared, "on a compris qu'il n'était pas question de choisir ce que l'on peut aimer, mais selon une optique beaucoup plus générale. Il fallait se mettre du côté de ceux qui risquaient, de ceux que leur intérêt poussait à vouloir la paix, donc des Soviétiques."⁴⁶ Sartre's rapprochement with the Communists is reflected in Le Diable et le Bon Dieu, first performed in 1951, and in a series of articles written for Les Temps modernes the following year, entitled "Les communistes et la paix"⁴⁷.

Throughout his attempts at good and evil Goetz had lived in proud isolation from the rest of society, but the conversion to political action does not mean the end of his solitude. Having taken over the leadership of the army, he tells Nasty that he will remain "seul avec ce ciel vide au-dessus de (sa) tête, puisqu' (il) n'a pas d'autre manière d'être avec tous". (DD 282). C. Launay has suggested that Goetz is no nearer to the peasants than Hugo had been to people like Georges and Slick. "Mais n'y a-t-il pas, de Goetz aux paysans dont il épouse la révolte," he asks, "la même distance qu'entre Hugo dans Les Mains sales, qui veut liquider sa mauvaise conscience de bourgeois dans l'action militante, et ses compagnons

46. Interview with M.-A. Burnier in March, 1961. See Les Existentialistes et la politique, pp. 80-1.

47. These articles are reprinted in Situations, VI, pp. 80-384.

que la faim et l'humiliation ont conduits au Parti?"⁴⁸. This is not altogether true in that Goetz is fairly readily accepted by the peasants whereas Georges and Slick remain suspicious of Hugo, while he is also more authentically committed to action than Hugo; but Goetz realises that his new-found political solidarity with the peasants does not mean a loss of identity in a vast, impersonal collectivity. His situation is, in this respect, similar to that of Hoederer and the attitude and outlook of the two leaders is very striking, the basic difference lying in the fact that Hoederer is an established and experienced revolutionary and Goetz is a relatively inexperienced convert to political action. It is interesting to note that, according to Simone de Beauvoir, Goetz "est l'incarnation parfaite de l'homme d'action, tel que Sartre le concevait"⁴⁹, although F. Jeanson, suspicious of Goetz's sense of spectacle and inclination towards self-affirmation, prefers the greater maturity and more sober approach of Hoederer.⁵⁰ There is, however, one important aspect of Goetz's character not found in Hoederer in which Sartre was able to express something of his own personal experiences as an intellectual in his uneasy relationship with the Communist Party. Because he is a bastard, half-nobleman and half-commoner, Goetz has found himself occupying a difficult and ambiguous position in society, and deprived of any real sense of belonging. "Nous ne sommes pas et nous n'avons rien," he tells Heinrich, and then adds: "Depuis mon enfance, je regarde le monde par un trou de la serrure: c'est un beau petit oeuf bien plein où chacun occupe la place qui lui est assignée, mais je peux t'affirmer que nous ne sommes pas dedans." (DD 64).

48. Le Diable et le Bon Dieu, coll. "Profil d'une oeuvre", no. 15, Paris, Hatier, 1970, p. 44.

49. La Force des choses, p. 261.

50. See "Le théâtre de Sartre ou les hommes en proie à l'homme" in Livres de France, no. 1, janvier, 1966, p. 10.

In her comments on Le Diable et le Bon Dieu, Simone de Beauvoir emphasises the significance of this situation, "la bâtardise symbolisant la contradiction vécue par Sartre entre sa naissance bourgeoise et son choix intellectuel"⁵¹. By virtue of his great critical self-awareness the intellectual committed to political action is also sensitive to the conflict between individual and collective needs, between his own subjectivity and the objective aims of politics, and this is reflected in Goetz's basic solitude. A sentence written by Sartre to describe the political commitment of his friend Paul Nizan applies with equal force not only to Goetz but also to Sartre himself: "Au coeur de l'engagement collectif, il conserverait la singularité de son inquiétude."⁵² The relationship of an intellectual to a political party can never be based on a blind, unquestioning faith, while his acceptance by militant workers will always be coloured with some degree of resentment and distrust. Because of his idealism, Hugo merely exacerbates this situation whereas Goetz attains a greater degree of solidarity by actively involving himself in the peasants' uprising. The implications are clear: the barrier that exists between intellectuals and workers may never be completely overcome in a class-structured society, but in "praxis" people are brought together and united in a common cause. As an example of this, Sartre points to the events of May 1968 in Paris. "Le mur qui sépare les intellectuels des travailleurs n'est pas tombé," he writes, "mais la preuve a été faite qu'il pouvait disparaître dans une action commune."⁵³

The general reaction of the critics when Le Diable et le Bon Dieu was

51. La Force des choses, p. 261.

52. Situations, IV, pp. 180-1.

53. Situations, VIII, p. 218.

first performed in Paris was no more satisfactory than it had been for Les Mains sales. The violent and often blasphemous language of some of the characters, the scene in which Goetz attempted to win the confidence of the peasants by inducing them to believe that he had received the stigmata of Christ, and the final triumphant affirmation of the death of God contributed to a high degree of scandal and controversy with the play being described by R. Kemp as "un Soulier de satin athée et blasphématoire"⁵⁴ and by T. Maulnier as an "énorme mélodrame antireligieux"⁵⁵. After a successful run in Paris, there followed a short tour of North Africa which gave rise to numerous disturbances and even fights among the spectators and the play was then banned in several provincial towns in France. These incidents could scarcely have pleased Sartre since they merely served to divert attention away from the basic subject of the play which was not an attack on the Church but Goetz's discovery of a realistic and practical form of humanism. It is true that this humanism is incompatible with Goetz's experience of religious belief since the effect of his relationship with God is to blind him to the problems of man on earth. After his final confrontation with Heinrich, Goetz is, in fact, faced with a radical choice: to continue his relationship with God or to accept the imperfect world of men. In choosing the latter, he breaks free from his obsession with the absolute and discovers "une morale historique, humaine et particulière"⁵⁶. It is this conversion to humanism with which Sartre is primarily concerned and, as such, the death of God is merely presented

54. La Vie du théâtre, Paris, Albin Michel, 1956, p. 234.

55. Combat, 18.6.1951.

56. Un théâtre de situations, p. 269.

as an integral part of Goetz's awakening and certainly not as an end worth dramatising in itself.

The significance and theatrical effectiveness of Goetz's awakening has, however, been contested on the grounds that it is impossible to take his dedication to absolute good seriously (since it is merely a challenge to his pride) with the result that, never having experienced an authentic relationship with God, his humanism is, in the words of H. Lüthy, "une solution de pure rhétorique."⁵⁷ Certainly the dénouement does depend on our believing Goetz to be sincere in his pursuit of good, and this point is underlined by P. Ricoeur. "Cette monstration de l'inexistence de Dieu par l'imposture est l'étape nécessaire en direction du sens éthique, politique, révolutionnaire de la pièce," he writes. "Il faut que soit conquise la conviction que 'Dieu est mort' pour qu'une conscience guérie de l'absolu entre enfin dans la véracité du relatif"⁵⁸. P. Ricoeur was one of the few Catholic critics to find Goetz's search for absolute good an effective and convincing representation of religious faith. He maintains that, although some of Goetz's actions, notably in the stigmata scene, suggest that he is a conscious impostor, his bitter realisation that he is unable to prevent the peasants' uprising and that his attempts at good have failed is something which goes far deeper than a self-imposed mask of penitence. Goetz's initial imposture thus leads to what he imagines to be an authentic religious experience, a feeling of total nothingness in the eyes of God. The interpretation of Pierre Brasseur, who played the part of Goetz in the original production of the play by Louis Jouvet, may have contributed to possible misunderstandings on this question. Simone

57. "Jean-Paul Sartre et le Bon Dieu" in Preuves, no. 5, juillet, 1951, p. 10.

58. "Réflexions sur Le Diable et le Bon Dieu" in Esprit, no. 11, novembre, 1951, p. 716.

de Beauvoir recalls that he had begun by portraying "un Goetz étourdissant", but that "il jouait la deuxième partie en faux jeton alors que, dans sa folie d'orgueil, Goetz s'aliène sincèrement à un Bien mensonger ..."60.

Although the hostility of the Catholic critics to Le Diable et le Bon Dieu was not really unexpected, the hostility of the Communist press did come as a surprise. G. Leclerc rather contemptuously entitled his review "Le Diable et le Bon Dieu a fait bâiller le 'Tout Paris'", dismissed the subject as a grotesque caricature of revolutionary politics and tartly concluded: "M. Sartre reste l'auteur des Mains sales."61. E. Triolet was particularly critical of Sartre's attempt to establish a parallel between contemporary political problems and the situation in Germany at the time of the peasant revolt. "Or, comme cette analogie est faussee," she declared, "loin d'éclaircir les problèmes d'aujourd'hui, elle les fausse, et l'idéologie de l'auteur s'en trouve basée sur une absence de base ..."62. She found, for example, Nasty a totally unconvincing figure who bore as much resemblance to contemporary revolutionary leaders as did the crowds of ignorant, forlorn peasants to the industrialised working classes in 1950. It is true that it was Sartre's intention to evoke in Le Diable et le Bon Dieu some of the political problems and choices facing his generation, but he did not set out to write a purely symbolic play where each character and situation could be precisely interpreted in terms of the present. On the other hand, he did believe that he was justified in proposing an analogy between the situation of society and the problems facing the individual in post-war Europe and in sixteenth century Germany. In each case, ideal

60. La Force des choses, pp. 259-60.

61. L'Humanité-Dimanche, 17.6.1951.

62. Les Lettres françaises, 14.6.1951.

or absolute values were set against relative human values: on the one hand, a sincere longing for an ideal form of socialism conflicted with the necessity of choosing either Russia or America, while, on the other hand, the strength of the Church and of orthodox Christian belief was being eroded by a growing social conscience and awareness of basic material needs. Having found a period which could throw light on the basic issues raised by socialism in Europe in 1950, Sartre took care to depict as accurately as possible its language, beliefs and customs. All the main characters in Le Diable et le Bon Dieu, although fictitious, are representative of certain historical types. All of them act and think within a specifically religious frame of reference in keeping with the age of Luther and the Reformation. Nasty, for example, is a revolutionary leader expressing his ideas in the language and beliefs of the sixteenth century, and thus considers himself a prophet sent to enlighten the people. As for Goetz, his attempts to attain spiritual salvation by torturing his own body and scorning all material and temporal attachments may seem a distortion of authentic Christian doctrine, but they are not out of keeping with the intense religious fervour of the Reformation. One of his monologues, for example, was directly based on a text of St. John of the Cross and the scene in which he condemns Hilda's belief in human love was inspired from a quotation found in J. Huizinga's La Fin du moyen âge⁶³.

Like Simone de Beauvoir's Les Bouches inutiles, Le Diable et le Bon Dieu is basically an allegory in which a particular historical situation or period is dramatised to throw into relief a contemporary philosophical

63. These and other examples of textual borrowings incorporated in the play to enhance its historical accuracy are given by Sartre in Le Figaro littéraire, 30.6.1951.

and political question. The major difference between these two plays is that the action of Les Bouches inutiles is concentrated into a relatively short period of time during which the Council of Vaucilles must decide what course of action to adopt as the city's supplies of food gradually dwindle, whereas Le Diable et le Bon Dieu consists of several similarly dramatic moments or situations spanning a period of one year and one day. The play thus constitutes something of a chronicle made up of several widely differing tableaux ranging from Goetz's military camp outside Worms to the peaceful community set up at Atweiler. At the outset, the spectators' interest is centred on Goetz's pursuit of evil, during which the fate of Worms seems balanced on a knife's edge, and this opening section culminates in Goetz being challenged to do good and deciding the question by a game of dice. From this point, our attention focusses on his efforts at good. First, he tries to win over the confidence of the peasants, a battle he seems to be losing until, in desperation, he resorts to stabbing his hands to convince the peasants that he has received the stigmata of Christ. The future of the "Cité du Soleil" is then threatened by growing unrest in other areas and we are left wondering if Goetz will be able to forestall the uprising and protect his community. He fails to do this and, after his efforts to reach saintliness through self-mortification, our interest shifts to his confrontation with Heinrich. The play ends with one more coup de théâtre as Goetz casts aside his preoccupation with being and devotes himself to a life of political action. Sartre lightens the overall tone of his work by introducing comic interludes, notably in his satirical treatment of the Archbishop and the banker, and later in the scene in which Goetz finds his popularity challenged by Tetzl's sale of indulgences. These moments of light relief help to bring variety and balance, and must be a very welcome diversion in a play which, in performance, runs for about four hours.

Le Diable et le Bon Dieu is dominated by its central character to a far greater extent than any other of Sartre's previous plays. Goetz is, in fact, an enthralling and fascinating theatrical figure, - a fearsome, arrogant adventurer with a taste for the spectacular in words as well as in deeds. Although the basic political and philosophical message of the play and most of the moments of particular theatrical effect are directly related to Goetz's progressive self-enlightenment, Sartre does not make the mistake of turning the play into an inner monologue, but constructs it around a series of confrontations and dialogues. In Les Mains sales such confrontations had been limited to the two main characters, whereas in Le Diable et le Bon Dieu there are several vivid and memorable exchanges notably between Nasty and Heinrich, two rival spokesmen for the poor, Nasty and Goetz, representing two different sides to human action, and between Goetz and Hilda, opposing religious and human love. In these exchanges, words and ideas tend to predominate over actions. "Ici la scène sert ouvertement à illustrer une théorie plus qu'à cerner une réalité," writes B. Poirot-Delpech, "à incarner une dialectique, à grossir une pensée, à forcer la voix."⁶⁴ He sees the traditional stage rites being transformed into "une véritable conférence dialoguée"⁶⁵, but this does not necessarily mean that the theatrical experience is any less powerful for it. In fact, the ideas expounded on the stage hold the spectators' interest and attention because, far from being abstract intellectual concepts, they reflect a particularly dynamic situation or confrontation. In the first tableau, for example, Nasty and Heinrich do not theorise abstractedly about their respective roles as leaders of the people but forcibly denounce each other's

64. Le Monde, 23.11.1968.

65. Ibid.

beliefs with clear and incisive language with the result that the dramatist is able to present the conflict of ideas in a manner which is unquestionably theatrical:

Heinrich: Tu ne fais peut-être pas de mensonge, mais tu ne dis pas la vérité.

Nasty: Je ne dis pas la tienne: je dis la nôtre. Et, si Dieu aime les pauvres, c'est la nôtre qu'il fera sienne au jour du Jugement.

Heinrich: Eh bien, laisse-lui juger l'Évêque. Mais ne verse pas le sang de l'Église.

Nasty: Je ne connais qu'une Église: c'est la société des hommes.

Heinrich: De tous les hommes, alors, de tous les chrétiens liés par l'amour. Mais toi, tu inaugures ta société par un massacre.

Nasty: Il est trop tôt pour aimer. Nous en achèterons le droit en versant le sang. (DD 40-1).

There have been two major productions of Le Diable et le Bon Dieu in Paris, the first in 1951 by Louis Jouvet and the second in 1968 by Georges Wilson. Each production emphasised a different aspect of the play. Louis Jouvet's production turned out to be his last theatrical engagement before he died. He was clearly interested in the epic qualities of Sartre's play and in turning it into a lavish spectacle, and no effort or expense was spared with this end in view. The programme notes revealed the enormous amount of work that had gone into the production: widening the stage, adjusting stage equipment, fitting 38 spotlights, preparing and designing ten different tableaux and 90 costumes. Over 100 technicians had been involved in the preparation for Le Diable et le Bon Dieu and the number of actors and back-stage personnel involved in the actual performance came to 121. The numerous crowd scenes helped add to the overall grandeur and spectacle, while the subject itself with its important political implications and splendid historical "cadre" is one of the most ambitious of all Sartre's plays. "C'est magnifiquement monté et superbement joué," commented

R. Kemp on Jouvet's production. "Le théâtre Antoine est allé à la bataille avec une vaillance qui doit être admirée et récompensée."⁶⁶ The contrast with the sober and discreet staging of the play by the T.N.P. under the direction of Georges Wilson could not be more marked. The latter's interest lay more in the political and philosophical content of the play and he thus greatly reduced the element of spectacle, relying on the forcefulness and resonance of the spoken word. "A part quelques mouvements de foules en haillons terreux sur dalles noires," noted B. Poirot-Delpech with evident approval, "le spectacle se réduit, inévitablement et heureusement, à des duos presque statiques détournant le moins possible l'attention de ce qui est dit, et qui est tout."⁶⁷ It is probable that the two actors who played the part of Goetz also contributed to the different tone of the two productions: the flamboyant Pierre Brasseur emphasising Goetz's grandiloquence, and the more restrained François Périer capturing in Goetz something of the anxiety and insecurity of Hugo (whom Périer had played in the original production of Les Mains sales). Finally, it is interesting to note that Georges Wilson's revival of Le Diable et le Bon Dieu came just a few months after the events of May 1968. There is little doubt that its political message was considerably enhanced by the agitation and unrest of that year which were felt throughout Western Europe, and the production is considered by M. Contat and M. Rybalka not only to have been an outstanding success, but also to have played a major part in the rebirth in France of political drama.⁶⁸

66. La Vie du théâtre, p. 237.

67. Le Monde, 23.11.1968.

68. See introduction to Un théâtre de situations, p. 11.

CHAPTER 7

The Final Period: Freedom and Social Conditioning

In Sartre's early plays, written and performed between 1943 and 1946, the loss of personal identity had not been directly related to the individual's social and political situation. In other words, the emphasis had been on personal attitudes and decisions rather than on external pressures and forces. Les Mouches and Huis clos, for example, denounced the attitude of those who sought to evade their freedom and responsibility by protesting their helplessness and inability to change their life, as well as of those whose actions were governed by the opinions and reactions of other people or by pre-conceived ideas. It is true that there are important social and political implications in Les Mouches and also in La Putain respectueuse, and that Égiste's temporal order and the Senator's defence of white supremacy provide a hint of the kind of social forces against which the individual must frequently struggle. But, at this stage of his work, Sartre had not looked closely at the possible effect of such forces on individual freedom. Ultimately, the people in Argos and the respectful prostitute had been presented with an unconstrained and unconditioned choice: to accept or to reject the voice of authority. "Dans n'importe quelle circonstance, dans n'importe quel temps et dans n'importe quel lieu," Sartre had written about his first four plays, "l'homme est libre de se choisir traître ou héros, lâche ou vainqueur."¹ Referring to this rather summary appraisal of the human condition, Sartre declared recently in an interview: "C'est incroyable: je le pensais vraiment!"² He had already begun to examine some of the practical problems of commitment in Les Mains sales and Le Diable et le Bon Dieu, emphasising

1. Un théâtre de situations, p.244.

2. Situations, IX, p.100.

the extent to which political action necessarily entails a severe curtailment of individual freedom. For the first time, too, there was a glimpse of the way in which the individual's future could be affected by his past. Hugo, for example, struggles unsuccessfully to shake off the intellectual torment and moral scruples which he has inherited from his middle-class upbringing, while Goetz's pursuit of the absolute is directly attributable to his initial rejection by society. Le Diable et le Bon Dieu ends on a far more positive and hopeful note than Les Mains sales because Goetz is ultimately able to come to terms with the present and with the demands of political commitment. In Sartre's next three plays, however, the individual does not shake off quite so easily the effects of upbringing and social environment which are seen to play a large and sometimes decisive part in the formation of his intellect and character, and in the curtailment of his freedom. There is also another way in which Sartre's rather simplistic theory of freedom is refuted in the later plays, namely man's confrontation with a situation which denies him any real choice (as between treachery and heroism, for example). It is with the character of Heinrich in Le Diable et le Bon Dieu that Sartre first examines such a situation. As a priest, Heinrich owes allegiance to the Church which supports the existing social order and which is therefore on the side of the rich: but Heinrich was born among the poor people of Worms for whom he feels particular affection and sympathy. When they rebel and imprison the Bishop and his followers in the palace, Heinrich is left alone, free to choose between the Church and the poor, while knowing that whatever choice he makes is a betrayal of one side or the other. "Ce n'est pas assez de dire qu'il y a conflit en lui," observed Sartre. "Il est lui-même conflit. Et le problème, pour lui, est absolument sans solution, car il est mystifié jusqu'à la moelle."³

3. Samedi-Soir, 2.6.1951.

The sombre but somewhat isolated elements of Les Mains sales and Le Diable et le Bon Dieu indicate an important evolution in Sartre's thought and set the tone for his later work where he is no longer directly concerned with political action and with the hope of collective freedom, but concentrates his attention on situations which emphasise the extent to which the individual's freedom may be threatened, suppressed and even turned against him. At first sight, it may seem rather surprising that such sombre preoccupations should have found expression in a play like Kean⁴ which Sartre adapted from a work by Dumas and which, according to Simone de Beauvoir, he wrote "en quelques semaines et en s'amusant beaucoup."⁵ It was, in fact, the actor Pierre Brasseur who first spoke of Dumas' play to Sartre during performances of Le Diable et le Bon Dieu, hoping to persuade Sartre to rewrite the play for him. There were several reasons why Sartre accepted Brasseur's proposals. He clearly felt a certain debt to him for his part in the success of Le Diable et le Bon Dieu and was, at the same time, a great enthusiast of nineteenth century melodrama. The adaptation also involved a challenge of a purely technical nature, that of modernisation. Finally, the play enabled Sartre to explore a question in which he had become increasingly interested since his involvement with the theatre and his acquaintance with people like Brasseur, namely the psychology of the professional actor. Whereas Dumas had been primarily concerned with dramatising the turbulent life of a famous English actor whose energies were devoted as much to wild, irresponsible merry-making as to his activities on the stage (hence the subtitle Désordre et génie), Sartre was interested in such events only in as much as they reflected the inner conflict of a tortured and divided person who assumes the identity of a "monstre sacré".

4. All textual references are taken from Kean, Paris, Gallimard, 1954, and will be incorporated in the thesis in the following abbreviated form: (K..). Eg. (K20) = Kean, p.20.

5. La Force des choses, p.320.

His adaptation thus concentrates on the question of reality and illusion, doing and appearing, the "acte" and the "geste", and bears certain similarities with Huis clos. Just as Garcin and Estelle, for example, have forsaken self-determination to uphold a certain image or appearance, so Kean finds that the mask adopted for the stage continues into his private life, with the result that each of his actions is often no more than a theatrical pose. There is also a striking similarity between the triangle of relationships involving Garcin, Estelle and Inès and those between Kean, Elena and the Prince of Wales. Each of the three characters in Kean has tried to establish a certain identity in the eyes of other people and, in their relationship with each other, each has tried to use or exploit the other for his or her own ends. Elena needed Kean for the glorification of love, Kean sought in Elena revenge for his rejection by high society, and the Prince of Wales wanted to capture Kean's experience of love by pursuing Elena himself. "Nous vivons tous trois de l'amour des autres et nous sommes tous trois incapables d'aimer," Kean tells Elena. "Tu voulais mon amour; moi le tien, lui le nôtre. Quel chassé-croisé!" (K199).

The main difference between Huis clos and Kean is that, in the former, the psychology of the three characters is not related to a specific social context. The play thus suggests that Garcin, Estelle and Inès are types rather than examples of a particular age and society. In Kean, on the other hand, the conflict and turmoil of the main character can only be fully understood within the context of nineteenth century England. Kean is, to a large extent, a victim of his social condition - something over which he has no control - whereas no external circumstances had seemingly denied the characters in Huis clos a life of free and responsible action, and the spectator is not encouraged to feel any real sympathy for them. When Kean, however, tells Anna that one does not act to earn a living but "pour mentir, pour se mentir, pour être ce qu'on ne peut pas être et parce qu'on en a assez d'être ce qu'on est"(K81), his conscious refusal to face up to reality does not meet with

forthright condemnation because we are aware of the social pressures to which he has been continually subjected since his childhood. In Dumas' play, Kean is depicted as a paria who is rejected by bourgeois society, but the author makes no further comment on this situation, whereas Sartre forcibly emphasises, as he had done in his study of Genet, the power of society to transform an individual into an object of opprobrium, especially when this individual is a bastard and therefore born a misfit and an outcast. Just as Genet had been forced into the role of a thief, so Kean finds that society has accorded him the function of an entertainer. On stage, he provides the necessary diversion and amusement for an audience which finds reality unsatisfying. "Dame! c'est que les hommes sérieux ont besoin d'illusion," Kean tells the Prince of Wales: "entre deux maquignonnages, ils aiment à croire qu'on peut vivre et mourir pour autre chose que du fromage." (K64). Faced from his earliest days by an unsympathetic and intolerant social order, Kean had been forced into a role which had gradually undermined his whole existence, alienating him further and further from his real identity as a human being. It is for this reason that he tells his audience that the real Kean "est mort en bas âge" (K166). The audience does not, however, understand the significance of this remark, taking it to be some kind of joke, but Kean silences the laughter with an angry outburst. "Taisez-vous donc, assassins," he cries, "c'est vous qui l'avez tué! C'est vous qui avez pris un enfant pour en faire un monstre!" (K166).

As in La Putain respectueuse, Sartre exposes the cynicism and complacency with which the ruling class tries to uphold its power and privileges while denying certain groups or individuals basic human rights. Thus, although Kean is tolerated by the aristocracy as an entertainer, he will never be respected as a man. The Count therefore justifies inviting Kean to dinner by observing: "Est-ce qu'on invite ces gens-là? Disons que je me suis assuré les services d'un bouffon" (K23). The

absurdity of such a rigid social order is that rights and values are related to one's position in society - something which is, to a large extent, predetermined and fixed before one is born - and not to merit. This is a situation which Kean pretends to uphold when he tells the Count that, whereas an actor's word will not be believed, no one dare doubt the word of an ambassador who has "un honneur héréditaire" and therefore "droit au respect par naissance"(K33). Respect, honour and dignity are privileges of tradition and of birth, and Kean knows that these privileges will always be denied him. In a bitter confrontation with Lord Mewill, Kean ironically observes that the former's standing forbids him to fight with a mere actor. "Vous êtes Lord et je suis saltimbanque," he says, "donc nous ne nous battons pas."(K111). But whereas Mewill owes his position in society to what has been given to him, Kean reflects with some satisfaction that he has cheated nobody and has earned what little respect people may have for him. In fact, it is only with those of his own class that Kean is able to experience a relationship where he is recognised and treated as an equal and where he is not confronted with a distorted image of himself. He has particular affection for the members of the travelling circus with whom he once performed, and they, in turn, respect and admire him. "Pour eux," Kean tells Salomon, "je suis un homme, comprends-tu, et ils le croient si fort qu'ils finiront par m'en persuader."(A99). Kean realises that between himself and the Prince of Wales, for example, there will always be an insurmountable barrier because of their unequal social position. "Il n'y a d'amitié qu'entre égaux, prince," says Kean in a line taken straight from Dumas, "et il y a autant de vanité à vous de m'avoir dans votre voiture que de sottise à moi d'y monter."(K148).

In his book on Genet, Sartre explains how "l'homme de Bien" refuses to recognise evil as his own possibility but projects it on to another person or group with the reassuring conclusion that "le méchant, c'est

l'Autre."⁶ In time of war, it is one's adversaries who embody evil, in time of peace society itself must be divided and a class of individuals found who are "méchants de naissance et sans espoir de changement."⁷ The sharp division of power and privileges in Kean shows how such an insidious philosophy is put into practice. Kean knows himself to have in principle the same human rights as any other person but, in practice, bourgeois society treats him as "l'Autre", an individual without rights fit only to be exploited and abused. Kean's angry outbursts are therefore directed, to a large extent, against the society that has tried to exploit him as an actor and ignore him as a man. His passion for Elena is not motivated by feelings of love or admiration, but by a desire to avenge himself on the nobility. The Prince of Wales sees through the lover's guise and tells Kean that "c'est nous, c'est nous que tu poursuis en Elena, nous les vrais hommes" (K67). Later Kean admits to Elena that, for a bastard, "c'est flatteur de tromper une Excellence" (K198), and such is his sensitivity and pride that he feels deeply humiliated by the qualities and status which are denied him. "La beauté, c'est humiliant," he tells Anna. "Humiliant, comprenez-vous? La beauté, la noblesse: c'est hors d'atteinte" (K76).

Kean's revolt is important because it shows that despite the force of social conditioning, he does not passively accept the identity reserved for him by bourgeois society. That he is able to avoid being totally enslaved by its laws and values is an indication of his basic freedom. Although we, as individuals, are conditioned by our social context, the most important aspect of our life, claims Sartre, "n'est pas ce qu'on fait de nous mais ce que nous faisons nous-même de ce qu'on a fait de nous."⁸ Kean's revolt is an expression of Sartre's more sober

6. Saint Genet, comédien et martyr, p.34.

7. Ibid, p.35.

8. Ibid., p.55.

conception of a freedom severely restricted and limited by the individual's social and political background. If his early propositions concerning individual freedom were to be upheld, Kean would, like Oreste, be able to challenge the order which tries to fix his social function by direct political action, but this would ignore the fact that society has made him into an actor. His revolt tends, therefore, to be theatrically conceived and enacted. He proudly imagines himself raining blows on Lord Mewill - "Cogner sur un Lord pour de vrai: mon r ve!"(K108) - but ultimately he wants to be accepted by the aristocracy and not to bring it down. He also uses the stage as a means of capturing through his dramatic creations some of the nobility and grandeur which society has denied him. His attempts at self-reinstatement are therefore both unrealistic (since bourgeois society will never open its doors to him) and escapist (since he substitutes the imaginary for real life). The play does, however, end on an optimistic note with Kean, having realised the futility and theatricality of his previous gestures, modestly deciding to begin a normal down-to-earth existence. "Ce sont les enfants qui se battent," he tells the Count. "Et les nobles. Et je me suis aper u cette nuit que je n' tais plus des uns et que je ne serai jamais des autres."(K206).

There is a striking similarity not only between Goetz and Kean, both of whom, born into a world which rejects them, initially react with ineffectual gestures of defiance before coming to terms with themselves and with their situation in the world, but, more particularly, between Genet and Kean. Indeed, some of Kean's remarks are so close to several of those in Saint Genet, com dien et martyr that there can be no doubt that Sartre intended to establish a parallel between the two figures. Commenting on this point, D. Bradby writes that "in the historical Kean, (Sartre) found echoes of his social preoccupations at that time; the play was written one year after Saint Genet, com dien et martyr, which presented a picture of Genet deformed by society's rejection of him,

just as Kean, actor and bastard, was rejected by nineteenth-century England."⁹ In both works bourgeois society is shown to propagate the myth of its own natural rights and privileges, and to reject those who are not born within its narrow circle. Revolt against society leads Genet to become a poet, and Kean a stormy and unpredictable "monstre sacré". Neither choice is intrinsically laudable but each has a certain instrumental value in liberating the individual from a state of complete social enslavement and reduction to the level of a passive, dehumanised object. The same is true of the choice made by the hero of the next play Sartre was to write, Nekrassov,¹⁰ where Georges de Valera finds himself, very much like Genet and Kean, in an extreme situation of abandonment and neglect, "orphelin de père et de mère, acculé depuis l'enfance à choisir entre le génie ou la mort"(N81). Genet's genius is expressed in his poetry, that of Kean on the stage, while Georges finds fame as a swindler and confidence trickster. Like Kean, Georges' revolt is directed against bourgeois society, although neither of them, in fact, wants to undermine its prestige and power. Kean takes revenge on the ruling class by trying to seduce women like Elena, while secretly longing to be accepted by it, and Georges, who sponges off the rich, necessarily wants to preserve the system which ensures his livelihood.

The main theme of Nekrassov is that of the "trompeur trompé", and here Sartre was able to emphasise how easy it is to get caught up in a situation where actions, far from having the intended results, turn against the person who has undertaken them. At the beginning of the play, Georges is unexpectedly prevented from committing suicide by two tramps, and thus feels frustrated at having failed to achieve what he had set out to do. He prides himself on being "fils de (ses) oeuvres"(N18),

9. Introduction, Kean, London, Oxford University Press, 1973, p.3.

10. All textual references are taken from Nekrassov, Paris, Gallimard, 1956 and will be incorporated in the thesis in the following abbreviated form: (N..). Eg. (N11) = Nekrassov, p.11.

the sole arbiter of his life and acts who owes no debt of respect or gratitude to any man. He is totally independent and self-sufficient, trusting in no one other than himself, and his pride and isolationism recall the attitude initially adopted by Goetz. Georges soon finds his enthusiasm for life returning when, having found a temporary refuge from the police in the house of Véronique, a young journalist for a left-wing newspaper, he overhears a conversation between Véronique and her father who is desperately seeking some sensational anti-Communist news for his own paper, Soir à Paris. The recent disappearance of Nekrassov, an important Russian minister, provides Georges with the idea of posing as Nekrassov and thus providing Soir à Paris with all the information it requires to boost its ailing anti-Communist campaign. Georges is perfectly at home in his new role and delighted with his success. His first revelation - that a list has been prepared containing the names of 100,000 Frenchmen to be executed when the Russians have occupied France - becomes immediate headline news for Soir à Paris, and his request that he be provided with a hotel room, two bodyguards, new clothes and some money is met without question.

The fifth tableau shows Georges at the height of his success. He is installed in a luxurious hotel suite surrounded by enormous bouquets of flowers sent by devoted anti-Communists, and content in the knowledge that Soir à Paris has doubled its circulation since the announcement of Nekrassov's defection. Like Goetz, Georges glories in his seemingly limitless power. "J'ai le pouvoir suprême," he proudly announces to Sibilot, "je suis l'éminence grise du Pacte Atlantique, je tiens la guerre et la paix dans mes mains, j'écris l'histoire, Sibilot, j'écris l'histoire....Sais-tu que j'ai rêvé de cet instant toute ma vie?"(N124). The discovery that the real Nekrassov is reported to be about to return to Moscow does not deter Georges: he confidently sets about inventing a story which will prove that the real Nekrassov is, in fact, an imposter. Already, however, there is a hint of the trap which Georges

is unwittingly preparing for himself when he tries to dissuade Sibilot from revealing his real identity by reminding him of the political and economic issues dependent on his false declarations. Georges has received telegrams or letters from three important heads of state, while the renewed vigour of the anti-Communist campaign has intensified the Cold War and increased the production of war weapons. "De gros intérêts sont en jeu," Georges tells Sibilot; "Nekrassov, ce n'est plus seulement moi: c'est un nom générique pour les dividendes que touchent les actionnaires des fabriques d'armements." (N130). He ends by warning Sibilot that, even if he wanted to give himself up, he would be powerless to arrest the progress of the complex machinery which he had helped put into motion. "Tu as mis la machine en marche: c'est vrai," says Georges. "Mais elle te broiera si tu essayes de l'arrêter." (N130). Georges is, however, blind to the fact that he is just as powerless as Sibilot. Although he realises that it is now too late to start retracting, he deludes himself into thinking that everything is ultimately dependent on what he says or does. Georges has a forewarning of the extent to which he has lost control of the situation when he is visited by Madame Castagnié, a former employee of Soir à Paris. Although Georges had declared that she and six other employees of the newspaper had been working for the Communists, he had not intended that they lose their job but had, in fact, hoped to render them a service by suggesting to the committee of directors that the best way to discredit them in the eyes of the Communists was to increase their salary. Georges now realises, however, that he has miscalculated the effect of his declarations, the mood he has created being less one of fear than one of hate. He begins to see that his position depends on the manipulation of forces of which he has very little experience or understanding and whose effect he clearly does not fully foresee. "La haine est une passion que je n'éprouve pas moi-même," he admits to himself: "je suis obligé de manier des forces terribles et que je connais imparfaitement."

(N136). Georges is also unaware of the extremely grave political consequences of statements which he had imagined to be harmless, such as his recent declaration that "l'ouvrier russe est le plus malheureux de la terre"(N142). Far from being "une plaisanterie sans conséquence" (N142), Véronique points out the possible effect of such a declaration on the readers of Soir à Paris, most of whom would belong to the French working class. They would be encouraged to believe that, despite the inadequacies of their own bourgeois controlled society, such a state was infinitely preferable to the oppressive form of socialism practised in Russia. Unwittingly Georges finds that he is contributing to the increasing mystification and exploitation of the poor, thus strengthening the power of the rich and classifying himself as a reactionary. Worse is to follow, however, for Georges now finds himself faced with the political consequences of certain statements attributed to him which he has not, in fact, made. Thus Véronique shows him an article in which he had supposedly admitted knowing two left-wing journalists who had been prominent in the campaign against the rearmament of Germany, a statement clearly intended to discredit the two journalists by implying that they were in the pay of the Russians.

Georges does not really become aware of his own powerlessness until he tries to rectify the way the situation has developed by asking that the seven employees of Soir à Paris be immediately reinstated, and that the paper officially recognise that Nekrassov did not, in fact, know Duval and Maistre. Nerciat promises to pass on Georges' first request to the committee of directors - a promise which Georges knows amounts to little more than a polite refusal - while his second request is flatly refused. As far as Soir à Paris is concerned, Georges' usefulness has been extremely short-lived. He had helped to revive the anti-Communist campaign of the right-wing press, but the public's interest is being rapidly exhausted by a surfeit of extreme and sensational declarations and, within a short period of time, the paper's distribution will be

back to normal. "On redescendra à 900 000; et qu'est-ce que tu auras été?" asks Jules. "Une montée en flèche de nos ventes, une dégringolade en flèche et puis plus rien: la mort." (N167). For the Ministry of Defence, however, Georges still has an important role to play, but again he finds that he is being used as a means to an end, as a pawn in the hands of the reaction. Pressure is being brought on him to give false evidence against Duval and Maistre as the first step in stifling the voice of the opposition. At this point, Georges realises the extent to which his original plan which had been carefully thought out has turned against him: he is no longer the agent, but has become the victim of acts which he had freely undertaken. He has, like Kean, been used and exploited by society. Kean had served as an entertainer, Georges as a political weapon, and the personal identity of each has been totally suppressed. Georges is treated with complete cynicism and impersonality by the newspaper and then by the Ministry of Defence, and even for the general public he soon realises that he will never be treated as an ordinary individual, only as an object to be passionately adored or reviled. There is a frightening divorce between the real man and the myth that surrounds him. "Est-il possible qu'un seul homme fasse l'objet de tout cet amour, de toute cette haine?" asks Georges as he is about to make an appearance at the party held by Madame Bounoumi. "Rassure-moi, Sibilot: ce n'est pas moi qu'on aime, ce n'est pas moi qu'on déteste; je ne suis qu'une image?" (N158).

The play thus ends with a grimly ironic twist, a cruel reminder that one's acts do not always have the results that one intended, and that the individual may be the unwitting cause of his own objectification and exploitation at the hands of society. "Gauche, droite, centre; je vous ai tous dans ma main," (N141), Georges had proudly declared to Véronique, but already she and the audience can see that he is no more than, in Sartre's own words, "un simple rouage du système."¹¹ When

11. L'Humanité-Dimanche, 19.6.1955.

Georges himself realises this, he decides to abandon his pose as Nekrassov and reveal the truth about his imposture to Libérateur, the left-wing newspaper of which Véronique is a journalist. Although he is now allying himself with a paper whose aim is not bourgeois propaganda but objective, political facts, there is no indication of a basic change in his outlook. Indeed, despite his chastening experience posing as Nekrassov, Georges continues to believe in his ability to manipulate others and to trust in his genius as a master swindler. "J'ai fini par gagner," he tells Véronique: "il publiera la prose d'un escroc, ton journal progressiste. Moi, cela ne me changera guère: je dictais au papa, je dicterai à sa fille."(N196).

Although Nekrassov centres around Georges, his adventures are really only interesting in as much as they expose and throw light on the complex social machinery in a bourgeois controlled state. Apart from Georges' own manipulation and exploitation in the anti-Communist campaign, the play emphasises two further sources of personal alienation - the use of propaganda and the social conditioning of income. Soir à Paris is seen to be a tool in the hands of the state since its whole presentation of facts depends on the political interests of the government. "Je suis un journal objectif, un journal gouvernemental," declares Jules with exaggerated pomp and dignity, "et mes opinions sont immuables tant que le gouvernement ne change pas les siennes."(N49). His paper prides itself on objectivity - "Vérité toute nue"(N165) - which is, in fact, pure political propaganda. Some of the anti-Communist propaganda of Soir à Paris is crude and unrefined, although, as Georges himself discovers, it is extremely effective since it preys on hatred and fear: at other times, the technique is far more refined and subtle. When Jules suggests that the paper organise regular collections for the poor, publishing the results of the collection each week, he is horrified by the suggestion that the money be given to the homeless in France. "Tu es fou!" he cries. "Il faut que nos sinistrés soient victimes de

catastrophes strictement naturelles: sinon, tu vas galvauder l'amour dans des histoires sordides d'injustice sociale."(N41). By emphasising the hardship caused by catastrophes such as earthquakes or flooding, the paper is able to divert the reader's attention away from a far more significant aspect of human suffering and misfortune - namely its political dimension. At the same time, the paper will induce its readers to believe in the basic generosity and charity of men, thus countering any mood of dissatisfaction or desire for change. "Voilà ce que j'appelle, moi, la meilleure propagande contre le communisme "(N41), declares Jules with great satisfaction. The paper also helps to maintain the belief that good and evil are not the possibility of each individual but, as in Kean, are clear-cut social attributes. Thus, when news of Nekrassov's apparent defection is first released, Jules suggests that his own photo and that of the Soviet minister be put side by side on the first page "pour garder le contraste du Bien et du Mal" (N43). Sibilot, himself a journalist of Soir à Paris, reveals the extent to which he is mystified by this particular form of propaganda when he calmly tells Georges: "Un criminel est un criminel!"(N79). Georges recognises in him the ideal "honnête homme", a man whose belief in the values propagated by the ruling class is firm and unshakeable. "On voit, monsieur, que vous n'avez jamais douté du Bien...", Georges tells him, "...et que vous n'écoutez pas ces doctrines subversives qui font du criminel un produit de la société."(N79).

Sibilot also reflects the conditioning of a man who is tied by his income to a clearly defined social status. He is deferential to the point of servility with his superiors while meekly carrying out his own specific social function. The result is that, far from being free from material constraints and from experiencing a deep sense of human values, he knows himself to be "un homme très ordinaire qui a dilapidé sa substance grise pour soixante-dix mille francs par mois"(N72-3). When Goblet first visits Sibilot's house, the inspector immediately recognises

a life style close to his own. The two men, although working in entirely different capacities, one as a policeman, the other as a journalist, have the same social position and both of them experience the intense feeling of humiliation and deprivation which that position implies. "Voilà bien ce qui me plaît, dans votre intérieur," Goblet tells Sibilot: "c'est qu'il sent la gêne et l'humilité fière. Enfin j'enquête chez un égal: chez moi-même, en quelque sorte!"(N86). Their mutual respect and understanding stem from the conformity of their experience which is itself a direct result of their social conditioning. They are, as R.Barthes points out, "des hommes aliénés par leur soixante - dix mille francs par mois, unis dans une même condition de servitude à l'égard de cet Ordre qui les compromet en les employant"¹²

Sartre had two main aims in writing Nekrassov. First of all, he hoped to contribute to the easing of East-West relations at that particular time and to promote a more tolerant and understanding attitude towards the Communists by ridiculing the obsessive and inflammatory anti-Communist propaganda of much of the French press. "Je veux apporter une contribution d'écrivain à la lutte pour la paix,"¹³ he declared in an interview with G.Leclerc. His second aim was to draw attention to the oppressive conditions of life and their enslavement of the individual in the so-called free societies of Western Europe. It would be quite wrong to see Nekrassov as an attack on certain individuals or groups of individuals like the directors and journalists of Soir à Paris, for Sartre's main interest lay not in people like Jules and Sibilot but in the system of which they are, to a large extent, the victims. "Ce sont les institutions, les structures qui déterminent les hommes," he declared. "J'ai montré mes personnages victimes d'une situation plutôt que d'un caractère....C'est pourquoi une satire de gauche doit être une satire

12. "Nekrassov juge de sa critique" in Théâtre populaire, no.14, juillet-août, 1955, p.70.

13. L'Humanité, 8.6.1955.

des institutions et non des individus."¹⁴ In this respect, Nekrassov presents an interesting contrast with Marcel Aymé's La Tête des autres¹⁵ which had been performed for the first time in Paris in 1952 - three years before Nekrassov. La Tête des autres exposes the corrupt social order of an imaginary country, Poldarie, showing that two eminent "procureurs" are more concerned with their own self-advancement than with the cause of truth and justice. In fact, the "justice" of the law courts is invariably seen to have little in common with the real facts of the case. The cause of such corruption and cynicism, however, is not political necessity, but the fallibility of human nature. As Roberte, the wife of one of the "procureurs", says at the end of the play: "Que veux-tu, l'injustice est en nous, dans notre sang et dans notre chair."¹⁶ Sartre is therefore justified in pointing out that, although the play constituted an excellent satire of a corrupt legal system, "ce n'était pas l'ensemble de la justice, une justice de classe, qui était en cause".¹⁷ In other words, whereas La Tête des Autres implies that with better, more conscientious legal representatives there will be a greater degree of justice, Nekrassov shows that a more truthful and objective form of journalism can only be achieved by challenging the political cause which people like Jules and Sibilot serve and uphold: Soir à Paris cannot, in fact, do anything other than induce in its readers a deep fear and distrust of Communism because it is the government's intention to stifle the voice of the left and protect the interests of the class in power.

14. L'Humanité-Dimanche, 19.6.1955.

15. Paris, Grasset, 1952.

16. La Tête des autres, p.174. It is interesting to note that Sartre bitterly attacked Aymé's first play, Vogue la galère, Paris, Grasset, 1944, for its insistence on an irremediably weak human nature. See Les Écrits de Sartre, p.102.

17. L'Humanité-Dimanche, 19.6.1955.

Commenting on the similarity between Kean and Nekrassov, D.McCall observes: "Both protagonists, the actor and the adventurer, make their livelihood by pretending that they are what they are not. Each discovers that it is he who has been mystified, forced by society into a role which does not permit him to exist as a man."¹⁸ Clearly both plays contain some exceedingly sombre elements which could provide the basis for a genuinely tragic conflict between man and society. Since, however, they are comedies they end on an optimistic, if somewhat forced note, with both Kean and Georges realising the extent of their mystification and leaving the stage a wiser and more guarded person. The attitude of defiant individual revolt which they had adopted towards the order which had rejected them and prevented them from holding a respected position in society is understandable but totally ineffectual, and, in this respect, both plays reinforce the basic political message of Le Diable et le Bon Dieu. Kean, which is less overtly political in theme and subject matter than Nekrassov, was received without hostility, but met with only moderate success. Many critics agreed that the play was only made memorable by the performance of Pierre Brasseur as Kean.¹⁹ It is certain that, had Sartre been able to spend more time over his adaptation, he would have examined in greater detail the psychological effect on Kean of his birth and upbringing. Unfortunately, his research into the life of the actor (which had clearly developed into a very real interest by the time the play was ready for performance as evidenced by a long interview with R.Saurel²⁰) came too late for him to give more than a fleeting glimpse of the interaction between the actor and society. Significantly, however, in the first volume of his book on Flaubert,²¹

18. The Theatre of Jean-Paul Sartre, p.102.

19. See, for example, J.-J. Gautier in Le Figaro, 19.11.1953, and J. Guignebert in Libération, 19.11.1953.

20. In Les Lettres françaises, 12.11.1953. Kean opened at the Théâtre Sarah-Bernhardt two days later.

21. L'Idiot de la famille, 1, Paris, Gallimard, 1971.

Sartre devotes several passages to a close analysis of the professional actor and the problem of his identity. Sartre's description of him as "un enfant volé, sans droit, sans vérité, sans réalité, en proie à de vagues vampires, qui a eu la chance et le mérite de se faire récupérer par la société tout entière et instituer dans son être comme citoyen-support de l'irréalité"²² indicates the extent to which he believes that acting, far from being an unimportant and harmless form of entertainment, raises serious political issues.

The political intentions of Sartre were not, however, concealed in Nekrassov and for this reason it was far less favourably received than Kean had been by the critics, many of whom were writing for papers whose systematic anti-Communist propaganda Sartre was openly ridiculing. A considerable intolerance and lack of self-criticism was immediately apparent in the reaction of the right-wing press. "Pour rire aux huit sketches de M.Jean-Paul Sartre il faut vraiment être décidé à rire," commented R.Kemp,²³ while J.-J.Gautier claimed that the effect produced by the play was "un ennui mortel".²⁴ The two critics made no attempt to examine the political meaning of Nekrassov, but were content to make vague comments about the play's artistic inadequacies. In a virulent attack on the critics, R.Barthes denounced the bad faith of those like R.Kemp and J.-J.Gautier who directed attention from the basic issues raised in Nekrassov and thus concealed the real reasons for their attacking the play with such hostility. "Malheureusement, Nekrassov est une pièce politique, résolument politique, d'une politique que l'on n'aime pas," wrote R.Barthes, "et c'est pour cela qu'on la condamne."²⁵ Indeed, apart from the Communists who, for the first time, greeted a play by Sartre with warm approval, the only favourable press

22. L'Idiot de la famille, 1, p.790.

23. Le Monde, 14.6.1955.

24. Le Figaro, 13.6.1955.

25. "Nekrassov juge de sa critique" in Théâtre populaire, no.14, juillet-août, 1955, p.72.

review came from M. Lebesque who considered Nekrassov the work of "un grand écrivain en pleine possession de ses moyens, un homme qui puise dans une sincérité indiscutable, une indignation et une verve partisans sans doute, mais dignes de notre respect."²⁶

Together with La Putain respectueuse, Kean and Nekrassov form an important part of Sartre's theatre and give an indication of his versatility as a dramatist. His humour, like that of Marcel, is sharp and pointed, and there is early evidence of Sartre's obvious gift for powerful social satire in his first novel, La Nausée.²⁷ Indeed, G. Sandier suggests that it is in the comic genre that Sartre's dramatic talent is most evident and that La Putain respectueuse and Nekrassov stand out as "les deux seules pièces satiriques de notre temps."²⁸ Sartre's next play, however, arguably the most sombre he has written, is completely devoid of humour. Kean and Nekrassov emphasised the extent to which Kean and Georges had been exploited and mystified, but ultimately both had found some escape from the threat of complete enslavement and powerlessness. For Frantz in Les Séquestrés d'Altona, on the other hand, no such escape is possible. "En certaines situations, il n'y a place que pour une alternative dont l'un des termes est la mort," wrote Sartre in his introduction to the first edition of Les Temps modernes. "Il faut faire en sorte que l'homme puisse, en toute circonstance, choisir la vie."²⁹ In Les Séquestrés d'Altona, Sartre examines a situation where the central character must ultimately choose death. In Le Diable et le Bon Dieu, Heinrich had found himself in an impossible situation because he was forced to recognise the authority of the Church while at the same time wishing to remain with the people. For Frantz, the conflict arises between two elements over which he has no control: the ideals

26. Carrefour, 15.6.1955

27. Paris, Gallimard, 1938.

28. See "Socrate dramaturge" in Les Critiques de notre temps et Sartre, p.101.

29. Situations, 11, p.28.

and principles which have been inculcated into him, and the social and historical context within which those ideals and principles are to operate.

In his studies of Genet and Flaubert as well as in his own autobiography, Sartre has shown how one's childhood environment and upbringing explain the development of one's later life. Les Séquestrés d'Altona³⁰ is the first play in which Sartre analyses in detail the conditioning factors of environment, especially parental influence, on the intellectual formation of an individual - in this case Frantz von Gerlach. The two predominant features of Frantz's character are his love of power and his overwhelming pride: both are a direct and unavoidable consequence of his upbringing and both play a decisive part in his life. Frantz's father who, throughout the play, is simply referred to as "le Père" is a rich German industrialist who owns a vast shipbuilding company. When war broke out in 1939 the father had an important role to play in supplying the German fleet with warships: in 1946, when the war was over and Germany lay in ruins, he had an equally important task to fulfil in the rebuilding of his country. The events of the play take place in 1959 at a time when Germany is once again flourishing and prosperous, and when the father's company has scaled new heights of prestige and power. The father's pride in the industry he has built up over the years is made apparent from the outset. He has called together Leni and Werner to tell them that he has only six months left to live, and to ask Werner to carry on as head of the industry. He refers to the latter as "une puissance fabuleuse"(SA35) and to himself as "moi qui fais flotter l'acier sur les mers"(SA20). The strength of the father's character and personality is such that he immediately stifles any possible dissension or opposition. He is clearly

30. All textual references are taken from Les Séquestrés d'Altona, Paris, Gallimard, 1960, and will be incorporated in the thesis in the following abbreviated form: (SA..). Eg. (SA20) = Les Séquestrés d'Altona, p.20.

accustomed to imposing his views and beliefs on others with ruthless detachment, whether they be business employees or members of his family. Thus he remains unmoved by Johanna's objections that he has no right to make plans or decisions about other people without consulting them first. In fact, he claims to be perfectly justified in disposing as he desires of Werner's life because, he says, "elle m'appartient"(SA25). Significantly, it is Johanna and not Werner who objects to the father's proposals: in fact, there is never any question of Werner opposing his father. "Tu sais bien que je lui obéirai!"(SA29) he tells Johanna, and when asked why he simply adds: "C'est le père."(SA29). Leni, too, despite her apparent rebelliousness is no less respectful of the father's authority and of the family's rites and traditions.

Werner had been allowed to pursue a career as a barrister because it had been the father's original intention that his elder son Frantz eventually take over control of his shipbuilding industry and inherit his power and authority. "Occupe-toi de l'entreprise," he had told Frantz in 1941: "aujourd'hui la mienne, demain la tienne; mon corps et mon sang, ma puissance, ma force, ton avenir."(SA50). The father had countered Frantz's objection that, on moral grounds, it was inadmissible to collaborate with the Nazis by reminding him of the future that lay ahead: "Dans vingt ans tu seras le maître avec des bateaux sur toutes les mers, et qui donc se souviendra de Hitler?"(SA50). Indeed, from his earliest years, Frantz had had instilled into him the values and attitudes of someone seemingly destined to occupy a position in society of great prestige and importance. This explains his basic love of authority and power. His pride, on the other hand, is not something he owes specifically to his father, but is explained by the strong Protestant influence on the moral climate in which he, like many generations before him, has grown up. "Tout ce que je peux vous dire, c'est que les Gerlach sont des victimes de Luther," the father tells Johanna: "ce prophète nous a rendus fous d'orgueil."(SA49). On

all moral issues Frantz has learned to react with a strong sense of individual responsibility, but his attitude to others is one of aloofness and even of contempt since he acts according to vague general principles or beliefs and not out of a deep feeling of fraternity and compassion for men as they really are. Frantz's efforts to save an escaped Polish prisoner during the war provide a striking example of the way he reacts to a situation of which he disapproves morally. His father had agreed to sell part of his land to the government even though he knew that Himmler intended to build a concentration camp on it. When Frantz learns that his father was under no obligation to sell the land, he clearly feels that there can be no excuse for such an action. He is used to seeing things in black and white, and to holding firm, unalterable convictions. "Frantz se promenait sur les collines en discutant avec lui-même," the father recalls, "et, quand sa conscience avait dit oui, vous l'auriez coupé en morceaux sans le faire changer d'avis." (SA49). Frantz's moral indignation on this particular issue reveals his lack of compassion: in fact, his first sight of the prisoners fills him with horror because they do not have the proud, dignified bearing which he expects of them. In other words, they do not conform to his idea of human dignity. "Père, ce ne sont plus des hommes," he says. "...Je me dégoûte mais ce sont eux qui me font horreur. Il y a leur crasse, leur vermine, leurs plaies. Ils ont tout le temps l'air d'avoir peur." (SA47). Frantz's contempt for the prisoners is made clear when he opposes his father's attempt to justify their condition with the declaration: "On ne ferait pas cela de moi." (SA47). When he discovers a Polish prisoner hiding in a nearby park, he feels that he has been presented with the chance to redeem the family honour by hiding him in his room. Frantz's hopes of saving the prisoner are, however, frustrated by the fact that the family chauffeur, who is probably aware of what has happened, may denounce him to the S.S. The father forestalls a possible denunciation by phoning Goebbels and explaining the situation. Within an hour the S.S. had arrived, tortured

the prisoner under Frantz's very eyes, and left. Frantz was left unharmed and unpunished, but was forced to enlist in the army.

These events are recounted by the father in a series of flash-backs in the course of the first act. Johanna immediately sees the effect they would almost certainly have had on Frantz. "C'était un petit puritain, une victime de Luther, qui voulait payer de son sang les terrains que vous aviez vendus" (SA55) she tells the father. But the latter's intervention deprives Frantz's action of its intended effect. By being left unpunished he realises that, as the son of a rich and influential industrialist, his action entailed no risks and that "on lui permettait tout parce qu'il ne comptait pour rien" (SA56). For someone with Frantz's moral pride and belief in power, this was a bitter and humiliating experience. The father now sees the mistake he had made. "J'aurais dû transiger pour deux ans de prison," he tells Johanna. "Quelle gaffe! Tout valait mieux que l'impunité!" (SA56). But, instead of finding himself in prison, Frantz is sent to fight in the German army on the Russian front where he shows himself to be a devoted and fanatical Nazi. This apparent change in Frantz's outlook and behaviour seems, at first sight, inconsistent with his previous attempts to save the life of the Polish prisoner. His idolisation of Hitler is, however, explained by two factors, both of which are directly related to the death of the prisoner. First of all, the experience of total helplessness - he had been held down by four soldiers while the prisoner was slowly bled to death - intensifies his desire for power. In fact, he will not be content with anything other than absolute power which, for a lieutenant in the German army, may mean a choice between the life or death, protection or torture of those under his command. Secondly, his experience of powerlessness is countered by the discovery of an unsuspected and sadistic delight in human suffering. "Le rabbin saignait," he recalls, "et je découvrais, au coeur de mon impuissance, je ne sais quel assentiment." (SA206). Frantz finds that he is able to

discard the abstract moral principles which he had once so vigorously upheld because they are totally unrelated to his concrete experience of reality. Like Goetz in Le Diable et le Bon Dieu, Frantz's love of good thinly conceals the basic indifference which he feels towards his fellow men. "J'ai envoyé Luther au diable," he tells Johanna, "et je suis parti. La guerre était mon destin et je l'ai voulue de toute mon âme"(SA182). Having previously been totally possessed and conditioned by the values and beliefs of his father, Frantz now finds himself impregnated and enslaved by the image of Hitler. "J'ai le pouvoir extrême," he tells his father in their final confrontation. "Hitler m'a fait un Autre, implacable et sacré: lui-même. Je suis Hitler et je me surpasserai"(SA206).

At the end of the war, Frantz has accumulated twelve medals for acts of heroism, but there is no official record of his cruelty and brutality. One by one, Leni, the father, and finally Johanna learn that Frantz the war hero is also a torturer. With the war nearing its end, Frantz had found himself in charge of a small company of men near the town of Smolensk. The Germans had captured two Russian peasants, thus presenting Frantz with an unpleasant choice. By torturing the prisoners he may elicit information about the partisans who have been continually harassing the Germans; by not torturing them, he knows that he will continue to expose his soldiers to the risks of further attacks and loss of life. In fact, his situation is very similar to that of Heinrich in Le Diable et le Bon Dieu when he is given the key to an underground passage and thus faced with the possibility of saving the priests but seeing the poor people massacred by Goetz, or with doing nothing and seeing the poor people massacre the priests. In both situations the individual is forced to choose evil, and, in the case of Frantz, the choice is torture. It also provides him with the chance to experience with terrifying and intoxicating intensity the full height of his power. "Je revendiquerai le mal, je manifesterai mon pouvoir

par la singularité d'un acte inoubliable," he cries: "changer l'homme en vermine de son vivant..."(SA206-7). Frantz's experience of power proves, however, to have been illusory. He is unable to make the prisoners talk and is powerless to prevent the whole of his force from being wiped out; but, even more significantly, nothing he can do will in any way prevent the military annihilation of Germany and the post-war economic revival. The truth is that Frantz's actions during the war have been as meaningless and as inconsequential as his attempt to save the life of the Polish prisoner. He has killed and tortured to no avail: not only could Germany not win the war, but it was also necessary that she lose it to be able to enjoy such post-war prosperity. The irony of such a situation is conveyed by the father's observation "Qui perd gagne"(SA207), a phrase which Sartre had originally thought of using as a title for the play.³¹

In 1946, when Frantz returns to Germany, the war is over but the memory of the last five years of his life cannot be conveniently struck from his mind. Although in the course of the war he had discarded certain moral principles which earlier he had tried to uphold, his basic pride remains. He refuses to renounce responsibility for the actions he has committed or to disown his fidelity to Hitler. If the Nuremberg tribunal condemns the German leaders as war criminals, then the same judgement can be made about Frantz. "Je suis Goering," he declares. "S'ils le pendent, c'est moi le pendu!"(SA44). The idea of collective German guilt is intolerable to Frantz and one which he seeks to evade by suggesting that it is an insidious weapon of propaganda used by the Allies to justify the crime they are secretly preparing - the destruction of Germany and the extermination of its people. "Tous innocents devant l'ennemi," Frantz defiantly announces to his father. "Tous: vous,

31. See interview in France nouvelle, 17.9.1959.

moi, Goering et les autres."(SA44). The devastation of Germany is still fresh in his memory, and it is this devastation which mitigates Frantz's recourse to torture since he can argue that it was his duty to do all in his power to avoid such a crushing and humiliating defeat. "Les ruines me justifiaient," he recalls: "j'aimais nos maisons saccagées, nos enfants mutilés."(SA207-8). Already, however, Frantz glimpses the possibility of his country recovering from its defeat, thus turning the last five years of his life into an accumulation of useless and unnecessary actions. The origin of Frantz's seclusion and fits of madness lies in his efforts to forestall such an eventuality by maintaining the illusion of a Germany in ruins and by assuming the role of a spokesman bearing witness to his age before a tribunal of crabs. "J'ai souhaité la mort de mon pays," he admits, "et je me séquestrais pour n'être pas témoin de sa résurrection."(SA208). Either Germany is destroyed or Frantz becomes "un criminel de droit commun"(SA214). When Leni suggests to Frantz that he can dispense with the tribunal of crabs and with his obsessive fear of being judged by boldly coming to terms with himself and declaring: "J'ai fait ce que j'ai voulu et je veux ce que j'ai fait"(SA92), she is, in fact, elaborating a theory of responsibility similar to that expounded by Oreste in Les Mouches. But whereas Oreste calmly accepts the reality and consequences of his acts - the murder of Égisthe and Clytemnestre - Frantz knows that, for him, total self-acceptance, even in the hypothetical situation of a Germany in ruins, is ultimately impossible because his actions include torture. His feeling of guilt is explained by his puritanism, but it also reflects the evolution in Sartre's thought since he had by this time made it clear that, however lucid and responsible one may be, there are "des actes inacceptables".³² Sartre is here making a distinction of degree between murder and torture as examples of political action, between the violence of revolt (which, in Les Mouches, ends the despotic

32. "Entretien avec Sartre" in L'Express, no.430, 10.9.1959.

reign of Égisthe and prepares the way for the liberation of the people of Argos) and the violence of oppression (which, in Les Séquestrés d'Altona, contributes only to the dehumanisation of man by man), but P.Thody raises an interesting objection when he comments that it is equally possible to imagine a situation in which torture is clearly the lesser of two evils and can therefore be defended on empirical grounds.³³

Frantz's total seclusion from the outside world has lasted for thirteen years and has proved an effective escape from reality. During this time, the only person to have remained in contact with him has been his sister, Leni, who has contributed to his escapism by deliberately concealing from him the real state of the country. When Johanna, encouraged by the father who wants to see Frantz one last time before he dies, gains admittance to Frantz's room she momentarily falls under his spell and finds herself gradually drawn into his unreal, hallucinatory world. But even before Leni, out of jealousy, destroys any possible complicity between Johanna and Frantz, Johanna's presence is sufficient to induce in Frantz a growing sense of insecurity. "Déjà ma folie se délabre," he says less than a week after her first visit; "Johanna, c'était mon refuge; que deviendrai-je quand je verrai le jour?" (SA165). Her attempts to maintain the illusion of Germany's misery have been clumsy and unconvincing: unwittingly, she is the primary cause of Frantz's return to reality. "Quand je vous regarde," he tells her, "je connais que la vérité existe et qu'elle n'est pas de mon bord" (SA166). Having failed in his attempt to shut out the outside world, Frantz finally emerges from his room to meet his father and be judged. He learns what he has suspected all along - that Germany is now a powerful and prosperous nation, having endured the devastation of a war which it had never any chance of winning. Those who had fought for the Nazis

33. See introduction to Les Séquestrés d'Altona, London, University of London Press, 1965, p.29.

in the belief that the war could be won had merely prolonged the suffering and retarded the country's reconstruction. "La vérité," says the father, "c'est qu'ils n'ont rien fait du tout, sauf des meurtres individuels." (SA213). Whereas the father's acts have contributed to the formation and development of a vast shipbuilding industry, Frantz has nothing to show for the life he has led. Once again he is confronted with the reality of his insignificance. "Ta vie, ta mort, de toute façon, c'est rien," he is told by his father. "Tu n'es rien, tu ne fais rien, tu n'as rien fait, tu ne peux rien faire." (SA214).

Having once endured the experience of total helplessness, Frantz had ferociously launched himself into military action, the pursuit of authority and power eventually leading him to become a torturer. With the war over, Frantz was haunted not only by the horrifying memory of such acts, but also by the possibility of their complete uselessness. Shortly afterwards, he had been told to leave the country after assuming responsibility for an incident in which Leni had caused the death of an American officer. It was at this point that he had locked himself in his room and begun thirteen years of confinement and isolation from the world outside. The father, having brought up Frantz to command, slowly comes to realise that his son lives in a world in which it is impossible for him to fulfil the role that he, the father, had fulfilled before him. The inevitable economic resurgence of Germany after the war and the revival of his own industry convince him that Frantz will never experience the individual power and authority which he had once enjoyed. The father had been an instigator of progress and change, while Frantz is no more than an onlooker. He cannot play an active part in the development of his father's industry because it has formed an independent life of its own, and henceforth it will owe its expansion and prosperity to the impersonal forces of capitalism and not to the efforts and ingenuity of any one man. "Je voulais que tu mènes l'Entreprise après moi," the father tells Frantz. "C'est elle qui

mène. Elle choisit ses hommes. Moi, elle m'a éliminé: je possède mais je ne commande plus."(SA215). This declaration by the father is not totally unexpected since, in an earlier scene with Werner, he had tried to overcome the latter's hesitations and misgivings by pointing out that the industry, although vast and complex, had become self-governing. "Il y a beau temps que je ne décide plus rien," he had told Werner. "Je signe le courrier. L'année prochaine, c'est toi qui le signeras."(SA22).

The father's judgement of Frantz turns out to be an admission of his own guilt since it was he who had instilled into him the love of power which is the direct cause of Frantz's inability to come to terms with life as he has experienced it. "Si je pouvais croire que tu sois efficace ailleurs et autrement...", he says to Frantz. "Mais je t'ai fait monarque; aujourd'hui cela veut dire: propre à rien"(SA215). There is no way that Frantz can ever realise his innermost aspirations. He was destined to experience only frustration and helplessness, and for this the father is prepared to accept total responsibility. "Dis à ton tribunal de Crabes que je suis seul coupable - et de tout" (SA216), he says. This is, in fact, exactly what Frantz had hoped to hear. For thirteen years he had tried to hide from his past and to avoid being judged. In moments of lucidity he had thought of committing suicide, but had decided that suicide could not erase his past. Now, the father is prepared to take the burden of judgement on his own shoulders. For Frantz, however, there is one memory which, as long as he lives, cannot be dismissed from his mind: the night he became a torturer. The image of the torturer is one which his father alone can erase by reabsorbing Frantz's identity into himself. As long as he and Frantz remain alive they will always exist as two separate individuals; but in committing suicide together they will be reunited and made one in death. "Vous aurez été ma cause et mon destin jusqu'au bout"(SA218), Frantz tells his father, while the latter, at first reluctant to

precipitate the death of the son he loves but has destroyed, finally accepts Frantz's proposals. "Je t'ai fait; je te déferai," he declares. "Ma mort enveloppera la tienne et, finalement, je serai seul à mourir."(SA218).

The play ends with the father and Frantz driving to their death in Leni's car, with Leni locking herself away in Frantz's room and with Frantz's favourite recording, his argument for the defence of his age, echoing across an empty stage. It is an exceedingly powerful conclusion to an enthralling but highly disturbing play. After the exaltation of freedom in Les Mouches and the mature assessment of "praxis" in Les Mains sales and Le Diable et le Bon Dieu, Sartre's final group of plays seems to be emphasising man's increasing powerlessness and enslavement at the hands of hostile social forces. One of the most obvious restrictions on the freedom of the individual, as the case of Frantz amply demonstrates, comes from parental upbringing. Frantz is himself fully aware of the extent to which he is no more than a reflection of his father with no real life and mind of his own. Thus, when he is visited by Johanna for the first time, he immediately suspects that it is his father who had told her to take such care with her appearance. Frantz knows his father's thoughts and intentions almost instinctively. "Quand je veux prévoir le tour qu'il manigance," he tells Johanna, "je commence par me lessiver le cerveau et puis je fais confiance au vide; les premières pensées qui naissent, ce sont les siennes."(SA103). Frantz's evident admiration for his father as a young boy develops into increasing resentment and hostility as he realises the extent to which his identity has been predetermined. His anger and frustration at what he has done or failed to do is directed not against himself, but against the man who has made it almost impossible for him to act in any other way. "Je me moque qu'il vive! Je me moque qu'il crève!" he cries when he is first told of his father's fatal illness. "Regardez ce qu'il a fait de moi!"(SA104).

He refutes Johanna's suggestion that the secluded life he has been leading indicates a free choice on his part. In fact, he claims that the initial choice which has moulded his whole life was made even before he was born. "Neuf mois avant ma naissance," he says, "on a fait choix de mon nom, de mon office, de mon caractère et de mon destin."(SA107).

The influence on the individual of his upbringing and early environment is analysed with far greater detail in Les Séquestrés d'Altona than in either Kean or Nekrassov. The importance of such an influence is overlooked in Sartre's early work although one of the stories of Le Mur³³ deals with the upbringing of a young boy destined to become a "chef" and thus prefigures, to a certain extent, the tragic situation of Frantz. But although Sartre was aware at that time of the effect of family life on the formation of the individual, he stressed the individual's freedom to change himself and his situation by action. This very positive and challenging attitude to life is expressed in plays like Les Mouches and Huis clos, but Sartre's later work operates a gradual shift of emphasis and underlines the extent to which such freedom is restricted. Reflecting on his own childhood, Sartre writes with particular venom of the bond of paternity and considers that the death of his father "fut la grande affaire de ma vie: elle rendit ma mère à ses chaînes et me donna la liberté."³⁴ Sartre's increasing interest in psychology and sociology, and his acceptance of the basic principles of Marxism, do not, however, indicate that he has abandoned the idea of man's powers of self-determination. In fact, he continues to affirm his belief in the individual's basic freedom, and he is resolutely opposed to any philosophy or science which would make of him a simple and predictable unit

33. Paris, Gallimard, 1939. The story in question is L'Enfance d'un chef.

34. Les Mots, p.11.

in a vast, impersonal system. Commenting on the situation of Frantz, Sartre observed that he cannot be understood as a man who had never at any time been free to choose another course of action, but adds that he is "tellement formé par sa famille, tellement formé par l'horrible expérience de son impuissance, il a en outre été si peu élevé pour l'amour des hommes, pour les liens humains, qu'il devait presque nécessairement faire ce qu'il a fait finalement."³⁵ Sartre would seem to be making a vital distinction between determinism - if we understand by this a belief in man's total powerlessness in the hands of external forces - and conditioning - which, while allowing for a certain degree of autonomy, stresses the limits to freedom and the obstacles to action.

On a more general level, Frantz is a victim of the age in which he is born. Not only can he claim with much justification that an identity had been reserved for him even before he had been born, he can also point out that, although it was he who fought in the war, it was those of his father's generation who were really responsible for it. Frantz's helplessness in this respect does not, however, preclude an awareness of his own basic freedom and a sense of personal responsibility, and this explains his feelings of guilt and fear of judgement for the actions which he has committed. His situation reflects the paradox and irony of Sartre's observation: "On ne fait pas ce qu'on veut et cependant on est responsable de ce qu'on est...."³⁶ The oppressive forces against which the individual must struggle do not, however, end with his upbringing and social milieu, nor with his exploitation and subjugation at the hands of hostile groups or classes, but also include "sa propre création en tant qu'elle devient autre."³⁷ There is a forewarning of this kind of situation in Nekrassov where Georges

35. Un théâtre de situations, p.347 (Our underlining).

36. Situations, 11, pp.26-7.

37. Critique de la raison dialectique, p.202.

suddenly finds himself a helpless pawn in the virulent anti-Communist campaign which he had first launched. In Les Séquestrés d'Altona, this alien force or creation is represented by the father's ship-building industry, referred to almost reverentially by him as "l'Entreprise". Before the war, the father had had an important role to play in the development of the industry, but in the post-war years he had seen that role gradually diminish and finally disappear altogether. "L'Entreprise créée par l'homme pour échapper à la rareté," writes M.-D. Boros, "se détache de son créateur pour former une entité opaque qui va commander aux hommes et dominer leur destin, sans qu'ils puissent rien faire pour freiner sa marche implacable."³⁸ None of Frantz's actions could, in any way, alter or modify the inevitable growth and expansion of the industry. "Pour agir, tu prenais les plus gros risques et, tu vois, elle transformait en gestes tous tes actes"(SA215), the father tells Frantz. The word "geste" is here used in an entirely different context from that of Sartre's earlier plays where an act becomes a gesture when the end in view is a certain appearance or image. Kean, of course, provides the most striking example of action reduced to a series of theatrical poses, but Kean is not essentially different from many of Sartre's other major characters. Indeed, as M.-D. Boros observes, we are all, to a certain extent, actors like Kean "dans la mesure où nous adoptons l'attitude magique de l'homme qui se fait posséder par un rôle, puis s'aveugle lui-même au point de prendre au sérieux le personnage dont il se fait habiter".³⁹ She points out that "le véritable sujet agissant sera celui qui aura réussi...à rejeter et à dépasser...tout désir 'd'être' quoi que ce soit...pour s'engager véritablement dans les entreprises concrètes,"⁴⁰ a striking example of which is given by Goetz's conversion to political

38. Un Séquestré: l'homme sartrien, p.43.

39. Ibid., p.159. Cf. Sartre par lui-même, p.114.

40. Un Séquestré : l'homme sartrien, p.130.

action at the end of Le Diable et le Bon Dieu. This important distinction between acts and gestures does not, however, apply to the case of someone like Frantz whose actions are eroded not by pretence but by his basic powerlessness. His acts have become gestures for the simple reason that the situation renders them ineffectual.

The plot and structure of Les Séquestrés d'Altona emphasise yet another threat to the freedom of the individual. It was Sartre's intention to concentrate on the interaction of a small group of people and to show how each person could affect the destiny of the others. The circularity of the action recalls the situation of Huis clos in which Garcin, Estelle and Inès are left to continue their hopeless pursuit of each other in hell. The comparison is particularly significant because it throws light on Sartre's evolution from ontological to sociological preoccupations. In Huis clos, the threat to the individual comes from the look or judgement of the other, whereas in Les Séquestrés d'Altona the fate of Frantz depends on the decisions and concrete actions of the remaining members of the family. By deciding to stay at Altona and to take over the management of the father's industry, Werner forces Johanna to accept the father's proposals and to go and see Frantz. This causes the intervention of Leni which, in turn, prepares us for Frantz's return to reality and the final confrontation with the father. Thus each of the characters in the play has a significant part to play in the final judgement and condemnation of Frantz. The von Gerlach family is intended as a symbol of society, and the interaction between each of the characters suggests the extent to which the individual may be manipulated by hostile social forces.

Three important conclusions can be drawn from Les Séquestrés d'Altona. The first is that, although Sartre is not refuting the theory of freedom and responsibility on which the whole of his early dramatic work is based, he is modifying it to take into account the effects of

parental upbringing and of one's social and political situation. Although Les Mains sales and Le Diable et le Bon Dieu had examined some of the limits to the freedom of the individual committed to political action, the underlying message of both plays had been helpful: man continued to act on the outside world with seemingly every chance of changing it. Kean, Nekrassov and Les Séquestrés d'Altona, on the other hand, emphasise the extent to which the outside world also acts upon and changes man. "Pour moi," declared Sartre, "le monde fait l'homme et l'homme fait le monde."⁴¹ It was the first of these propositions which had been overlooked in Les Mouches and, to a lesser extent, in Le Diable et le Bon Dieu. The second conclusion to be drawn from Les Séquestrés d'Altona is that Sartre had become increasingly conscious of the sombre complexity of the political situation with which the individual was confronted in post-war Europe. Indeed, when asked what particular feeling or emotion he had intended to arouse with his play, Sartre replied: "Le sentiment de l'ambiguïté de notre temps. La morale, la politique, plus rien n'est simple."⁴² The recognition of this ambiguity does not obscure the fact that universal political freedom is the goal for which man is striving; it merely emphasises the difficulties and traps that attend the pursuit of this goal. The conclusion of Le Diable et le Bon Dieu tends to minimise this ambiguity by showing Goetz in a situation where there is a straightforward choice of action. Moreover, by choosing to lead the peasants against the barons, Goetz is also able to express his new-found humanism and solidarity, whereas in Les Séquestrés d'Altona suicide, although a logical and necessary end for Frantz, does not in any way resolve the contradictions with which he had been faced. The third conclusion with which the spectator is left is that he belongs

41. France nouvelle, 17.9.1959.

42. "Entretien avec Sartre" in L'Express, no.430, 10.9.1959.

to a violent and criminal age which will be judged and condemned by later generations. Here Sartre conveys in dramatic form an idea which he had already expressed in his study of Genet. "Ces hommes masqués qui nous succéderont et qui auront sur tout des lumières que nous ne pouvons pas même entrevoir," he writes, "nous sentons qu'ils nous jugent; pour ces yeux futurs dont le regard nous hante, notre époque sera objet. Et objet coupable."⁴³ The masked men who will pass judgement on the twentieth century have become, in Les Séquestrés d'Altona, the terrifying and sinister tribunal of crabs whose presence is evoked throughout the second and fourth acts which take place in Frantz's room, and again at the end of the play in his speech for the defence of the age. The idea of judgement and objectification occurs in Huis clos but on a purely ontological level, the individual's identity being fixed or appropriated by an alien consciousness, whereas in Les Séquestrés d'Altona Sartre has introduced a historical perspective.

Another similarity between Saint Genet, comédien et martyr and Les Séquestrés d'Altona lies in the respective roles of Genet and Frantz. Sartre describes Genet as "notre prochain, notre frère"⁴⁴ holding up before us a mirror in which our collective guilt is reflected, while Frantz is also a figure with whom we can identify and through whom our guilt is made apparent. The fact that Frantz had returned to Germany after long, bitter fighting in a war his country was certain to lose was a clear and unambiguous reference to the situation of Frenchmen in 1959, involved in a hopeless struggle to crush the revolt of nationalist forces in Algeria. It was also no secret at this time that the French had resorted to the widespread use of torture in Algeria, and although several of Sartre's plays show

43. Saint Genet, comédien et martyr, p.549.

44. Ibid.

that political action invariably necessitates violence, this is clearly one form of violence which he finds totally unacceptable. In the preface to Henri Alleg's La Question,⁴⁵ a firsthand account of the treatment of political prisoners in Algeria during the war, Sartre denounces the practice of torture as "une vérole qui ravage l'époque entière"⁴⁶ and shows how it has slowly and insidiously become an accepted political weapon. Just as Frantz had been forced one day to awaken to the horrifying reality of Smolensk, so the French, having once suffered at the hands of the Germans, now find that it is they who are responsible for suffering, and suddenly realise that the face they have caught sight of in the mirror - "un visage étranger, haïssable"⁴⁷ - is, in fact, their own. Frantz also learns that the torture to which he had resorted was useless from a political point of view as well as being morally unacceptable, and here Sartre anticipates the case of French soldiers returning to France in the knowledge that the acts of violence and brutality which they had been forced to commit were, in the long run, ineffectual and unnecessary. Indeed, in 1962 Algeria eventually gained independence and France, if not thriving on account of this defeat, was certainly not adversely affected by it.

To see Frantz exclusively as a representative or symbol of the French people would, however, be placing too strict and limited an interpretation on the play, although the Algerian war was clearly uppermost in Sartre's mind when Les Séquestrés d'Altona was written. Frantz's situation could, in fact, apply with equal force to those who had supported Stalin during his reign of terror or to the Germans involved in the extermination of the Jews. Indeed, the whole history of Sartre's generation is one of violence and conflict, and, on a more general level,

45. Paris; Éditions de Minuit, 1958. Sartre's preface is reprinted in Situations, V, Paris, Gallimard, 1964.

46. Situations, V, p.80.

47. Ibid., p.73.

Sartre sees his play as an expression of "la consternation qui saisit les hommes de mon âge (cinquante - cinq ans) et un peu plus jeunes, quand ils regardent cette époque que nous avons tous faite et qu'ils disent: 'Ah bon, c'est ça.'"⁴⁸ Moreover, because Sartre retains his belief in man's basic freedom, he is justified in considering that those of his generation must bear the responsibility for the great collective crimes that had been perpetrated in their lifetime. "De l'ensemble de cette histoire violente," he declared, "nous devons considérer que nous sommes tous responsables."⁴⁹ Like Frantz, we oscillate between efforts to evade our responsibility and moments of lucid and critical self-examination, between feelings of justification and doubt, innocence and guilt. "En ce sens," wrote Sartre in the programme for the play's revival in Paris in 1965, "Frantz, cas-limite, fuyard qui se questionne implacablement sur ses responsabilités historiques devrait, si j'ai de la chance, nous fasciner et nous faire horreur dans la mesure même où nous lui ressemblons."⁵⁰ Thus, although at that time the war in Algeria had come to an end and with it the practice of torture, the play still retained much of its impact and relevance since it left the spectator with the question: "qu'as-tu fait de ta vie?"⁵¹

Most critics have found Les Séquestrés d'Altona to be the most pessimistic of all Sartre's plays. J.Palmer, for example, considers that "the world of the play is rotten to the core, for the characters' cult of failure paralyzes the springs of action, and the social system which is responsible for the tragedy will continue, the Gerlach mansion will continue to be inhabited."⁵² There is no question, however, of Sartre passively accepting such a world nor indeed is he saying, as P.Thody

48. Les Écrivains en personne, p.222

49. "Sartre répond aux jeunes" in L'Express, no.455, 3.3.1960. This firm and unambiguous statement of responsibility recalls Sartre's startling assertion in L'Être et le Néant that he was "aussi profondément responsable de la guerre que si je l'avais moi-même déclarée"(p.641), and underlines the basic consistency and continuity of his thought.

50. See Un théâtre de situations, pp.357-8.

51. Ibid, p.358.

52. "Les Séquestrés d'Altona: Sartre's black tragedy" in French Studies, no.2, April, 1970, p.161.

suggests, that man "is condemned both by his own nature and by the situation in which he finds himself to do only evil."⁵³ Although Frantz's upbringing and the historical context in which he finds himself, make torture almost inevitable, his is a particular case of which Sartre is not making a general rule. The implications of Les Séquestrés d'Altona are not that all action is useless because it is bound to fail, but that concerted and responsible political action is necessary if the world is to be changed. Just as Huis clos should, in part, be seen as an exhortation to break free from the constraints of habit or public opinion, so Les Séquestrés d'Altona, by presenting us with an oppressive and violent world in which man is often totally impotent and alone, provides at the same time the springboard for a greater degree of political awareness and contestation. Thus, without formulating or explicitly proposing a precise course of action, the play, as M. Contat points out, "peut réveiller en nous, par réaction, la volonté d'une réappropriation du monde à des fins humaines, l'exigence d'un monde où l'homme serait enfin sujet de l'Histoire."⁵⁴ Despite this important qualification, Les Séquestrés d'Altona remains a sombre and frightening portrait of our age, and the reasons for this are to be found in the violence and conflict through which Sartre had lived and in his increasing awareness of his own powerlessness as a writer committed to the cause of justice and freedom. At the time of writing "Qu'est-ce que la littérature?" Sartre clearly thought that the novelist or dramatist could have an effect on his public by drawing its attention to some of the more significant political and moral issues of the time. He soon came to realise, however, that literature, had neither the absolute value he had initially attributed to it, nor the power to change people or influence public opinion. It was not only in the field of literature, but also as a political demonstrator or essayist that Sartre experienced his powerlessness. "Nous avons crié,

53. Sartre: A Literary and Political Study, p.133.

54. Explication des "Séquestrés d'Altona" de Jean-Paul Sartre, p.69.

protesté, signé, contresigné," he wrote in 1960, looking back over the years of protest and agitation; "nous avons, selon nos habitudes de pensée, déclaré: 'Il n'est pas admissible...' ou: 'Le prolétariat n'admettra pas...' Et puis finalement nous sommes là: donc nous avons tout accepté."⁵⁵ From their numerous disappointments and frustrations. Sartre and those of his generation had learned one thing above all else - "(leur) radicale impuissance".⁵⁶ Never could this powerlessness have been experienced more acutely by Sartre than during the Algerian war. Despite numerous appeals in Les Temps modernes to open peace negotiations in Algeria and eye-witness accounts of the unnecessary horror and suffering caused by the war, the public outcry was minimal and the government continued its policy of repression against the F.L.N. The situation clearly had a profound effect on Sartre who was sickened by the public's refusal to take a firm stand against the government and bitterly aware of the inadequacy of his own protests. In an article written in 1958, for example, and entitled "Nous sommes tous des assassins",⁵⁷ Sartre denounced the absurdity of condemning to death two people working for the F.L.N. and involved in an act of sabotage which would have incurred no loss of life when the government had calmly accepted the bombing of Sakiét and the death of civilians. "Il faut le répéter chaque jour aux imbéciles qui souhaitent épouvanter l'univers en lui montrant 'le visage terrible de la France'," he wrote: "la France n'épouvante personne...elle commence à faire horreur, c'est tout."⁵⁸

It was against this political background and as a result of Sartre's experience of helplessness, guilt and horror at that time that Les Séquestrés d'Altona was conceived and written. A discussion on the subject of the theatre and politics in which Sartre took part with writers like Arthur Adamov and Michel Butor about eighteen months before Les Séquestrés d'Altona was staged in Paris shows the extent to which Sartre

55. Situations, IV, p.133.

56. Ibid., p.133.

57. Reproduced in Situations, V.

58. Ibid., p.71.

was already preoccupied with the question of writing about the Algerian war in a form which would be theatrically viable and which would also avoid censorship.⁵⁹ He had been in a similar position when writing Les Mouches where his use of the Orestes legend had ensured the necessary distancing and had, at the same time, passed through the net of German censorship. Les Séquestrés d'Altona, on the other hand, is set firmly in the present, but by situating the action in Germany and by drawing to a large extent on Frantz's experiences during the war, Sartre effectively overcomes the problems of distancing and censorship by transposing the issues raised by the Algerian war into a different historical context. He was particularly interested in the historical period of Les Séquestrés d'Altona because it provided the kind of extreme situation with which to hold the attention of the spectators. The Germans who had lived through the rise to power of Hitler's National-Socialist party, six years of war and the crushing defeat of their country were, he felt, faced with a far more agonising examination of their past and their responsibilities than most of their contemporaries. "A mon avis, le problème d'avoir à porter un jugement sur le passé historique récent et d'avoir à en assumer la responsabilité est beaucoup plus aigu, plus clair pour les Allemands,"⁶⁰ declared Sartre, adding that the same questions would probably be asked by the French when the war in Algeria had come to an end.

It was not the form but the content of Sartre's play of which there was the most criticism. It was suggested that the basic meaning of the work was obscured by the multiplicity of themes and ideas which Sartre had tried to include in it. Apart from the question of torture and the fairly clear allusion to the war in Algeria, the play contains reflections of a more general and less precise nature on individual and collective responsibility and on the inevitability of a future historical judgement.

59. See "Le théâtre peut-il aborder l'actualité politique?" in France - Observateur, no.405, 13.2.1958.

60. Un théâtre de situations, p.336.

Sartre also tried to examine some of the barriers and threats to individual freedom, emphasising the effect of upbringing and using the example of the father's industry to demonstrate the hostile power of circumstances which man himself has brought about (an idea which he analyses at great length in the Critique de la raison dialectique). In addition to this, critics found in the relationships within the von Gerlach family and in Frantz's madness and seduction echoes of Huis clos and Le Mur. "La pièce est de celle dont la densité appelle la lecture,"⁶¹ wrote M. Capron in her review of the play, while B. Poriot-Delpech considered that "l'incertitude sur le sens profond de la pièce est bien le sentiment dominant à la sortie du théâtre."⁶² Since the ideas and situations in any play are intended to be effectively grasped in performance rather than be enhanced and clarified by a reading of the text, there must remain some doubt as to the completeness of Les Séquestrés d'Altona as a work written for the stage. On the other hand, it would be quite wrong to suggest that the play fails, in performance, to generate a deep interest or achieve a lasting theatrical effect. Indeed, that this is not the case, is borne out by the fact that it was played throughout the whole of the 1959-60 season at the Théâtre de la Renaissance in Paris and then successfully revived at the Théâtre de l'Athénée in 1965. Although Les Séquestrés d'Altona is very dissimilar in theme and tone to Le Diable et le Bon Dieu, the two plays do have much in common: both have the distinct disadvantage of being exceedingly long - even after cuts the original performance of Les Séquestrés d'Altona lasted for four hours - while they also depend for much of their effect on the fascination engendered by the central character, a monstrous but ultimately deeply human figure. The first production of Les Séquestrés

61. Combat, 26.9.1959.

62. "Les Séquestrés d'Altona" in Recherches et Débats, no.32, septembre, 1960, p.60.

d'Altona will probably be remembered, above all, for Serge Reggiani's interpretation of the role of Frantz and for his ability to transform Frantz's wild and seemingly incoherent monologues into a powerful and moving theatrical experience. "The sudden intrusions of a strange kind of poetry into the apparently solid, bourgeois world of the von Gerlachs provided some of the best effects in Sartre's theatre,"⁶³ writes P.Thody, adding that the contrast between the language of Frantz and that of the rest of the family effectively evokes the two different levels of reality on which the play operates, namely the metaphysical and historical dimension introduced by Frantz and the concrete social order represented by the father.⁶⁴ The gradual disintegration of this order is symbolised by the cancer from which the father is dying, while the contrast between the two levels of reality is made even more apparent by the different physical levels of Frantz's room on the first floor and the living-room on the ground floor where the family reunion take place. There is also, as O.Pucciani points out,⁶⁵ a striking analogy between the situation of Frantz and that of Sartre himself. Frantz is enclosed in his room as Sartre is isolated by his status as an intellectual and by his career as a writer: both have experienced powerlessness and guilt, and both bear testimony to the horror of their age, a testimony which will survive long after their death and be listened to or read by future generations. These are clear and striking symbols which help to draw the audience's attention to certain essential aspects of the play, but one is left with the final impression that, in Les Séquestrés d'Altona, Sartre has tried to express too many ideas, thus seriously undermining the overall value and effect of the work by the weight of its intellectual content.

63. Introduction, Les Séquestrés d'Altona, London, University of London Press, 1965, p.35.

64. The same point was made earlier by O.Pucciani in an interview with Sartre in Tulane Drama Review, no.3, March, 1961, p.16. Although Sartre seems reluctant to use the word "metaphysical" in connexion with the world of Frantz, the epithet is surely a valid one in view of the latter's preoccupation with responsibility, guilt, judgement and absolution.

65. See "Les Séquestrés d'Altona of Jean-Paul Sartre" in Tulane Drama Review, no.3, March, 1961, p.32.

Sartre's last direct involvement with the theatre was his adaptation of Les Troyennes,⁶⁶ performed by the T.N.P. at the Palais de Chaillot in 1965. Although it cannot be claimed that Les Troyennes occupies a particularly significant place in Sartre's work, it can be seen as an appropriate epilogue to the trilogy of plays which precede it and which provide a final assessment of the individual's historical situation and role. Although, as in Kean, Sartre was attracted by the technical problems which his adaptation would involve, it was clearly the play's theme and political message which interested him most, that is to say, a condemnation of war and, more particularly, of imperialism. Whereas the social and political implications of Kean are something which Sartre had to emphasise in his adaptation of Dumas' play, he was able to leave the basic content of Euripides' play virtually untouched, concentrating instead on the language and style. Sartre had been struck by a performance of Les Troyennes during the Algerian war and had noted how favourably it had been received by the audience. The additions which he made to the play underline his increasingly sombre appraisal of the human condition which he sees as being continually ravaged by violence and conflict. He emphasises, for example, an idea which had been given great prominence in Les Séquestrés d'Altona - namely that man is often his own worst enemy. Frantz's defence of the age had reminded us that "le siècle eût été bon si l'homme n'eût été guetté par son ennemi cruel, immémorial, par l'espèce carnassière qui avait juré sa perte, par la bête sans poil et maligne, par l'homme"(SA222), and the image of the beast is repeated several times in the course of his speech. The same image occurs in Les Troyennes where the chorus, echoing Hécube's lamentations, emphasises the illusory nature of human happiness: "On se fascine sur l'apparence/sans voir la bête immonde qu'elle dissimule."(T62).

66. All textual references are taken from Les Troyennes, Paris, Gallimard, 1966, and will be incorporated in the thesis in the following abbreviated form: (T..). Eg. (T20) = Les Troyennes, p.20.

In a world of conflict, action is often rendered futile and the individual is faced with the bitter realisation that his efforts have counted for nothing. This is another of the themes of Les Séquestrés d'Altona which finds expression in Les Troyennes. Cassandre, for example, declares that the Greeks have no reason to feel victorious or triumphant since the Trojans can proudly claim to have defended their land and people, whereas the Greek soldiers lost during the war have died "pour rien"(T49). Andromaque, on the other hand, does not believe that the cause, however just or glorious, can in any way offset the futile and unnecessary loss of Trojan lives, declaring that her husband, Hector, had also died "pour rien"(T68). Finally, Hécube, having given Astyanax, Andromaque's son, great care and attention, is confronted with the futility of her devotion since the Greeks have decided to execute Astyanax before returning home. "Tant de soucis, tant de soins/pour rien, toujours pour rien," she bitterly laments. (T119).

The contemporary relevance of Les Troyennes from a political point of view hardly needed underlining for Sartre's audience in view of the recent troubles, first in Indo-China and then in Algeria, but the play's denunciation of imperialism is made even more explicit by Sartre and even more relevant to France by the Greeks being referred to as Europeans intent on invading and colonising another continent. "Hommes de l'Europe,/vous méprisez l'Afrique et l'Asie/et vous nous appelez barbares, je crois, " cries Andromaque, "Mais quand la gloriole et la cupidité/vous jettent chez nous,/vous pillez, vous torturez, vous massacrez."(T81). This contrast between Europe and the Third World, is, in fact, more of a transposition of ideas than an addition on Sartre's part since, as he points out, it reflects "l'opposition antique entre Grecs et Barbares, entre la Grande Grèce qui développait sa civilisation vers la Méditerranée, et les établissements d'Asie Mineure où l'impérialisme colonial d'Athènes s'exerçait avec une férocité qu'Euripide dénonce sans ménagement"(T7). Les Troyennes should also be seen as

a reflection on war in general and, in this respect, the conclusion in which we are told that the Greeks, having rased Troy to the ground, will themselves be wiped out on their return home is an apt reminder that, in an atomic war, there would be no ultimate victors. "Faites la guerre, mortels imbéciles," says Poséidon in the final scene which Sartre has added to the original, "...Vous en crèverez./Tous."(T130). Hécube's words in the preceding scene suggest that the gods too will disappear from the earth and it thus on a note of total destruction that the play ends.

CHAPTER 8

Two Concrete Approaches to the quest for Personal Identity

The word "euristic" has been used by both Marcel and Sartre to describe their philosophical method and provides an equally appropriate description of their theatre, since the plays are dominated by the individual's search for harmony and a true sense of personal identity in a world in which he feels an outsider, a misfit or a mere number. A state of alienation and of exile thus forms the starting point of the individual's journey of self-discovery, while the fulfilment or realisation of a meaningful personal existence is the goal towards which he is striving. In this respect, there is considerable similarity between the theatre of Marcel and Sartre, but the precise meaning which each dramatist attaches to terms like alienation or true personal identity is fundamentally different.

The first of these terms, for example, is used by Marcel to describe the feeling of spiritual confusion and unease in which we see the majority of the characters in his plays. "Mon oeuvre dramatique, dans son ensemble, peut être considérée comme le théâtre de l'âme en exil," he writes. "J'ai tenté d'y montrer le tragique de l'aliénation sous toutes ses formes."¹ The characters' alienation is underlined by the recurrence in their speeches of images of darkness and obscurity or by their insistence on having mistaken their route or lost their way. They find themselves imprisoned in a world which is undermined by self-centredness, increasing loneliness and isolation, and an overwhelming sense of hopelessness. Life seems to have lost its essential value and purpose, and the individual feels within himself a need for meaning, assurance and peace. This need, which is indicative of man's spiritual essence or soul, can only be answered when the individual opens on to a transcendent world of love, mystery and communion. In Le Monde cassé, Le Dard and L'Émissaire it is through the continuing

1. Les Nouvelles littéraires, 7.6.1951.

presence of those loved but no longer alive (on earth) that Christiane, Werner and Antoine are assured that such a world exists and is accessible to us all, and they, in turn, can guide and enlighten those who are close to them. Thus Laurent is moved by Christiane's new belief and assurance and Sylvie responds to Antoine's humility and sincerity, while Simon in Le Signe de la Croix is inspired by tante Léna's unwavering courage and Pascal in Rome n'est plus dans Rome finds his revolt transmuted into assurance and faith by the seemingly chance intercession of a young monk. Faith and hope is seen not as a form of salvation or reconciliation on an individual level, but as an experience of transcendence in which the individual is not only reunited with those he has loved most deeply, but also joined in spiritual brotherhood with other fellow beings engaged "dans cette sorte de pèlerinage hasardeux qu'est l'existence humaine."² "Or, je ne crois pas m'abuser en disant que cette affirmation du Corps mystique", writes Marcel, "est comme le pôle magnétique vers lequel gravite toute mon oeuvre dramatique - et celles mêmes de mes pièces qui semblent baigner tout entières dans l'angoisse."³ The plays written before Marcel's conversion are marked by an almost nostalgic longing for peace and harmony, but the conclusion of La Chapelle ardente and of Un Homme de Dieu, for example, seems at first sight depressingly sombre. Aline will continue, albeit unwittingly, to intrude into and devastate the lives of those around her, while Claude has no certain answer to his anguished plea for self-knowledge. Moreover, in La Chapelle ardente we see how the death of those we have loved, instead of being transmuted into an illuminating spiritual presence, may lead to a form of blinding idolatry and thus become a totally destructive influence. In other

2. Théâtre et Religion, p.75.

3. "Théâtre et philosophie. Leurs rapports dans mon oeuvre." in Recherches et Débats, no.2, octobre, 1952, p.38.

words, both plays, like many others written during the same period, emphasise the inescapable reality of solitude and suffering in our life on earth and give no firm indication of any other order or level of human experience. On what basis, therefore, can Marcel suggest that the recognition of the mystical body of Christ is the magnetic pole towards which his early as well as his later dramatic work moves? First of all, there is the evidence of a play like L'Iconoclaste which was composed as early as 1919, a few years before La Chapelle ardente and Un Homme de Dieu, and which explicitly affirms the positive value of mystery, an affirmation which is central to the author's belief in the reality of spiritual communion. Secondly, the movement of Marcel's early plays, although not immediately transparent even to the author at the time they were conceived and written, becomes far clearer when seen within the context of his dramatic work as a whole. This total assessment of Marcel's work enables us to see that, although there is obviously a very significant step forward from both La Chapelle ardente and Un Homme de Dieu to Le Monde cassé, for example, a play which Marcel could not possibly have written before his conversion to Catholicism, the point of departure in all three plays, as, indeed, in the whole of Marcel's theatre, is the same, namely an experience of temporal discord and ambiguity. The main difference between the plays written before and after 1929 is that, in most cases, the search for spiritual communion and truth remains implicit and frustrated in the former, whereas it is explicitly stated and answered in the latter. In other words, Marcel's conversion changes the ultimate tone of his dramatic work without altering its basic direction.

In Marcel's "pièces éclairantes" faith is presented as a powerful and illuminating vision or insight. "La situation théâtrale permet aux différents protagonistes," writes R.Troisfontaines, "après des erreurs et des tâtonnements, d'accéder - peut-être transitoirement -

à une lumière, à un ordre supérieur où tous les rapports se transforment et se renouvellent."⁴ At this point of time, the individual's spiritual journey seems to have ended; starting from a state of exile and alienation, of "l'âme devenue étrangère à elle-même, et pour elle-même à peu près incompréhensible",⁵ he has at last discovered his true identity or essence. The important qualification "peut-être transitoirement" reminds us, however, that no assumptions can be made about the future of Christiane and Laurent, for example, or of Werner and Pascal. The individual finds spiritual fulfilment through faith, but this fulfilment is not definitive. The testimony of Geneviève in Le Monde cassé and of Antoine in L'Émissaire is vitally important in this respect, emphasising and exemplifying Marcel's own observation that "on se fait en vérité de la Foi une idée bien pauvre et bien caricaturale si on imagine qu'elle est une sorte de talisman ou de porte-honneur, alors qu'elle est une vie, une vie où la joie et l'angoisse se coudoient continuellement...."⁶ The uncertainty and ambiguity of man's terrestrial condition is ended only at death, and only then, having passed into another life "où tout sera englouti dans l'amour"(E269), does Marcel suggest that spiritual fulfilment is complete and everlasting.

The search for an authentic and meaningful existence is presented in an entirely different light in Sartre's theatre. Alienation is seen by Sartre as the suppression of freedom: the individual loses his personal identity when he renounces or is deprived of his powers of choice and self-determination. In Sartre's early plays, notably Les Mouches and Huis clos, alienation is the result not of external forces, but of the individual's failure to take his life into his own hands and assume responsibility for his actions. The citizens of

4. De l'existence à l'être: la philosophie de Gabriel Marcel, 1, Louvain, E.Nauwelaerts, 1953, p.34.

5. "Théâtre de l'âme en exil" in Recherches et Débats, no.10, juin-juillet, 1950, p.10.

6. Présence et Immortalité, pp.12-13.

Argos live in an oppressive and authoritarian state, but it is a state to which they have acquiesced and for which they are therefore responsible. It was in their power to denounce Égisthe's crime and refuse him as their ruler as it had been to avert Agamemnon's death on his return from Troy. The alienation of Garcin and Estelle in Huis clos begins long before death deprives them of the powers of self-determination and makes them into helpless, malleable objects in the eyes of those who remain on earth; it in fact begins from the moment that they allow the judgement or look of other people to guide their actions. At this stage of Sartre's work, the basic implications of the alienation of the citizens of Argos or of Garcin and Estelle are moral and not political, an appeal to individual freedom and responsibility rather than an attack on the structure of society. The outbreak of war in 1939 had, however, changed the nature of Sartre's experiences and was gradually transforming his whole attitude to man's problems. "Mes expériences sont devenues de plus en plus sociales à partir de la mobilisation,"⁷ he later declared, while in another interview he maintained that it was during his imprisonment by the Germans in 1940 that "(il) prit conscience de ce qu'est la véritable liberté."⁸ The socialisation of Sartre's work and thought becomes more apparent when Les Mouches is compared with La Nausée and Le Mur, both of which had been written and published by 1939; but it is only with Les Mains sales (1948) and, in particular, Le Diable et le Bon Dieu (1951) that, for the first time, the problems presented in his plays are political rather than moral, collective rather than personal. Sartre's experience of war was, in fact, an intermediate step in his evolution towards Marxism. It emphasised the intrusion of history and politics into the life of the individual, while the Resistance

7. "Sartre répond aux jeunes" in L'Express, no.455, 3.3.1960.

8. Les Nouvelles littéraires, 1.2.1951.

movement drew attention to the collective aims and aspirations of most French people. At the same time, however, the heroic and courageous acts of its members called for deeply personal and individual decisions and choices, and this individualism is reflected in Les Mouches and Morts sans sépulture, both of which were directly inspired by Sartre's experience of the Resistance in France. It was only after the Liberation and his involvement in the post-war political problems and upheavals of Western Europe that there came "l'expérience vraie, celle de la société"⁹ and the end to Sartre's highly individualistic vision of life. He considers, however, that his experiences, first of all before and then during the Second World War, played a vital part in helping him lay the foundations for a philosophy of freedom and apply it to the restrictive and threatening political situation of his contemporaries in the post-war years. "Il fallait que le personnage d'avant-guerre, qui était une sorte d'individualiste égoïste, stendhalien, soit plongé malgré lui dans l'Histoire tout en gardant la possibilité de dire oui ou non," he claims, "pour pouvoir ensuite affronter les problèmes inextricables de l'après-guerre comme un homme totalement conditionné par son existence sociale, mais cependant suffisamment capable de décision pour réassumer ce conditionnement et en devenir responsable."¹⁰ The strength of social conditioning is something which Sartre emphasises more and more in his later plays; the individual is seen to be the helpless victim of inhuman political forces and his mystification or loss of personal identity stems directly from his political situation and not, as earlier, from his own inadequacies. Here, then, alienation raises political and not moral questions, and in Nekrassov and Les Séquestrés d'Altona, in particular, reflects fundamentally Marxist preoccupations since both plays emphasise the inhumanity of a society dominated by the interests

9. Situations, IX, p.101.

10. Ibid.

of the ruling class and by the powerful forces of capital.

It is with the contestation of the power and authority of the ruling class by those who are exploited and under-privileged, and with the latter's efforts to realise a free, class-less society that man's hopes of liberation lie, a belief which is reflected in most of Sartre's plays after 1948. This liberation cannot, however, be achieved by peaceful means: man lives in a violent and oppressive society, and he is therefore obliged to resort to violence if he wishes to change that society. Les Mains sales and Le Diable et le Bon Dieu point to a course of revolutionary political action which avoids the extremes of idealism and cynicism. Such action also effectively unites the oppressed and exploited, and this sense of unity marks the first important stage in their fight for freedom. The particular problem of the left-wing, middle-class intellectual lies in the difficulty he may experience in being readily accepted by a revolutionary party which represents the immediate interests of a class to which he does not belong "by birth". It is the class stigma which hangs over Hugo in Les Mains sales and which vitiates the unity and solidarity he should feel with other party members. In the three plays which follow Les Mains sales - Le Diable et le Bon Dieu, Kean and Nekrassov - the central character is either a bastard or an orphan, and this reflects Sartre's own position as a left-wing intellectual and the feeling of exile or isolation to which it gives rise. Again, only in a true socialist state can such a problem be effectively resolved, although this belief is not explicitly affirmed in any of Sartre's plays.

Whereas Sartre presents us in his later plays with situations calling for a new political status and identity for the individual, the situations in Marcel's theatre lead the individual to an awareness of his spiritual identity. For Marcel, man remains in essence a creature of God, but this identity is not reducible to the mere fact of allegiance to the Church. Indeed, the experience of Claude in Un Homme de Dieu

emphasises the possibility of such an allegiance degenerating into habit and routine for the most pious and devout Christian. But when Claude's acts of devotion seem to have become mechanical gestures devoid of any real fervour or authenticity, his spiritual identity is not suddenly taken away from him. The more loving, compassionate and understanding the individual becomes, the more fully is this identity realised and the closer he becomes to God; but at no time is he ever abandoned or, in Christian terms, beyond redemption. Aline, for example, is no less a creature of God for having sacrificed Mireille's future happiness in order to preserve intact the memory of Raymond; her blinding and obsessive attachment to the latter merely isolates her from her family and friends, and stifles her powers of love and compassion. In other words, she lives in a state of temporary spiritual alienation or exile which, without the effect of grace, will be resolved only when her life on earth has ended. The intervention of grace is not, however, abrupt and irrational; it presupposes a certain call or appeal, as in the case of Christiane in Le Monde cassé or of Pascal in Rome n'est plus dans Rome. Grace directs and illuminates the individual but does not negate his freedom: it is an invitation rather than an order to believe, for Christiane remains free to reject the evidence of Jacques' prayers as Pascal is free to ignore the evidence of his encounter with the young monk. The evidence with which they are presented is not, of course, something that can be grasped and analysed rationally. It is like a sign confirming the individual's innermost thoughts and feelings, and is therefore a deeply personal and subjective experience, for what may be a sign to Pascal, for example, may have no meaning or significance for another person. Nevertheless, the fact that the individual recognises that there are grounds for believing means that his or her act of commitment is not a blind leap of faith. The explicit faith of Antoine in L'Émissaire and the implicit faith of tante Léna in

Le Signe de la Croix is sustained by their humility and vigilance as well as by their fidelity and steadfastness in difficult and harassing situations. Theirs is an example of living faith and of a creative response to life. The believer does not expect to have any clear-cut or pre-ordained rules or precepts with which to tackle the situations in which he will find himself, hence the emphasis on creativity. At the same time, however, his faith provides him with a basic purpose and sense of vocation, and here the emphasis is on his receptivity, - his awareness of the mystery of life and of God's presence. It should also be pointed out that where the individual fulfils or realises his true spiritual identity, one cannot really speak of self-fulfilment or self-realisation, since the "moi" or self is, in fact, a barrier to effective communion with others. By constantly thinking of her loss and her misfortune, Aline is incapable of loving Mireille although she deludes herself into imagining that she is able to do so. Similarly, the marriage between Christiane and Laurent has foundered because neither person makes a real effort to help and understand the other - a fault which both recognise at the end of the play when, for the first time, they see the possibility of starting a new life together.

Whereas Marcel insists that an individual's life may belie his true identity or essence, Sartre makes no distinction between what one is and what one does. As Inès says to Garcin in Huis clos: "Tu n'es rien d'autre que ta vie" (HC165), a rather unpleasant and unpalatable fact if one happens to be guilty of sadism, cowardice or infanticide, but a fact which one must nevertheless accept. While, however, there is scope for the individual to change the course of his life by positive and decisive acts - an opportunity which Garcin and Inès have turned down, but which Oreste and Goetz have accepted - Sartre's plays remain severe but not unhopeful. It is when we are presented with the case of someone like Frantz in Les Séquestrés d'Altona that the whole mood of Sartre's work becomes sombre and depressing. Here the

individual's identity is still reflected in his acts although he may be a helpless victim of parental upbringing and of the social and political context in which he finds himself, and although he may have almost no scope for acting in any other way. In becoming a torturer, Frantz is forced to act in a way which is an abuse of his freedom and a destruction of his human qualities. Moreover, he is also a victim of historical circumstances in that his recourse to torture is made all the more intolerable by its complete uselessness in the light of Germany's post-war economic revival, and the conclusion to be drawn from this is that, in a changing and uncertain world, the individual's identity cannot be fully and immediately established since he is unsure of the meaning his acts will later assume. "Car la situation décide," writes Sartre. "Non de nos actes particuliers mais du sens qu'ils revêtiront en dépit de nous-même, pour les autres hommes et à nos propres yeux."¹¹

As far as the attempt to scrutinise and understand motives for any past action is concerned, there is some common ground between Sartre and Marcel. Just as Claude's pardon in Un Homme de Dieu remains ambiguous and impenetrable despite the minister's earnest and extensive self-examination, so Garcin in Huis clos and Hugo in Les Mains sales find themselves reflecting on past acts but unable to establish their real motives. This ambiguity is not resolved in Sartre's plays whereas Un Homme de Dieu and also L'Émissaire point to the need for an appeal to someone who does know us as we really are, that is to say to God. For this reason, Marcel believes that "un théâtre existentiel, à un certain niveau, est inévitablement amené à en appeler à la transcendance".¹² For Sartre, on the other hand, this appeal to a transcendent reality is shown to be a cause of alienation. In Les Mouches

11. Situations, V, p.96.

12. Les Nouvelles littéraires, 27.1.1949.

Sartre is primarily concerned with the state of France under the Vichy government and with the need for active resistance against the Germans, but the cause of individual freedom represented by Oreste is clearly incompatible with any strong temporal or spiritual order. It is, however, apparent that this is the order of a despotic state or of an authoritarian Church, whereas the faith to which Marcel alludes in his theatre is deeply personal. There is clearly a vast difference between the passive acceptance of authority and ritual on the part of the citizens of Argos and the attitude of individuals like Antoine in L'Émissaire or Simon in Le Signe de la Croix. Indeed, where faith is an act of personal commitment which does not pretend to resolve the ambiguity of human experience, F. Jeanson maintains that there can be no basic incompatibility with Sartre's early definition of freedom. "Le choix du croyant," he writes, "n'est susceptible d'authenticité qu'à partir du moment où le croyant cesse de concevoir sa propre foi comme polarisée par un Dieu d'évidence, pour la reprendre à son compte - et l'assumer comme un 'pari', où il s'engage sans réserve à tout moment."¹³ The phrase "un Dieu d'évidence" is here, of course, used in the sense of a God that can be objectively verified or demonstrated, and therefore has nothing in common with the "evidence" for faith with which Marcel's characters may be confronted. There is, in fact, no radical difference between the "pari" described by F. Jeanson and the faith of Antoine in L'Émissaire who qualifies his experience of life as one in which "nous croyons et nous ne croyons pas, nous aimons et nous n'aimons pas, nous sommes et nous ne sommes pas; mais s'il en est ainsi, c'est que nous sommes en marche vers un but que tout ensemble nous voyons et que nous ne voyons pas" (E268). In Le Diable et le Bon Dieu, however, Sartre raises another objection to religious faith and to Christianity in particular. Faith, for Goetz, turns into horror for all that is human and terrestrial.

13. Le Problème moral et la pensée de Sartre, p.271.

of the sin and evil in man, so he aspires more ardently to a state of purification and to a spiritual union with God. It is significant that, although Goetz is here expressing an idea which has been upheld in the past by many influential Christian figures, it is an idea which Marcel himself rejects without hesitation. "Ma conviction la plus intime, la plus inébranlable," he writes, "...c'est, quoi qu'en aient dit tant de spirituels et de docteurs, que Dieu ne veut nullement être aimé par nous contre le créé, mais glorifié à travers le créé et en partant de lui."¹⁴

Although Sartre rejects the idea of a transcendent spiritual reality, he speaks of transcendence in a strictly secular context to describe the efforts of the individual to change or modify the situation in which he finds himself. Oreste and Goetz both commit themselves to the cause of an oppressed people in an effort to bring them greater freedom. In so doing they transcend their condition not by fleeing it or seeking spiritual release from it, "mais en l'assumant pour la changer, c'est-à-dire en la dépassant vers l'avenir le plus proche...."¹⁵ Transcendence in this sense is simply a form of project or move towards change, a manifestation of freedom which contrasts with the resignation of those who passively accept and identify with the present. The most important question in this respect is, of course, how the individual will use his freedom. In L'Être et le Néant, for example, Sartre's analysis of freedom and choice leaves aside all ethical considerations and seems logically to lead to a form of extreme anarchy and individualism, and this reflects his rather negative attitude in the pre-war years. Simone de Beauvoir emphasises the extent to which she and Sartre remained aloof and distant spectators in this period of great social and political unrest,¹⁶ and Sartre has contrasted his own

14. Être et Avoir, p.196.

15. Situations, 11, p.257.

16. See La Force de l'Âge, p.224.

intellectual idealism at that time with the political realism of his friend Paul Nizan.¹⁷ It has been noted that Sartre's experience of war and captivity had a profound effect on his thought and, on his return to France in 1941, he had already begun to elaborate a theory of commitment to take into account the importance of man's political situation. Simone de Beauvoir was immediately struck by his change in attitude. "Sa nouvelle morale," she writes, "basée sur la notion d'authenticité, et qu'il s'efforçait de mettre en pratique, exigeait que l'homme 'assumât' sa 'situation'...."¹⁸ This new sense of moral and political responsibility which is evident in Sartre's early plays and which forms the basic subject of his lecture "L'Existentialisme est un humanisme" provides an important social and political framework within which the individual's freedom is to operate. It would therefore be quite wrong to imagine that Sartre envisages a meaningless, chaotic and amoral world in which we are free to do anything within our power. Yet this interpretation is not uncommon among critics of Sartre. M.Esslin, for example, suggests that the only real difference between, on the one hand, Sartre and Camus, and, on the other hand, so-called dramatists of the absurd like Beckett and Ionesco is not their philosophy of life but the way it is expressed in dramatic form. He is critical of Sartre and Camus for trying to express what he imagines to be a philosophy of hopelessness and despair in a rational and coherent form, and concludes: "In some senses, the theatre of Sartre and Camus is less adequate as an expression of the philosophy of Sartre and Camus - in artistic, as distinct from philosophic, terms - than the Theatre of the Absurd."¹⁹ The critic has here made the mistake of assuming that Sartre's philosophy (and, indeed, that of Camus too)

17. See Situations, IV, p.147 et seq.

18. La Force de l'âge, p.442.

19. The Theatre of the Absurd, London, Eyre & Spottiswoode, 1964, p.17.

had not developed during and after the war beyond the unqualified statements of L'Être et le Néant (or, in the case of Camus, beyond those of Le Mythe de Sisyphe), but even then it is doubtful if the philosophy of this early period, despite its obvious incompleteness and inadequacies, can be considered an expression of total absurdity. Certainly Sartre himself would strongly refute the suggestion that the Theatre of the Absurd had anything in common with his own thought. Freedom, for Sartre, has always implied some form of active contestation, and this is clearly brought out in his plays, whereas the Theatre of the Absurd centres around a philosophy of inaction which seems to deny all possibility and hope of change. For this reason, Sartre is highly critical of writers like Beckett and Ionesco, claiming that, because of their passivity and resignation, they conform to the ideals of the bourgeoisie, presenting a superficially disturbing image of its life, but not one which challenges its very basis and justification.²⁰

Commenting on the basic search for fulfilment in the theatre of Marcel and Sartre, J.Chenu claims that, for Marcel, the individual receives his identity from God, whereas, for Sartre, the individual chooses his identity. We are thus presented with two contrasting poles of thought, "recevoir" and "faire".²¹ This is a fair assessment of Sartre's thought in as much as the individual is left to create his own values without relying on any external authority or guide. It must, however, be remembered that in a world of social and political oppression, exploitation and alienation, the individual has a fairly clear goal at which to aim, namely a greater degree of freedom, respect and unity among all men. No one can be authentically committed to a cause which ignores this end. In other words, to become aware of individual liberty is not an end in itself, but the first step towards

20. See Un théâtre de situations, pp.128-30.

21. See Le théâtre de Gabriel Marcel et sa signification métaphysique, p.218.

the desire for collective liberation. Moreover, self-effacement is just as important in Sartre's conception of political action or "praxis" as it had been for Marcel in his theory of "disponibilité". Nearly all of Sartre's plays emphasise the threat of self-indulgent gestures or poses, of action vitiated by the individual's concern for a certain objective identity or image. "Par l'action," writes Sartre of the individual who is authentically committed, "on devient autre, on s'arrache à soi, on se change en changeant le monde."²² Of all Sartre's characters it is Hoederer who probably exemplifies best of all the sober and unassertive action of a revolutionary, a form of "praxis" which excludes any kind of bravado or personal glory. "Cette morale de la praxis," observes M.-D.Boros, "va éliminer toute considération d'héroïsme personnel en exigeant de l'individu un sacrifice total de son 'moi'."²³

The acts that lead to socialism are seen to be no less extreme and violent than the acts by which an oppressive order—such as that represented in Les Mouches by Jupiter or in Les Séquestrés d'Altona by Hitler—sustains its authority. It is also interesting to note that neither Oreste nor Goetz feels that he is "un homme parmi les hommes" until he has committed an act of cold-blooded murder. It is suggested by M.-D. Boros that this reflects above all the intellectual's need to match words with actions before he can prove his real allegiance to the group or class whose cause he espouses. "C'est pourquoi il témoigne d'une fascination irrésistible pour l'acte le plus absolu, le plus irrémédiable," she writes, "celui après lequel on ne peut plus revenir en arrière, le meurtre, sorte de baptême du sang, sacrifice expiatoire qui donne à l'aspirant le droit de pénétrer dans la collectivité des hommes et de participer à leurs entreprises."²⁴ In contrast to Oreste and Goetz, Hugo's dreams of integration are never concretely

22. Situations, VI, p.12.

23. Un Séquestré: l'homme sartrien, p.213.

24. Ibid., pp.204-5.

realised, and Les Mains sales emphasises the deep sense of inadequacy and isolation of an intellectual who is unable to come to terms with the harsh realities of revolutionary action.

The threat which hangs over any form of political commitment is that of fanaticism and impersonalisation, of what Marcel calls "l'esprit d'abstraction." Several of Sartre's critics in fact believe that the main characters in his plays are devoid of any warmth or compassion for their fellow men. "Tout au plus, ils aiment non pas certainement les hommes, mais 'l'humanité'," claims H.Lüthy, " - ce qui est une question de rhétorique. Ceci est peut-être même leur signe distinctif."²⁵ This criticism is certainly without foundation when applied to Hoederer in Les Mains sales, for the most striking aspect of his character is his mistrust of words and abstractions, and his love of men as they really are. It is, however, true that there is a certain glib rhetoric in the way in which Oreste and Goetz, for example, announce their new sense of responsibility. Goetz also seems quite unmoved by having to kill a rebellious leader. As he prepares to leave the stage, he kicks the body to one side and calmly observes: "Voilà le règne de l'homme qui commencé. Beau début." (DD282). On the other hand, Sartre cannot be accused of minimising either the gravity of man's political situation or the very real difficulties of achieving any significant social change. He does not disguise nor gloss over the harsh realities of revolutionary politics of which some degree of impersonality and inhumanity is an unavoidable element. Here, in fact, was a subject of particular concern for several other French dramatists writing political plays at the same time as Sartre. Both Albert Camus in Les Justes²⁶ and Thierry Maulnier in La Maison de la nuit²⁷ present the conflict of "praxis" and morality within a revolutionary group or organisation.

25. "Jean-Paul Sartre et le Bon Dieu" in Preuves, no.5, juillet, 1951, p.11.

26. In Théâtre, récits, nouvelles. First performed in France 15.12.1949.

27. Paris, Gallimard, 1954. First performed in France 12.10.1953.

In Les Justes, Kaliayev's moderation and compassion is set against Stepan's hard and uncompromising political beliefs: Kaliayev believes that the cause of freedom and justice imposes certain limits on the action taken to achieve that end, but Stepan recognises no such limits and believes that the end justifies the means. There is a similar confrontation in La Maison de la nuit between Hagen and Krauss, two spies from an Eastern European country sent to capture and execute a minister who is trying to escape to the West. Hagen finds himself overcome by compassion for Werner, the minister, and also for the small group of innocent people who must be executed with him, and is thus unable to carry out his orders, whereas Krauss' devotion to the cause of the Revolution is implacable and unwavering, and seems to have destroyed the last vestiges of humanity in him. Just as Kaliayev could not throw the bomb that would cause the death of children, so Hagen cannot accept the sacrifice of innocent victims; and, in both situations, there is no real doubt as to where the dramatist's sympathies lie. There are, of course, strong moral objections to revolutionary politics, and it is these objections which are raised by both Camus and Maulnier; but it is difficult to see how political action can be reconciled with any kind of pure morality of universal love and compassion and still remain a realistic and effective means of change in an oppressed and divided world, a point which is forcefully brought home by Sartre in Les Mains sales. It should also be pointed out that the charge brought against the politics of the extreme left in Les Justes and La Maison de la nuit is unfairly weighted because of the almost total lack of human feelings of Stepan and Krauss. With the former, in particular, we are left to ponder if it is not a deep, personal desire to avenge the humiliation endured during his imprisonment rather than genuine concern for the lot of all oppressed people which is the reason for his revolutionary fervour.

A more serious criticism of Sartre's theatre concerns its ten-

dency to vastly oversimplify the kind of choices and political situations with which the individual or a class is faced. Sartre maintains that he had to abandon the fourth volume of Les Chemins de la liberté²⁸ because he felt that the straightforward and clear-cut situation of France in 1940 did not reflect the far more complex and uncertain situation of the post-war period. One is, however, justified in asking if the political situation in Europe in the last fifty years, including the period of the Second World War, has not always been extremely complex. Sartre claims that a Frenchman in 1940 was either for or against the Germans, and Les Mouches reflects this almost manichaeian attitude. Sartre's attack in Les Mouches on the insidious and degrading propaganda of the Vichy government is perfectly acceptable, as indeed is Oreste's call to overthrow an oppressive political order. On the other hand, the whole question of the possible divisiveness of the Resistance - in particular, as a result of reprisals by the Germans - is overlooked, while there appears to be no middle course between Resistance and Collaboration. In direct contrast to Les Mouches, L'Émissaire emphasises some of the drawbacks of the Resistance and suggests the possibility of political abstention, while it also presents the case for a form of collaboration based not on fear or self-interest, but on the hope of avoiding unnecessary suffering and preserving the national unity of the French people. Even if Sartre were to insist that Les Mouches does reflect the clear-cut choices facing the French in 1943, it could be pointed out that the play tends to glorify and hence misrepresent the harsh realities of the Occupation. That Sartre was certainly not unaware of such realities is made apparent in his essay "Paris sous l'occupation",²⁹ a grim and sombre description of the feelings of helplessness and humiliation of most French people

28. Extracts of this fourth volume appeared in Les Temps modernes in 1949 under the title Drôle d'amitié. The completed volume was to have been entitled La Dernière Chance.

29. In Situations, III.

during the war. Of Sartre's later plays, Le Diable et le Bon Dieu is the one to which the charge of over-simplification most readily applies. The option facing Goetz of either supporting the peasants or pursuing his own unending dialogue with the absolute is as clear and uncomplicated as Oreste's choice between involving himself in the life of the citizens of Argos and continuing to remain "free" and detached. Moreover, by presenting the class struggle in Le Diable et le Bon Dieu as an open war between two clearly delineated sides, the nobles and the peasants, Sartre conveys nothing of the qualified support of, or opposition to a particular course of action - of what he calls the "pour, mais..." and the "contre, mais..."³⁰ - to which the real social and political problems of post-war France gave rise. On the other hand, Sartre himself would point out that the theatre is concerned not with political reality but with myth, and that some degree of over-simplification is therefore inevitable.

Marcel's attitude to action and change in the world is very different from that of Sartre, but is equally open to criticism. By refusing to sacrifice the individual to a political cause or ideology and by concentrating on inter-personal relationships rather than on collective issues, Marcel takes a stand in his plays for the inviolable rights of the human person. In this respect, Christian charity shares with Kantian ethics the belief that the individual should at all times be treated as an end in himself and never as a means to an end. But Sartre argues with great force and conviction that such a position is not only inadequate but also contradictory in a world which survives on oppression and injustice. "Tel est le paradoxe actuel de la morale," he observed in 1947: "si je m'absorbe à traiter comme fins absolues quelques personnes choisies...si je m'acharne à remplir tous mes devoirs envers eux, j'y consumerai ma vie, je serai

30. Situations, IX, p.100.

amené à passer sous silence les injustices de l'époque, lutte des classes, colonialisme, antisémitisme, etc., et finalement à profiter de l'oppression pour faire le bien."³¹ Political action, on the other hand, is an effective tool of social change, but at the cost of sacrificing the sovereignty of the individual, - something which, as the dialogue between Eustache and Werner in Le Dard clearly illustrates, Marcel refuses to accept. It should not, however, be assumed that all Marcel's characters turn their backs on the outside world and make no positive contribution to the problems and hardships of the society to which they belong. Both Werner and Simon openly express their horror of an oppressive political order which they oppose not by acts of calculated revolutionary violence as do Sartre's heroes, but by acts of Christian humility and self-sacrifice. Werner returns to Germany to face imprisonment but in the knowledge that his presence may inspire and comfort his fellow prisoners, and Simon acts in similar fashion by remaining in France to ally himself with other Jews and share, if necessary, in their suffering and persecution. Both are inspired to act as they do by the spiritual presence of a close friend or member of the family who has recently died, and both believe in some ultimate peace and reconciliation beyond the torment and suffering of life on earth.

The contrast between Christian charity and revolutionary "praxis", between Marcel's essentially moral stand and Sartre's essentially political stand also brings out the difference between love and solidarity. Christiane's realisation in Le Monde cassé that there is a communion of sinners as well as a communion of saints is central to Marcel's conception of love. Love is a means of bringing together and uniting all people: there are no rejects or outcasts because of one's past or one's race or class, nor are there any absolute barriers

31, Situations, II, p.296.

between the living and the dead. In Marcel's early plays the individual's aloofness and self-centredness had been the greatest obstacle to harmony and understanding among people; but his later plays, in particular those written during and after the Second World War, reveal the growing threat of political intolerance and fanaticism. Werner foresaw a plague of spiritual poverty spreading over the earth, and plays like La Fin des temps and Mon temps n'est plus le vôtre seem to bear witness to a world devastated by such a plague, a wilderness without faith or love. This is a sombre view of man's present condition and reflects Marcel's own belief that we are entering an eschatological age. It would be quite wrong, however, to suggest that Marcel is the victim of morbid and extravagant fantasies: prominent figures in England like Aldous Huxley and George Orwell who were writing at approximately the same time as Marcel readily acknowledge the very real and sinister threat to humanity in the present age and present us in Brave New World³² and Nineteen Eighty-Four³³ with a bleak, chilling view of our foreseeable future. At no time, however, either in his philosophical or his dramatic work does Marcel ever abandon himself to despair for it is in this absolute resignation and abandonment of hope that he sees "la seule tentation dont en dernière analyse nous ayons à nous garder."³⁴

Contrary to the interpretation generally applied to Huis clos, Sartre does believe that human relationships can be meaningful and harmonious. There is plenty of evidence for this in his own personal life, - his very close and long-standing relationship with Simone de Beauvoir and his steadfast support for any genuinely oppressed group or community, whether they be from Indo-China, Algeria, Cuba or, as in the case of students and miners, from France itself. It is this

32. London, Chatto and Windus, 1932.

33. London, Secker and Warburg, 1949.

34. Présence et Immortalité, p.13.

particular form of allegiance which forms the basis of collective political solidarity, and of which Le Diable et le Bon Dieu provides a clear and striking example. But whereas the Christian can claim that love means the end to separation and divisiveness, this is manifestly not true of the political solidarity of the left. In fact, such solidarity only succeeds in uniting one particular group or class against another. Goetz is with the peasants and against the nobles, just as Hoederer is with the Communists and against all other political parties and ideologies. "En vérité, la conscience d'être solidaires ne rapproche pratiquement les hommes que dans des groupes fermés, opposés à d'autres groupes," observes P.-H.Simon; "elle fonde une morale de la camaraderie dans la lutte, non de l'universel amour."³⁵ Even then, certain circumstances or situations may arise which will result in the individual's feeling of exclusion from a group whose cause he nonetheless upholds. Thus the three survivors from the small group captured and tortured by the "miliciens" in Morts sans sépulture form a tightly closed circle from which Jean, another active member of the Resistance who is later imprisoned with them, is excluded because he had not shared in their suffering. Hugo's feeling of isolation in Les Mains sales also stems from the fact that he has not shared in the experiences of the group to which he wishes to belong. Most revolutionaries are, like Georges and Slick, driven to political action by the experience of poverty and exploitation, something of which Hugo, a middle-class intellectual, has no real knowledge. His alliance with the Communist Party is therefore viewed with suspicion and distrust not only by people like Georges and Slick, but also by an important party official like Louis. The question of political solidarity clearly preoccupies Sartre far more than that of interpersonal relationships, but the latter are not entirely overlooked

35. Théâtre et Destin, p.184.

in his theatre. In Les Mains sales, for example, we see a very close relationship developing between Hoederer and Hugo, while the nature of human love is explored in Hilda's devotion to Goetz in Le Diable et le Bon Dieu. Her affection for Goetz is unaltered by his efforts to humiliate and destroy himself as a human being, and this total acceptance of one person by another effectively counterbalances Garcin's assertion that "l'enfer, c'est les Autres"(HC167).

For Marcel, the experience of love is a magnificent spiritual gift, but because of the deficiencies of human nature and the increasing spread of political fanaticism it is a rare privilege mysteriously granted to the individual. Its rarity does not in any way undermine or contradict its universality, for that which has universal value is, for Marcel, that which is least assimilable with the tastes and aspirations of the masses. This theme of "l'universel contre les masses", although not coherently articulated in philosophic form until after the Second World War,³⁶ is, in fact, central to Marcel's work and beliefs as a whole and can be seen in plays like Le Dard and Le Signe de la Croix where Werner, Simon and tante Léna stand out as understanding and deeply compassionate individuals in a world ravaged by passions and abstractions. This reflects an aristocratic conception of personal identity, - an identity which is fully realised only in a small number of individuals of exceptional humility and devotion. Sartre, on the other hand, recognises in the revolutionary spirit of the masses the most authentic manifestation of human values since, as Simone de Beauvoir recalls, he believes that "le vrai point de vue sur les choses est celui du plus déshérité."³⁷ Hoederer, Nasty and Goetz do not, therefore, constitute an élite, but merely reflect and uphold the voice of the people in their long and bitter struggle against oppression, a struggle which is the most immediate

36. In Les Hommes contre l'humain.

37. La Force des choses, p.17.

expression of personal identity at the present time since it is based on a desire for collective liberation. Ultimately, however, the full realisation of personal identity presupposes an end to human conflict, exploitation and alienation, and this can only be achieved in an autonomous and self-regulating society.

It is not enough to describe this fundamental opposition between Marcel and Sartre as an inevitable clash between a Christian and a Marxist view of the world; there is a clash in the whole personality and sensitivity of the two men which is clearly revealed in their early childhood experiences. Both were only children brought up in a cultured and exceedingly sheltered middle-class environment. Marcel reacted to his solitude as a child with an almost passionate longing for the company of brothers and sisters. His intense feeling of deprivation provides a stark contrast with Sartre's contented isolation from the outside world and from children of his own age. The rather arid moral climate of their early life also had quite differing effects on them: Marcel moved closer towards religion as a result of his parents' lack of faith, whereas Sartre found himself "conduit à l'incroyance...par l'indifférence de (ses) grands-parents."³⁸ But the most significant and revealing aspect of the childhood of Marcel and Sartre lies in their respective reaction to the loss of a parent. The death of his mother when he was only four was a grievous personal loss for Marcel and a cruel affront to the young child's love and affection. Marcel's anxious enquiry into the possible meaning of death and the survival of those who are most dear to us, culminating in his belief in the immortality of the human person, undoubtedly stems from this early childhood experience. For Sartre, on the other hand, the death of a parent was a personal gain rather than a loss, an experience of liberation and expansion of his being rather than of deprivation and mutilation, - although his reaction may have been very

38. Les Mots, pp.81-2.

different had it been his mother and not his father who had died. Sartre certainly developed a close relationship with his mother, but he valued above all else his independence and freedom, and this has certainly remained a constant preoccupation throughout his life. Thus, from their earliest years, one can see a certain pattern emerging in the attitudes and behaviour of Marcel and Sartre which will explain the radical divergence in the whole subject matter and tone of their dramatic work. The impact of a major war merely accentuated their basic differences. As a result of his work for the Red Cross, Marcel came into contact with many families anxiously trying to secure information about missing relatives, thus reinforcing his sensitivity to the human tragedy involved in each loss of life and forming the basis for his reflections on the question of personal identity. For Sartre, on the other hand, war meant direct involvement in the political issues of the time and prepared him for the collective fight against oppression and injustice. The Second World War also marked the first intrusion of History into Sartre's private life and the gradual erosion of his belief in the absolute value and justification of art. In fact, although Sartre has continued to be what he terms a "classical" intellectual,³⁹ a man committed to his age above all through the medium of the written word, he has gradually abandoned the arts for more direct and more concrete political involvement and contestation which he sees as the only effective means of understanding and coming to grips with reality. Art is therefore considerably less important for Sartre than political action, a belief which Marcel does not, of course, share. Indeed, he has always believed (as Sartre himself had done for many years) that the artist occupies a privileged position in the world since he sees and understands more clearly than most the ultimate reality of human experience. For Marcel, this

39. For Sartre's analysis of the contradictions faced by an intellectual, and of the latter's reaction to them, see Situations, VIII, p.457 et seq.

reality which is spiritual and not political can be effectively interpreted by the artist through his own particular medium of expression. "Je suis au reste tenté de penser que c'est à partir des oeuvres d'art que la vie doit être interprétée," writes Marcel, " - et je ne parle pas, bien entendu, de la vie comme phénomène naturel, mais de notre vie atteinte dans son mystère et dans son intimité."⁴⁰

It is in a close examination of the content and form of the plays of Marcel and Sartre, supported by the evidence of their impact in performance, that their value as theatre can be assessed. In this respect, it is clearly important not only for Marcel and Sartre to present an intellectually stimulating vision of man or insight into a particular aspect of his life, but also for this vision or insight to be expressed in a way which moves the audience on an emotional or affective level, that is to say by the choice of striking theatrical situations and by the creation of powerful, "living" characters. These are two distinct but nonetheless inter-related aspects of dramatic art. The hold which the situation and characters exert on the audience, for example, will not be sustained if the intellectual content is trite and uninspiring. Likewise, however clear and striking the ideas which the dramatist is expressing may be, their impact will be considerably weakened if the form in which they are presented is theatrically unimposing. It is the relative success or failure of Marcel and Sartre to achieve this necessary unity and balance which enables us to assess their strengths and weaknesses

40. Lettre-Préface to R. Troisfontaines in De l'existence à l'être: la philosophie de Gabriel Marcel, 1, p.10.

as dramatists.⁴¹

Sartre's first play to be performed professionally, Les Mouches, provides an example of the breakdown in the unity of content and form. Sartre has carefully avoided talking about freedom in vague and excessively abstract terms, and the ideas which the play expresses are clear and precise. When Les Mouches was first performed the relevance and appeal of these ideas were enhanced by the fact that, at that time, France was an occupied country, while on the most immediate formal level Sartre had found in the Greek myth of Orestes a convenient framework within which his allegory could operate. But the play fails because this framework, although clear and well-defined, is untheatrical. The characters on stage have no real stature or presence. When Oreste decided to kill Égisthe and Clytemnestre, for example, he does so with almost total detachment, and when he tells Électre that the horror of his deed cannot be erased from his memory (for he would not be a human being if this were not so) his words seem contrived and his feelings are therefore unconvincing. There are several isolated theatrical effects, notably in the ceremony for the return of the dead and in Oreste's final address to the people of Argos, but these effects do not cancel out the lack of sustained interest in the actions and destiny of the main characters. In short, Les Mouches is a drama of disembodied ideas and, as such, cannot be considered good theatre. In contrast to Les Mouches, Les Séquestrés d'Altona shows Sartre well versed in the formal techniques and effects of the theatre (which is not altogether surprising in view of the fact that this is the last important play he has written, whereas Les Mouches was very much the work of a beginner). Unlike Oreste and Électre, the characters in Les Séquestrés d'Altona are theatrically imposing: each member of

41. This does not, of course, mean that the successful integration of content and form is a valid criterion with which to assess the strengths and weaknesses of all dramatists; but it does presuppose that this is a synthesis which both Marcel and Sartre are trying to achieve in their dramatic work and for which they should therefore be judged.

the von Gerlach family (including Johanna) is different and intriguing in his or her own right. The whole of the exposition bathes in mystery and suspense: we gradually learn some of the facts about Frantz's self-enforced seclusion and our impatience to see him and the room in which he lives increases as we hear the sound of his footsteps and the cracking of oyster shells. Nor is there anything anti-climactic about Frantz's first appearance. We, like Johanna, are both intrigued and repulsed by the strange, hallucinatory world in which he lives. The dénouement is also handled with great skill as Frantz and the father are reunited after thirteen years, and then decide to commit suicide together, while the curtain falls on an empty stage with the voice of a man who has since died addressing the audience for the last time. Since Les Séquestrés d'Altona is also full of interesting and arresting ideas, it may be imagined that it fulfils all the requirements of a good play. This is not, however, the case: the play fails because it is intellectually too demanding. In Les Mouches the ideas had been kept relatively simple and uninvolved, whereas in Les Séquestrés d'Altona the ideas are often exceedingly complex and difficult to absorb. In the context of the theatre this is a very grave failing since the audience is not in a position to go back over those parts of the play which it has not fully understood. Moreover, whereas there can be no doubt as to the central unifying theme of Les Mouches, namely freedom, the same is certainly not true of Les Séquestrés d'Altona. At the time the play was first performed, French audiences were aware of the allusion to the Algerian war, but the memory of Nazism must also have been uppermost in their minds with the result that there was some doubt as to whether the author was talking about torture in a particular country or violence in general.⁴²

42. It is, of course, clear that the play would not now be likely to evoke memories of the Algerian war for French people, whereas its historical setting ensures that there is a constant allusion to Nazism and, by extension, to violence in general; an interpretation which Sartre had himself foreseen at the time of the play's revival in Paris in 1965. See Un théâtre de situations, pp.356-8.

But the play could equally have been interpreted as a reflection on parental and environmental conditioning, the alienating forces of capitalism or even the inhumanity of man to man. Good drama should focus the audience's attention on a particular subject or issue, but because of its confusing proliferation of ideas Les Séquestrés d'Altona fails to do this. A similar criticism could be made of Rome n'est plus dans Rome, where once again we are left with the impression that the author has tried to express too many ideas. In Les Mouches the ideas had been clear and digestible, but the characters and situations totally untheatrical, whereas in Les Séquestrés d'Altona and, to a lesser extent, in Rome n'est plus dans Rome the converse is true. Thus in all three plays the essential unity and balance of content and form breaks down and this seriously undermines their overall theatrical effect.

In Huis clos and Les Mains sales, on the other hand, there is no such disproportion, and these are probably Sartre's two best plays. Huis clos has enjoyed numerous successful revivals since it was first performed at the Vieux-Colombier in 1944, and doubtless the same would have been true of Les Mains sales had Sartre not taken objection to the way the play was being interpreted and thus decided in 1952 to ban all further performances, except in exceptional circumstances. In both plays the ideas are simple and striking, the situations gripping and the characters boldly delineated. There is no need for recourse to grandiose theatrical effects as in Louis Jouvet's production of Le Diable et le Bon Dieu; in fact, there is no real element of spectacle in either play. The effect which they produce in performance is achieved with an almost classical economy of means: a clear, central theme, a small number of characters, and a plain, uncomplicated set. The key to the success of Huis clos and Les Mains sales lies in the fact that they evoke an intense and powerful human conflict. Few people can remain insensitive to the torment of Garcin, Estelle

and Inès and their hopeless pursuit of one another, and few will forget the confrontations between Hugo and Hoederer in Les Mains sales. In both plays we have an admirable synthesis of situation and ideas, characters and dialogue - in short, a clear example of good dramatic art. Among Marcel's plays, Un Homme de Dieu is the one which comes nearest to achieving this successful synthesis of content and form, although Marcel insists that it is by no means one of his best works. There is little doubt, however, that it is the best of his plays to have been performed in Paris since the war. It is very difficult to make any final assessment about a play like Le Dard of which there have been a very small number of performances, while despite the interest aroused by Le Monde cassé, L'Émissaire and Le Signe de la Croix, none of these plays has been performed by a professional company in France and therefore no consideration of their overall theatrical effect can be made.

The fact that so few of Marcel's plays have been performed in France does, of course, raise doubts as to the value of his dramatic work as a whole. A small number of his plays had been performed in Paris in the inter-war years but had passed almost unnoticed by the critics. Then, in 1949, at a time of considerable popular interest in existentialism, Marcel, whose position as a philosopher had already been well established, enjoyed his first major success as a dramatist with Un Homme de Dieu. In the next four years three more of Marcel's plays were produced in Paris: La Chapelle ardente in 1950, Rome n'est plus dans Rome in 1951 and finally Le Chemin de crête in 1953. The decisive failure of Le Chemin de crête, all the more ironical in view of the fact that the same play had been successfully produced for the first time in Brussels only a few years earlier, was later staged in London, and has recently been adapted for French radio by the Comédie Française,⁴³ brought Marcel's career in France as a dramatist to an

43. The play was broadcast on "France-Culture", 31.5.1971.

abrupt end. None of his plays has been performed professionally in France since that date. Marcel himself believes that his reputation as a philosopher has probably hindered his acceptance as an authentic dramatist by theatre directors in France, although the same could not be said of Sartre who was in a similar position to that of Marcel. Whatever doubts there may have been concerning Sartre's talents as a dramatist after the cool reception given to Les Mouches, these were almost immediately banished by the success of Huis clos just one year later. Marcel, on the other hand, had no such early success with which to establish himself as a dramatist, although it is legitimate to suggest that he would have achieved this recognition, and benefited accordingly, had Un Homme de Dieu been staged when it was first written instead of 25 years later. Certainly, if Marcel had then established himself as a dramatist of note, a play like Le Monde cassé which closely follows Un Homme de Dieu and is arguably one of the best that he has ever written would not have been passed over in almost total silence.

There are, of course, other factors which explain Marcel's lack of success as a dramatist. First of all, the basic subject matter of his plays and their searching, reflective tone does not have immediate appeal, in contrast to Sartre's dramatic work which raises moral, social and political issues to which few people are indifferent. Marcel's theatre has also met with a certain amount of resistance because of its seeming inconclusiveness. The reaction of several theatre critics to those of his plays which have been produced is particularly significant in this respect. "Ses pièces sont des départs sans arrivée,"⁴⁴ wrote one critic in his review of Le Dard, while J.Lemarchand observed of Un Homme de Dieu: "Pièce qui laisse le regret de ne voir mener à leur terme aucune des voies ouvertes..."⁴⁵

44. Lumière, 20.3.1937.

45. Combat, 28/9.5.1949.

G.Lerminier's criticism of Rome n'est plus dans Rome was that the play did not answer any of the questions that it had raised,⁴⁶ while in his review of Le Chemin de crête he claimed that, by leaving unsolved the question of Ariane's identity, Marcel had failed to observe one of the basic rules of the theatre, that is to say he had deprived his play of a dénouement.⁴⁷ This last point does not really carry much weight since a play reaches a climax whether the uncertainty and ambiguity of the subject is increased and intensified, or elucidated and clarified. A dénouement does not necessarily provide the audience with a solution or explanation. What we do clearly see from the reaction of critics like G.Lerminier is that the "oui, mais" of Marcel's theatre, that is to say its restitution of the existential dimension of human experience and its avoidance of ideological slogans and dogmatic assertions, disconcerts and frustrates those who expect a play to be readily sounded and categorised. The very close attention which Marcel's theatre demands will ultimately, he hopes, lead us to reflect on the inextricable ambiguities and uncertainties of life and, at the same time, elevate us to a more compassionate and understanding view of the individual and of the difficulties which he or she may face. "Le théâtre doit faire accéder le spectateur à un plan où il se rende compte que la question de 'classer' autrui dans telle ou telle catégorie n'a aucun sens," he observes. "Nous devons apprendre à ne pas juger."⁴⁸ This is clearly an exceedingly ambitious, albeit laudable aim on Marcel's part, but one is left to ask if there is not something inevitably élitest about a theatre which requires such a high level of concentration and reflection.

There is, however, a far more serious accusation levelled against Marcel's dramatic work, namely that it may make good armchair reading,

46. Témoignage chrétien, 25.5.1951.

47. Le Parisien libéré, 5.11.1953.

48. "Théâtre de l'âme en exil" in Recherches et Débats, no.10, juin-juillet, 1950, p.13.

but it does not make good theatre. P.-A.Touchard, for example, recognises the dramatic interest of Marcel's plays, that is to say, the fact that they reflect some of the struggles and uncertainties of human existence, but expresses doubts as to their theatricality, that is to say their scenic effect and their impact in performance. "On a l'impression en lisant ses drames qu'on assiste à l'effort tendu et pénible de plusieurs êtres qui cherchent à se délivrer des ténèbres où leur pensée et leur amour se meuvent," he writes. "C'est un spectacle éminemment dramatique, mais je ne suis pas sûr qu'il soit toujours théâtral."⁴⁹ This last point is taken up and developed by M.Beigbeder. He claims that the whole tone of Marcel's dramatic work is unacceptable within the context of a live performance, the theatre depending for its effect on exaggeration and over-simplification, whereas the action in Marcel's plays leads the audience into a maze of very fine and subtle details. "L'action des pièces de Marcel", he writes, "presque chaque fois, chemine comme ces petits ruisseaux qui serpentent timidement à travers les prairies, sans berges bien tranchées, et plongeant sous terre dès qu'ils sont menacés de trop s'étendre, ou d'être nettement circonscrits."⁵⁰ M.Beigbeder is not opposed to the subject matter of Marcel's theatre, but to its treatment and presentation. External action can be reduced to the absolute minimum, he thinks, without the play's hold over the audience being reduced provided that the situation remains charged with extreme and obsessive passions. It is here that we find the key to the success of Racine or of a play like Huis clos, and, in M.Beigbeder's view, another reason for Marcel's failure as a dramatist for his characters "ne vont jamais jusqu'à cette distension sourde et pathétique, ils sont presque tous atteints d'une modération petite-

49. Opéra, 5.9.1945.

50. "Théâtre philosophique?" in Esprit, no.160, octobre, 1949, p.569.

bourgeoise irrémédiable...."⁵¹ Whereas P.-A. Touchard merely expressed certain reservations about Marcel's dramatic work, M.Beigbeder seems in no doubt that it is simply not good theatre, and in this he is joined by other critics like J.Mauduit⁵² and G.Pillement.⁵³ Certainly it is true, as all these critics point out, that Marcel avoids approximation and simplification in his plays, that the situations are invariably analysed in great depth and that there are very few emotional outbursts and virtually no acts of physical violence on the part of his characters. On the other hand, one can find very similar qualities in the plays of Chekhov, and yet this is a writer whose dramatic work has met with international success and recognition. In fact, the similarity between Marcel and Chekhov is particularly striking, and it is surprising that A.Maurois seems to be the only French critic to date to have made any comment to this effect.⁵⁴ Like Marcel, Chekhov is preoccupied in his theatre with the spiritual unease or disarray of the individual in a world which seems to be losing hold of any permanent and stable values. His plays are set in the present and centre around the lives of a middle-class family or small circle of friends and relatives. He opts, like Marcel, for a naturalistic setting and avoids any of the violent actions or extreme emotions which M.Beigbeder believes to be essential in the theatre. His plays are also interrogative in as much as they do not propose any solutions to the characters' unease and uncertainty, but leave the audience to reflect on the questions which have been slowly eroding their happiness and their confidence in life. The conclusion of The Three Sisters⁵⁵

51. "Théâtre philosophique?" in Esprit, no.160, octobre, 1949, p.573.

52. See Témoignage chrétien, 11.11.1949.

53. See Anthologie du théâtre français contemporain, III, Paris, Éditions du Belier, 1948, pp.207-8.

54. See Marianne, 17.3.1937.

55. In The Oxford Chekhov, (ed.R.Hingley), London, Oxford University Press, 1964.

or of The Cherry Orchard⁵⁶ is certainly as open and as disconcerting as the conclusion in any of Marcel's "pieces ambiguës" such as La Chapelle ardente or Un Homme de Dieu. It is interesting to note that Marcel recognises and admires in Chekhov's theatre the very qualities which he himself has tried to achieve in his own work and which he has constantly held to be a sign of authentic dramatic creativity, namely a feeling for life in all its richness, diversity and ambiguity. Marcel says of his own plays that "elles marquent une protestation contre toutes les formules dans lesquelles on cherche à emprisonner la vie"⁵⁷ and adds: "L'amour que je porte au théâtre de Tchekov tient précisément au fait que la vie y est restituée dans sa plénitude, que jamais l'auteur n'intervient pour fausser les perspectives."⁵⁸

It is significant that it is with Chekhov that Marcel should have so much in common and not with a dramatist like Paul Claudel. The fervent Catholicism of the latter finds no place at all in Marcel's dramatic work. His plays are not a triumphant assertion of the presence of God, but a constantly renewed search for order and harmony in a world threatened by the breakdown of inter-personal relationships, growing impersonalisation and, ultimately, the disintegration of all human values. For many of Marcel's characters, the search is rewarded with a clear invitation to religious belief, as in the case of Christiane or Pascal, for example, but this comes only after a long and arduous struggle against doubt and despair. "Un Claudel croit, et de sa foi, il bâtit son oeuvre triomphale, salubre, pleine de sève et d'affirmations..." writes R.Jouve. "Gabriel Marcel ne place sa foi qu'à l'extrême pointe de la flèche, où l'accumulation des contradictions sur lesquelles elle s'élève est aspirée comme en un point."⁵⁹

56. In The Oxford Chekhov, (ed. R.Hingley), London, Oxford University Press, 1964.

57. Le secret est dans les îles, p.13

58. Ibid.

59. "Un théâtre de la sincérité. Gabriel Marcel, métaphysicien et dramaturge." in Études, vol.2, avril, 1932, p.26.

Marcel's mature philosophical and dramatic work is that of a man who, having discovered religious faith, does not cease to question it, and for this reason his theatre, as C. Moeller observes in his survey of twentieth century literature and thought, "est donc à même d'atteindre ceux qui, sans être déjà animés d'un sentiment religieux explicite, sont cependant éveillés à la présence d'un monde spirituel".⁶⁰ It is in this particular respect that Marcel has made a significant contribution to religious drama in the twentieth century, for the message of his plays is, in many ways, far closer to a non-Christian public than Claudel's L'Annonce faite à Marie,⁶¹ for example, or the Dialogues des Carmélites⁶² of Georges Bernanos, although it must be recognised that, as works of theatre, these two plays probably surpass anything that Marcel has ever written.

Unlike Marcel, Sartre's importance as a dramatist has not been seriously contested. Most of Sartre's plays have met with immediate success in France and have been successfully revived, and the general interest in his theatre, to judge by the number of articles and books written on it both in France and abroad, is still considerable. Although Les Mouches was rather coolly received, Sartre was extremely fortunate in having his first major play produced by an experienced and as talented a director as Charles Dullin. Dullin was not able to make an indifferent play a great theatrical success, but he did give Sartre valuable insight into the essential qualities of good drama. What Sartre had discovered a few years earlier at Trier was the very great impact which a play could have on its audience, but he had still to learn a great deal about dramatic style. Bariona had been successful because the subject suited the occasion admirably, but it had been

60. Littérature du XX^e siècle et Christianisme, IV, Paris, Casterman, 1960, p.212.

61. In Théâtre, II, Paris, Gallimard, bibliothèque de la Pléiade, 1956.

62. Paris, Éditions du Seuil, 1949.

hastily composed and written, and Sartre was not unaware of its many imperfections. "Elle sacrifiait trop à de longs discours démonstratifs,"⁶³ he later declared. It is these same stylistic imperfections which explain, to a large extent, the failure of Les Mouches (for, as with Bariona, the subject was ideally suited to the situation and mood of the public which was to see the play). These stylistic imperfections were brought home emphatically to Sartre in the course of the rehearsals directed by Dullin at the Théâtre de la Cité. "Mon dialogue était verbeux; Dullin, sans m'en faire reproche ni me conseiller d'abord des coupures, me fit comprendre, en s'adressant aux seuls acteurs," recalls Sartre, "qu'une pièce de théâtre doit être exactement le contraire d'une orgie d'éloquence, c'est-à-dire: le plus petit nombre de mots accolés ensemble, irrésistiblement, par une action irréversible et une passion sans repos."⁶⁴ It is certainly no coincidence that Sartre's next play, Huis clos, remedies many of the obvious inadequacies of his first two experimental works and has those very qualities of dramatic action and style which, through Dullin's influence, Sartre had realised were essential if a play was to be effective in performance and not just an interesting literary text. In particular, Huis clos shows Sartre's command of the language and dialogue of the theatre: the long speeches of Les Mouches gave way to sharp and rapid exchanges, and, as in his later dramatic work, Sartre shows a particular gift for striking slogans or catch-phrases. Inès' accusation: "Tu n'es rien d'autre que ta vie." (HC165), and Garcin's cry of "l'enfer, c'est les Autres" (HC167) will be remembered long after the curtain has fallen to end the play, as will Hoederer's bold assertion: "Tous les moyens sont bons quand ils sont efficaces" (MS209)

63. "Le théâtre de A jusqu'a Z" in L'Avant-Scène Théâtre, no.402-3, 1-15 mai, 1968, p.33.

64. Ibid.

or Goetz's rhetorical outburst: "Si Dieu existe, l'homme est néant; si l'homme existe..."(DD267). The danger with such phrases is that they may become isolated from the context of the performance and then interpreted as an accurate summary of Sartre's thought on inter-personal relationships or the nature of revolutionary action, for example, when it is in fact clear that they are highly provocative and over-simplified formulae. On the other hand, because they are provocative and over-simplified, and not qualified or explained in more detail, they are theatrically effective. This point is emphasised by Jean-Louis Barrault when he says of the language of the theatre that "on doit l'entendre une seule fois et l'entendre très rapidement, donc il ne faut pas demander au spectateur de faire des associations d'idées; il faut que le langage soit frappant au lieu d'être, mettons, intellectuel".⁶⁵ The striking dramatic language of plays like Huis clos and Les Mains sales also reflects the very clear-cut themes or ideas with which the spectators are presented. Where Marcel treads cautiously and proceeds by careful analysis, Sartre is prepared to exaggerate and over-simplify; the tone of Marcel's theatre is suggestive, while Sartre's plays, with the exception of Les Séquestrés d'Altona, advance with great clarity and decisiveness along a broad moral or political front. Once again, this emphasises Sartre's strength and effectiveness as a dramatist for, as R. Speaight observes: "it is the capital letters which give to the plays of Sartre their force; it is the capital letters which make us listen...",⁶⁶ adding that, although Sartre's vision of life may be less deep than that of Marcel, it is far clearer and that "in the theatre clarity is always more effective than chiaroscuro".⁶⁷

65. Un théâtre de situations, p.43.

66. "Philosophy in the French Theatre Today" in The Listener, 19th February, 1953, p.309.

67. Ibid.

Sartre's best dramatic work also demonstrates his ability to create an atmosphere of tension and excitement to match the extreme situations around which the plays are constructed. Thus, as J. Guicharnaud remarks, "the spectator is held by the expectation of rebounds, the promise of extreme and definitive acts, the surprise of certain dramatic effects, and the double question: What's going to happen? How will it turn out?"⁶⁸ This is particularly apparent in Les Mains sales, for example, and, to a lesser extent, in Le Diable et le Bon Dieu and Les Séquestrés d'Altona. Sartre also shows his readiness to experiment with different dramatic forms and genres. The comic genre is used with great effect in La Putain respectueuse and Nekrassov to underline serious political issues, a mythological or historical background provides the setting for Les Mouches, Le Diable et le Bon Dieu and Les Séquestrés d'Altona, Les Mains sales has a realistic, contemporary setting, and Huis clos combines both realism and symbolism. Finally, with Kean and Les Troyennes, Sartre has given evidence of his skill as an adapter. Although, however, his plays contain many new and challenging situations and ideas, there is nothing original in his experimentation with dramatic forms. Indeed, Sartre believes in fairly traditional modes of expression and of audience participation, and, in this, he differs quite markedly from another committed socialist playwright like Brecht. Sartre admires Brecht more than any other twentieth century dramatist and declares himself to be in total agreement with the kind of Marxist views expressed in his plays.⁶⁹ He does not, however, believe totally in Epic theatre as Brecht has defined and developed it: he accepts the need for distanciation in that the audience should become aware and critical of the problems with which it is presented, but he also believes that the playwright should make full use of the effects of

68. Modern French Theatre from Giraudoux to Beckett, p.132.

69. See Un théâtre de situations, p.327.



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Dramatic theatre - that is to say the creation of characters and a situation with which the spectators can identify. Thus, in his own form of "théâtre engagé" Sartre attempts to combine some of the elements of Epic and Dramatic theatre, and considers that the ideal theatrical effect "serait de montrer et d'émouvoir en même temps",⁷⁰ - an effect which he probably comes closest to achieving in plays like Huis clos and Les Mains sales.

Sartre's main strength as a political dramatist lies in the fact that he stresses the need for the individual to take it upon himself to try and change the world in which he lives while also taking into account the extent to which external social forces may submerge his powers of revolt and contestation or distort the effect of his acts. Social and political change is not, therefore, presented as an inevitable consequence of the march of History, but is seen as the result of human endeavour, with all the uncertainty, obstacles and difficulties which it entails! There is no facile revolutionary optimism in Sartre's plays, and the search for personal identity, as in the theatre of Marcel, is tempered by the threat of failure and by the recognition of the need for constant application and self-renewal. In this way, the existential dimension of the dramatic work of Marcel and Sartre is clearly affirmed.

70. "Deux heures avec Sartre" in L'Express, no.431, 17.9.1959.

CONCLUSION

The aim of this thesis has been to provide an exposition and discussion of the theme of personal identity in the theatre of Gabriel Marcel and Jean-Paul Sartre. As far as the theatre of Marcel and Sartre taken in isolation is concerned, the most complete studies to date of the dramatist's treatment of the theme of personal identity is provided by J.Chenu in Le théâtre de Gabriel Marcel et sa signification métaphysique and by F.Jeanson in Sartre par lui-même. Both of these critics have admirably grasped and conveyed in their studies the basic meaning and movement of the plays of Marcel and Sartre, but neither has taken into account the final period of their work and, despite the fact that they are often spoken of and related as philosophers, neither has attempted a comparison of them as dramatists. Particular attention has been paid in the thesis to the plays which fall into this final period, while the first and last chapters cover new ground in discussing the respective importance of the theatre in the life and work of Marcel and Sartre and in comparing the two dramatists' treatment of the theme of personal identity. The general scope of the study has also been enhanced by relating the work of two prominent French thinkers whose view of the world and of the individual's place in it ultimately raises two fundamentally different philosophies of life: Christian and Marxist. A particular effort has been made in the thesis to give a balanced and dispassionate "vue d'ensemble" of the complete dramatic work of the two writers. This has depended not only on carefully tracing the evolution in the thoughts and preoccupations of Marcel and Sartre as it affects the theme of personal identity, but also on trying to identify as closely as possible with the author's own particular beliefs and aspirations. In other words, it has been important to approach the plays "from within" before making any judgement about them, rather than criticise them from a fixed ideological standpoint. It has been

seen that Sartre's dramatic work, in particular, has often been gravely misrepresented when criticism has been coloured by strong ideological differences.

It has also been borne in mind that the plays of Marcel and Sartre, like those of any dramatist, have been written, first and foremost, to be performed, and an attempt has therefore been made to assess the strengths and weaknesses of their work as theatre. In this respect, Sartre's plays have had a far greater impact than those of Marcel. Not only has Sartre shown himself to be a more imaginative playwright than Marcel by his experimentation with different dramatic forms and techniques, he has also proved that he possesses a sure feel for the language, situations and general atmosphere of the theatre. But the fact that the plays of Sartre have aroused a far wider and more lasting interest than those of Marcel cannot be accounted for simply in terms of dramatic style and technique. It is significant that the whole tone and content of Sartre's work has found an immediate echo not only among his contemporaries but also among succeeding generations. His plays, in common with the rest of his work, raise challenging and controversial philosophical and political issues and, because of this, they are readily accepted in an age of social unrest, of growing class-consciousness and contestation of authority and power. Marcel's work, on the other hand, despite its range and diversity, has rarely been thought of as particularly challenging and has certainly never been looked on as controversial. This does not, of course, mean that Marcel has failed to capture the imagination of the public simply because he has tried to uphold outmoded values and beliefs. In fact, his plays are also critical and challenging in their own right, but the subject of the "soul in exile" or spiritual unrest and Marcel's careful and detailed study of it is clearly out of touch with the general mood of contemporary society. Thus F.Kingston, in his Christian

critique of modern French existentialism, readily concedes that "Marcel's treatment of reality is not a popular one" and that "his writings will not be read by the large numbers of people who read Sartre".¹ Nor does the short-term future suggest a reversal in the respective appeal of the work of Marcel and Sartre. Emphasising the significance of the agitation and contestation of the left, and the increasing politicisation of our daily lives, G.Sandier writes: "Loger en nous des images efficaces ou des concepts subversifs qui, les uns comme les autres, soient de nature à provoquer des hommes à des actes, voilà bien, semble-t-il, la seule fin que se puisse proposer le théâtre, s'il entend demeurer un langage contemporain."² In this respect, the plays of Sartre, the majority of which were first performed more than twenty years ago, have lost none of their relevance or "actualité". Although Marcel's theatre does have much to tell us about the situation of man in contemporary society, his message is unlikely to have any great impact on the public as a whole until there is a widespread rebirth of man's sense of spiritual belonging. At the present time, however, there is no apparent likelihood of such a radical change in people's outlook and preoccupations.

Although Marcel and Sartre hold very different and, in many ways, incompatible views of the world, this does not mean that appreciation on an individual level of one of the dramatists will necessarily preclude appreciation of the other. We can, for example, admire the specifically theatrical qualities of Un Homme de Dieu or of Huis clos, just as we can admire these qualities in the work of Claudel and Brecht; but, even more significantly, many of the situations presented in the plays of Marcel and Sartre can be directly related to our own

1. French Existentialism: A Christian Critique, pp.203-4.

2. Théâtre et Combat: Regards sur le théâtre actuel, Paris, Stock, 1970, p.15.

experience of life. Indeed, it should be remembered that, for the spectator or reader, the dramatic work of Marcel and Sartre constitutes an appeal which is ultimately far more important than any aesthetic judgement which we may make about their plays. Like The Murder of Gonzago performed at Hamlet's request before Claudius and the Court of Elsinore, the theatre of Marcel and Sartre is a mirror in which we catch sight of our own reflection. The characters of Le Monde cassé, Le Dard and L'Émissaire or of Les Mains sales, Le Diable et le Bon Dieu and Les Séquestrés d'Altona are struggling with varying degrees of success to live and act meaningfully in a world which many of us, irrespective of political or religious beliefs, can hardly fail to recognise as our own. Whether the ultimate recourse for the individual is religious or political faith, the awful reality of our age is reflected in the bitterness and discontent forseen by Werner, the divisive and fanatical ideologies witnessed by Antoine, the oppressive inequality of wealth, power and privilege seen by Goetz and the impotence and guilt felt by Frantz. The plays of Marcel and Sartre do not allow us to escape from the reality of our daily lives, but make us aware of ourselves as moral agents in a particular social or political context. In other words, the spectator, reader or critic is stripped of all intellectual pretence and called into question as a human being. In this respect, the theatre of Marcel and Sartre is a rejection of scholasticism and an instrument of self-criticism which may ultimately lead to self-renewal. The study of their plays should not therefore be viewed as an academic adventure enjoyable as an end in itself, but as one further step towards a deeper understanding of the world in which we live, and as an appeal to action, an appeal which leaves us free to choose between Christian morality and revolutionary "praxis".

BIBLIOGRAPHY

The bibliography is divided into two sections:

Section A gives full bibliographical details of the plays of Marcel and Sartre, (listed chronologically according to date of publication) as well as details of first performances and major revivals.

Section B provides a select bibliography of other works by Marcel and Sartre (including articles and interviews), also arranged chronologically, and of critical studies devoted to the two writers (including theatre reviews of the plays discussed in the thesis). These critical studies are listed in alphabetical order under the author's name, but the theatre reviews are arranged chronologically. This section of the bibliography contains only those works which are referred to in the thesis or which were found to be of particular interest with regard to the subject of this study.

The most complete bibliography to date of Marcel's works is provided by R. Troisfontaines in De l'existence à l'être: la philosophie de Gabriel Marcel, Louvain, E. Nauwelaerts, 1953, enlarged and re-edited in 1968, and the most complete bibliography of Sartre's works up to the end of 1969 is to be found in Les Écrits de Sartre, compiled by M. Contat and M. Rybalka, Paris, Gallimard, 1970.

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- (ii) Dreher, S. et Rolli, M., Bibliographie de la littérature française 1930-1939, Lille, Giard & Geneva, Droz, 1948.
- (iii) Drefet, M.L., Bibliographie de la littérature française 1940-1949, Lille, Giard & Geneva, Droz, 1954 .
- (iv) French VII Bibliography, vols 1-2, New York, Stechert-Hafner, Inc., 1949-58; vols. 3-4, New York, French Institute, 1959-68.
- (v) French XX Bibliography, vol. 5, New York, French Institute, 1969-73.
- (vi) Revue d'Histoire du Théâtre, Paris, Brient, 1948-73.

SECTION A

1. The theatre of Marcel

La Grâce and Le Palais de sable in Le Seuil invisible, Paris, Grasset, 1914.

Le Coeur des autres, Paris, Grasset, 1921.

✓ Un Homme de Dieu, Paris, Grasset, 1923; re-edited Paris, La Table ronde, 1950, and in Cinq pièces majeures, Paris, Plon, 1973.

L'Iconoclaste, Paris, Stock, 1923; re-edited in Percées vers un ailleurs, Paris, Fayard, 1973.

Le Quatuor en fa dièse, Paris, Plon, 1925.

Le Regard neuf, Le Mort de demain and La Chapelle ardente in Trois pièces, Paris, Plon, 1931; La Chapelle ardente re-edited Paris, La Table ronde, 1949, together with a first unfinished version of the play entitled Le Sol détruit.

Le Monde cassé, suivi de Position et approches concrètes du mystère ontologique, Paris, Desclée de Brouwer, 1933; Le Monde cassé re-edited in Cinq pièces majeures, Paris, Plon, 1973.

Le Chemin de crête, Paris, Grasset, 1936; re-edited in Cinq pièces majeures, Paris, Plon, 1973.

Le Fanal, Paris, Stock, 1936.

Le Dard, Paris, Plon, 1936; re-edited in Le secret est dans les îles, Paris, Plon, 1967.

La Soif, Paris, Desclée de Brouwer, 1938; re-edited in Cinq pièces majeures, Paris, Plon, 1973.

L'Horizon, Paris, Aux Étudiants de France, 1945; re-edited in Percées vers un ailleurs, Paris, Fayard, 1973.

Colombyre ou le Brasier de la Paix, La Double Expertise, Les Points sur les I and Le Divertissement posthume in Théâtre comique, Paris, Albin Michel, 1947.

L'Émissaire and Le Signe de la Croix in Vers un autre royaume, Paris, Plon, 1949; L'Émissaire re-edited in Le secret est dans les îles, Paris, Plon, 1967, and Le Signe de la Croix re-edited with additional epilogue in Cinq pièces majeures, Paris, Plon, 1973.

La Fin des temps, Paris, Réalités, no. 56, 1950; re-edited in Le secret est dans les îles, Paris, Plon, 1967.

Rome n'est plus dans Rome, Paris, La Table ronde, 1951.

Croissez et multipliez, Paris, Plon, 1955.

Mon temps n'est plus le vôtre, Paris, Plon, 1955.

La Dimension Florestan, Paris, Plon, 1958.

La Prune et la prunelle in L'Avant-Scène Théâtre, no. 225, 1960.

Two unfinished plays have also been published:

L'Insondable in Présence et Immortalité, Paris, Flammarion, 1959.

Un Juste in Paix sur la terre, Paris, Aubier, 1965.

Other plays by Marcel which have not been published include:

Le Petit Garçon (completed in 1913; rewritten in 1919).

Les Mains vides (1925).

L'Attelage (1926).

La Chambre d'en face (1927).

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La Grace, Paris, Théâtre des Mathurins, 1921.

Le Regard neuf, Paris, Le Nouvel Ambigu, 25.5.1922.

La Chapelle ardente, Paris, Vieux-Colombier, 25.9.1925; Paris, Théâtre Charles de Rochefort, 5.10.1950.

Le Dard, Paris, Théâtre des Arts, 2.3.1937; Paris, Théâtre des Deux Masques, May, 1937.

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