Norma Coverdale, B.A.: the treatment of women in selected works of Henry de Montherlant

Coverdale, Norma

NORMA COVERDALE, B.A.: THE TREATMENT OF WOMEN IN SELECTED WORKS OF HENRY DE MONTHERLANT.

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The aim of this thesis is to determine how women are treated in selected works of Henry de Montherlant. This is explored by examining their relationships with other women as well as with men. Inevitably, this leads to an analysis of the multifaceted area of love.

Part I researches Montherlant's prose work and included in this section is the investigation of the importance of 'l'ordre mâle' to the author and the influence this exerts over his early prose work in the areas of tauromachy, war and sport, and where the male adherence to this concept leaves women.

The 'syncrétisme et alternance' which is central to Montherlant's thinking is explored in this section.

Part 2 is concerned with Montherlant's theatre in which the psychological development of the main characters is of great importance.

It is in this section that a comparative study is made of the influence of Mme. Elisabeth Zehrfuss' written contribution to *La Reine morte*. Her unpublished notes are set out in full in the Appendix.

The thesis also draws on the unpublished correspondence between Henry de Montherlant and Elisabeth Zehrfuss between the years 1934 and 1945.

An investigation is made as to whether or not there are any differences between the way women are treated in Montherlant's prose and in his theatre and the conclusion is drawn that there are.

THE TREATMENT OF WOMEN IN SELECTED WORKS OF HENRY DE MONTHERLANT

BY

NORMA COVERDALE, B.A.

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I am indebted to Dr. Robert Posen, whose enthusiasm for his subject inspired me to pursue this research, to Dr. Barry Garnham for his constructive criticism and for encouraging me to independent thought, and to Mme Elisabeth Zehrfuss, whose exchange of letters with Henry de Montherlant, together with her diary notes, have been made freely available to me, and whose sharp mind and excellent memory for detail have made my research very rewarding.

INTRODUCTION

In the preparation of this thesis I have elected to divide it into two sections, beginning with Montherlant's prose work and concluding with his drama, although I have by no means set out my study chronologically within each part. I felt it necessary to begin with his prose because, since much of it was written before his drama, and indeed some of it in his early youth, it is interesting to see the development of his ideas in the treatment of women within his works.

Much of Montherlant's early works are semi-autobiographical and mirror his youthful ideals - *Le Songe* (1922), *Les Olympiques* (1924), *Les Bestiaires* (1926) and *La Petite Infante de Castille* (1929) from his prose work, but also *L'Exil* (his first play, originally written in 1914, when Montherlant was only eighteen years old, but not published until 1929).

The texts I have selected for study are as follows:

Prose: *Le Songe, Les Olympiques, Les Bestiaires, La Petite Infante de Castille, Les Jeunes Filles, Pitié pour les femmes, Le Démon du bien, Les Lépreuses, La Rose de sable* and *Les Garçons.*

Theatre: *L'Exil, La Reine morte, Malatesta, Le Maître de Santiago, Port-Royal* and *La Mort qui fait le trottoir (Don Juan).*

Although there is a long length of time between the writing of his first novel - *Le Songe* - and his later novels, of the ones I have selected, *La Rose de sable*, published in 1968, was actually written between 1930 and 1932 and *Les Garçons*, published in 1969, was first drafted in 1914 and fifty pages of it were in fact written in 1929.

The thesis draws upon the unpublished correspondence between Henry de Montherlant and Elisabeth Zehrfuss, between the years 1934 and 1945, from which I have quoted liberally. The originals of these letters (of which there are over 400) are on loan to the Bibliothèque Cantonale at the University of Lausanne, and Mme Zehrfuss kindly gave me copies of all of them. Mme Zehrfuss' diary notes, which she kept at this time, have also proved invaluable in providing a

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background to this period of Montherlant's writing as well as an insight into their very intimate friendship. I am also indebted to Professors Jacques Robichez and Michel Raimond for the recorded interviews they accorded me when I met them, the former imparting some of his vast knowledge of Montherlant's theatre, and the latter of the author's prose work.

In my analysis of the texts I shall investigate characters, the narrator and the author, all of whom are distinct, but there are times, particularly in his prose work, and which I shall specify, when these differentiations are blurred. There are occasions when it is clear that the author is using the narrator to speak for him. At others, the author intervenes and at yet other times the narrator is not representing the authorial voice.

There is a sharp distinction between the treatment of women in Montherlant's prose work and those in his theatre and this raises the questions 'what distinction?' and 'why?' 'What?', I hope will be answered for the reader in this thesis. 'Why?' is more open to debate. There has often been the suggestion that, in his drama, Montherlant is atoning for some of the women he created in his prose. Being a man who was never swayed by public opinion (although he was an avid reader of any criticism written about his work), and who believed implicitly in the freedom of the individual to nurture and develop his own creativity, I believe it is much more likely that it was Montherlant's *choice* to make the women of his theatre more heroic than those in his prose.

There are certain concepts common to all Montherlant's work, be it prose or drama. The nature of love is one of these and Montherlant explores it in great detail, covering every spectrum of the emotion and the resultant relationship between people, be they of the opposite gender or of the same sex. However, it is not until his theatre that this investigation reaches its peak in his portrayal of Mariana in *Le Maître de Santiago* and of Inès in *La Reine morte.*

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'L'ordre mâle' is another belief close to Montherlant's heart. Although by no means absent from his theatre, it is more evident in his prose work, and for this reason I have explored it fully in Part I.

Conversely, 'la vie intérieure' of Montherlant's heroes, although present as an idea in his prose work, is more fully developed in his theatre, to the degree that the women are often set up in opposition to the men in order that the psychology of the hero can be fully explored.

Central to all Montherlant's work, be it prose or drama, is his theory of 'syncrétisme et alternance'. It is a concept to which he adhered in his personal as well as his professional life. Montherlant believed that every experience had validity. Despite the traditionally accepted belief that certain attitudes or modes of behaviour were incompatible with one another, for Montherlant '*tout est vrai*'[1].

We shall see 'alternance' manifested in the character of Costals in the cycle of novels grouped under the title of *Les Jeunes Filles*. He displays contradictory characteristics to different women – 'soit un roué avec Rachel Guigui, un séducteur avec Solange, un camarade un peu protecteur avec Andrée, un directeur de conscience janseniste avec Thérèse'[2]. 'Syncrétisme' is portrayed not only within one character but, in the tetralogy of *Les Jeunes Filles*, the one-sided portrayals of each of the women together make up a syncretic whole.

Like many authors, Montherlant used real life experiences of himself and others which he interwove into his work in such a way that he denied that the final characters were ever meant to represent anyone in particular. However, he was well aware that his reading public looked for similarities between his characters and people they knew, to the extent that he felt it necessary to warn Elisabeth Zehrfuss not to refer to herself in her letters as 'un artichaut'. (They had intimate nick-names for each other):

> Votre idée de parler de l'artichaut est bien imprudente. Dans cinquante ans, on ressortira nos lettres, on verra que Costa[3] appelle Solange 'l'artichaut', et on en déduira des choses affreuses pour votre honneur.[4]

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The public's reaction to the tetralogy of *Les Jeunes Filles* was not only to claim that Solange was the exact representation of several of Montherlant's female friends (many of whom vied with each other for this 'honour') but, conversely, to decry Andrée and Thérèse as unbelievable individuals. However, in a letter to Elisabeth Zehrfuss, Montherlant enclosed a letter from one Mlle M. C. Martin of Marseille, sent to him by his friend, M. Maurice Martin du Gard. With great delight Montherlant sees this fan-letter as a 'Nouvelle preuve du caractère classique d'Andrée'[5]. Mlle Martin claims that it was only on reading *Service inutile*, 'que j'ai cru comprendre les sentiments de M. de Montherlant à mon égard, et encore, sur le moment, je n'avais pas *la présomption de m'attribuer différents fragments* de la "Lettre du Père à son fils"[6]. This provokes a comment in the margin by Montherlant:

> inoui!... je savais que *toutes* les femmes se reconnaissent dans Andrée, mais dans le "fils"!...[7]

Mlle Martin's assertion that *'certains indices révélateurs*, notamment le souvenir de notre sourire échangé en 1934 lors de sa conférence à Marseille, m'ouvrirent les yeux'[8], (a smile which, if it had ever happened, Montherlant did not remember), and her expressed wish that 'si M. de Montherlant éprouve toujours ses mêmes sentiments à mon égard, *devrons-nous nous armer mutuellement de confiance*'[9], drives Montherlant to write at the side, 'tout cela est exactement Andrée et Thérèse Pantevin'[10].

His letters to Elizabeth Zehrfuss verify that not only did Montherlant use some of his experiences with people to create parts of his characters, but that, where events were outside his own acquaintance he did, on occasions, use notes specifically requested by him of Mme Zehrfuss. This particularly applies to the psychology of the pregnant woman, which I shall deal with in the Introduction to part 2, but there is also an important letter which he wrote to her on February 14th 1939, wherein he writes,

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> Il vous est instamment demandé de noter des détails *nuptiaux* pour les *Lépreuses*, – qu'on vous donnera à lire dès mon retour. Toute brindille sera la bienvenue pour la confection de ce nid.[11]

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Notes

1. Henry de Montherlant, 'Syncrétisme et alternance', in *Aux Fontaines du désir*, in *Essais*, p. 242.

2. Louis Baladier, letter to the present author, 16 September 1990.

3. Costa was the original name for Costals.

4. Henry de Montherlant, letter to Elisabeth Zehrfuss, 7 October 1936.

5. Montherlant, letter to Elisabeth Zehrfuss, 20 May 1936.

6. Mlle M. C. Martin, letter to M. Maurice Martin du Gard, 16 May 1936.

7. Ibid.

8. Ibid.

9. Ibid.

10. Ibid.

11. Montherlant, letter to Elisabeth Zehrfuss, 14 February 1939.

CHAPTER 1 'L'ORDRE MALE'

> *Apaisés les esprits de la vie forte qu'il se disposait à trahir. Les vents peuvent se lever enfin, qui remportent Alban vers la pleine mer de l'ordre mâle. Iphigénie a été égorgée sur l'autel.*[1]

'L'ordre mâle' for Montherlant has certain characteristics. It is concerned with the world of order, male valour and comradeship, which can be found in such male-dominated activities as war and bull-fighting, as well as in physical sports.

In *Les Olympiques* the juxtaposition of Mme Peyrony with the young athletes highlights this important conception of 'l'ordre mâle'. For Mme Peyrony is the embodiment of 'Le Désordre' – the author even gives that title to the chapter introducing her. She presides over a household which is 'la maison à l'envers,'[2] where there is

> L'ignorance, la frivolité, l'impulsion ... l'absence complète du moindre bon sens ... La cage des hamadryas, au Jardin d'Acclimatation, est un lieu plus sain, est un lieu plus fraternal qu'un tel foyer ...[3]

Her frivolous adornments and sophisticated apparel serve to emphasise the incongruity of this disorganised woman appearing in the orderly world of the two hundred disciplined young male athletes who, in their sparse, purely functional clothing in austere colours of black and white, are participators in an exceptionally self-disciplined life-style.

The methodical line-up of the boys on the starting line is likened by the narrator to that other area where the male order prevails – namely, an army on the march to war. By his sarcasm directed at Mme Peyrony, whom he compares to a fish jumping when she jumps at the sound of the starting pistol ('Eh! Madame, vous faut-il des sels?'[4]) we are left in no doubt that she is a misfit in this 'royaume de Garçonnerie'[5].

Through the irony which is continually directed at Mme Peyrony because of her feeble reactions – such as requiring a chair to sit down – which dramatically demonstrate the contrast between her and the uprightness and strength of the

athletes, we are shown that hers is an alien and unsettling presence in this world of male order. The narrator ironically ponders on the possibility that offering a lady a seat in the future may become no longer just an act of gallantry but perhaps

> ... *réellement* elles ne tiennent pas sur leurs jambes?[6]

The strict training régime of the athletes has its parallel in the rigorous discipline of an army, and these two areas of life epitomise 'l'ordre mâle' in Montherlant's world.

The meeting between the narrator with his grazed hand and the injured female cross-country runner in *Les Olympiques* is another means of demonstrating the tribute to 'l'ordre mâle'. The sight of her blood elates him because the connotation of injury with combat is a reminder to him of the comradeship that war fosters. He now has a feeling of kinship with her, whereas before he had never singled her out as worthy of notice. Now, in the new affinity he feels between them, she is elevated to the world of male valour and he sees her as

> ... la guerrière ... la camarade, la soeur profonde des soldats ... et son nom était *Courage*.[7]

The blood flowing from her injury reminds him of the wounds of dead soldiers which he has sometimes seen covered in poppies, which have been thrown there by the bomb blast. By this similarity she is thus equated with 'l'ordre mâle'.

The narrator takes the symbol of blood to greater heights, calling it 'la religion du sang'[8]. Whereas water and whiteness are symbols of purity in Montherlant's theatre here, in his world of prose, he sees in the injured athlete's blood a renewing of one of the oldest mysteries:

> ... le sang qui épure, initie et rend sacré.[9]

So, any association with blood, by extension of the metaphor, is deemed sacred. The young athlete, female though she be, is, for the moment, in the eyes of the narrator, a member of the much revered male order.

He extends the metaphor further to remind us of the third area of 'l'ordre mâle' which stands equally alongside the worlds of war and athleticism – that is, the sport of bull-fighting. This is illustrated by the excitement of the narrator's dog, who desperately wants to lick the blood dripping from the girl's wound, just like the dog in the Mithraic bas-relief who is voraciously drinking the bull's blood. This reference to Mithra is an indication of Montherlant's obsession with ancient Rome, Greece and paganism, which lasted throughout his life.

In *Les Bestiaires* Alban relives this myth. He is Mithra and the bull he will kill is Le Mauvais Ange. By so doing he will not only be making the sacrifice demanded by Soledad in her mythical role of le Soleil, but he will be affirming his position in the male order. His desire to conquer Soledad is akin to his wish to bring a bull to submission. Indeed, he believes:

> Le combat et la volupté sont frère et soeur.[10]

Yet, for Alban to enjoy satisfaction from such an act, the bull/Soledad has to prove itself worthy. By her demand that Alban should so risk his life for her sexual favours, Soledad puts herself in the same position as a weak bull who does not merit the dignity of a fight to the death. Worthiness is important to the Alban of this novel, just as it is to him in *Le Songe*. Recognising that he could be killed in the bull-fight, he thinks,

> ... cela m'est égal d'être tué, si j'ai fait auparavant quelques choses dignes de moi.[11]

Blood, so significant a symbol in the male world of war and tauromachy, and serving as a reminder of this male order in the episode of the wounded athlete of *Les Olympiques*, plays an important part throughout *Les Bestiaires*, beginning with Alban's birth in 'un fleuve de sang'[12] and continuing with the blood of the bulls, not only of those injured in the bull-ring, but in the abattoir where they are unceremoniously chopped up after the corrida. The colour chosen by Soledad to wear at dinner echoes the symbolism. Her underskirt, which could be seen below her dress is

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> ... d'un rouge doré comme la blessure vive du taureau.[13]

Thus she is equated with the bull and so, like the bull, is a means by which Alban can assert his male dominance.

The link between Alban's affair with Soledad and the whole world of tauromachy is further emphasised by the pace of the novel. The author has carefully constructed it so that the outer framework formed by the chapters follows the tempo of a bull-fight, with the inner dual plot of amourous pursuit intertwined with Alban's passion for bull-fighting conforming to the pattern of the corrida with its rhythm of thrusts and pauses for breathing space and eventual climax.

Soledad, like the bull, is an essential element in the masculine world – one whose purpose is to allow the exposition of 'l'ordre mâle' whilst herself remaining outside it.

In contrast, in *Le Songe*, we are shown the type of female who, like the injured athlete, is allowed to enter 'l'ordre mâle'. In this novel Alban is entranced by the album he looks through with Dominique, when he sees pictures of the Parthenon – the temple of the young girl. What fascinates and pleases him is

> ... que ce temple de la Jeune Fille soit construit dans le style dorique, comme si les Athéniens, puisque le gardien de leur cité était une femme, avaient voulu qu'au moins par sa demeure elle rappelât constamment qu'elle participait aussi à l'ordre mâle ...[14]

So, we are being indoctrinated with the idea that only a certain type of female, that is one with a masculine shape, is to be admired and accepted in 'l'ordre mâle', and, by implication, that 'l'ordre mâle' is something worthy of aspiration.

Dominique believed, when Alban left her to go to war, that

> Il est bien parti ... bien repris par cet ordre mâle, où quoi que je fasse je m'entrerai jamais,[15]

When she conceives the idea of becoming a nurse at the Front she believes that this would be a way of entering this male order where before she had always been

on the fringe, through her sporting activities.

In fact, by participating in her athletic, non-sexual life, she was already part of that male order. Their Platonic friendship, too, helped to ensure Dominique her place in the masculine world. Once she tries to change their relationship she risks being alienated from the male order.

The inferiority of heterosexual love, which has no place in the comradeship, which is an essential component of 'l'ordre mâle', can be seen in the symbolism of words such as 'mollesse'[16] and 'chancelante'[17], which are evidence of a weakness which accompanies Dominique's desire in contrast to the muscular strength she portrayed when participating in the masculine world.

If she had been successful in changing their friendship from the Platonic to the sensual one that she desired, it would have been impossible for her to remain a member of the masculine world. However, Alban's rejection of her later meant that she was compelled to stay in 'l'ordre mâle'. This compulsion may also be seen as the author's way of reconciling femininity and 'l'ordre mâle'. The embodiment of these two concepts in Dominique creates in her the Montherlantian ideal of the perfect woman at this period. But, more than this, Dominique serves as a means whereby Alban, in repelling her offer of a sensual relationship, is able to reaffirm his own allegiance to 'l'ordre mâle'. Thus we have an indication of the position of women, the treatment of whom I am exploring in Montherlant's œuvre.

Unlike Alban, Auligny, in *La Rose de sable*, is initially, an unwilling participant in 'l'ordre mâle'. It is purely to please his dominating mother that he enters the army, a career for which he is totally unsuited because of his awakened sympathies with the indigenous population, which cause conflict with his soldierly duties. His position in the masculine world in which he moves is undermined because it was only because he was 'pris en main par sa maman'[18], against his

own wishes, and by her conniving and intrigues, that he achieved a posting in Morocco.

The portrayal of such a man, whose

> ... sensibilité n'a guère son emploi dans la carrière des armes,[19]

is contrasted strongly with the picture we are given of Colonel Rugot, who is ambitious to the point of dyeing his hair purely for the purpose of seeming younger, in order to take part in active combat and thus ensure a chance of promotion.

It is not the male order itself which is being questioned in this novel, but Auligny's own feelings and the stance he takes within 'l'ordre mâle'. For his attitude of sympathy and kindness to the indigenous population does not produce any reciprocal feelings. Indeed, Auligny is killed by the very people against whom he had vowed not to take up arms. (He had already made plans to apply for a non-combative post before the uprising.)

Previously, he had desired to leave the army altogether, and he was encouraged to feel that he was not alone with his sensitivities and feelings of empathy with the Arabs when he met Pierrotey, who is leaving the army. Mistakenly, Auligny assumes that his new friend is departing for moral reasons. The narrator undermines this idea because, in fact, Pierrotey leaves in deference to his fiancée's wishes.

Auligny's noble sentiments are further undermined when the narrator tells us, tongue in cheek, that, in the middle of the night, the reluctant soldier is woken up 'par une crise de lâcheté'[20], and when he realises that leaving the army because of his compassion for the Arabs would put him outside society, he abandons this course of action. Thus noble sentiments are seen to take second place to the importance he attaches to 'belonging' in society.

The narrator does not allow us to lose sight of the fact that 'l'ordre mâle', despite Auligny's defection, remains all-important. When he has been discarded

by his mistress, Ram, Auligny's feelings for the indigenous population, which had been greatly inspired and maintained by his love for her, fade with her disappearance. In his efforts to distance himself from his former attachment to the Arabs, Auligny

> ... goûtait comme un assainissement à passer de la femme à l'ordre masculin.[21]

There is surely the overt meaning here that the male order is far more preferable to that of the female world with the pointed suggestion that the latter is contaminated. There is also the veiled suggestion that the female influence is one of the emotions whereas the male order is concerned with rationality. Added to this, we must not lose sight of the fact that it is Mme Auligny's fault that he is in the army, a misfit, and therefore it can be said that it is she who is the cause of the upsetting of the orderliness of the male world.

Although Costals, in the tetralogy of *Les Jeunes Filles*, is not participating in one of the areas of 'l'ordre mâle' previously mentioned i.e. war, sport and tauromachy, nevertheless he remains safely ensconced in the masculine world. He achieves this by the determined preservation of his artistic intellectual and spiritual freedom, not allowing any woman to participate in those areas of his life. To that end, he limits his relationships with women preferring to involve himself with those who are his intellectual inferior – such as Solange, of whom he said:

> Son éducation intellectuelle est nulle.[22]

In this way he is able to preserve his masculine superiority.

By creating female characters in this tetralogy who are seen to be flawed, be it physically, emotionally or mentally, the author ensures that they have no possibility of even a tenuous participation in 'l'ordre mâle'. Like Douce, in *La Petite Infante de Castille*, their place, if it can be deemed such, in the male order, is one of passivity. It is Costals who remains the dominant figure, imposing his rules and regulations on all his relationships. It is he who decides whether any

association between him and a female should remain Platonic, or whether it should develop into one of sensuality.

It can be seen that the Montherlantian perception of 'l'ordre mâle' is of a world which is quite alien to most females who often provide a disruptive influence. Any participation by women in this masculine world of orderliness and virility is limited to a particular type – one who is athletic and who maintains her relationship with men devoid of sentiment. We have also seen that membership of 'l'ordre mâle' is a fragile and sometimes temporary affair.

Chapter 1 L'Ordre Mâle

Notes

1. Henry de Montherlant, *Le Songe*, p. 216.
2. Montherlant, *Les Olympiques*, p. 243.
3. *Ibid.*, p. 244.
4. *Ibid.*, p. 311.
5. *Ibid.*, p. 311.
6. Montherlant, *Les Olympiques.*, p. 312.
7. *Ibid.*, p. 249.
8. *Ibid.*, p. 248.
9. *Ibid.*, p. 249.
10. Montherlant, *Les Bestiaires*, p. 442.
11. *Ibid.*, pp. 554 and 555.
12. *Ibid.*, p. 512.
13. Montherlant, *Les Bestiaires*, p. 444.
14. Montherlant, *Le Songe*, p. 17.
15. *Ibid.*, p. 40.
16. Montherlant, *Le Songe*, p. 97.
17. *Ibid.*, p. 99.
18. Montherlant, *La Rose de sable*, p. 44.
19. Montherlant, *La Rose de sable*, p. 42.
20. *Ibid.*, p. 318.
21. Montherlant, *La Rose de sable*, p. 369.
22. Montherlant, *Les Jeunes Filles*, p. 1032.

CHAPTER 2 LOVE

L'idéal de l'amour est d'aimer sans qu'on vous le rende.[1]

1) Comradeship

> *Avant tout, croyance très ferme et que j'ai gardée, que si l'amour est une belle chose, l'amitié entre homme et femme, elle aussi, en est une très belle, plus haute que l'amour et plus précieuse d'être plus rare que lui, et difficile.*[2]

The comradeship which has been seen to be an important component of 'l'ordre mâle' is illustrated in the Platonic love which exists between Alban and Dominique in *Le Songe*. The author has created in Dominique a character who bears all the hallmarks of the type of female who is eligible to fit in to the male order. There can be no doubt that Montherlant chose her name as carefully as that of her counterpart, Douce, in *La Petite Infante de Castille*. The implied symbolism is obvious: each is representative of a type – Douce, is the sensual woman who epitomises sweetness and softness, whereas Dominique is symbolic of strength and virility – both physical and moral.

There is a suggestion of dual sexuality in Dominique, which is emphasised by the choice of Christian name being one which is common to both sexes. The author compounds this theory of her bi-sexuality with the fact that she shares the same surname (Soubrier) as Serge, in *La Ville dont le prince est un enfant*, who is the theatrical equivalent of Alban's lover, Serge Souplier, in *Les Garçons*. Note also the similarity of sound of the two surnames. This surely serves to underline the point that it is Dominique's masculine attributes which endear her to Alban.

Yet there is a conflict in Dominique between her feminine and masculine qualities which is hinted at right from the start. Because of her excellent physical shape, brought about by her well-developed muscles, she has a more masculine than feminine figure.

There is a contradiction within her that she finds difficult to resolve. On the one hand she looks with scorn on

> ... les femmes ... pendues aux bras des amants comme des êtres sans vertèbres et qui sans cela s'affaisseraient de faiblesse, pareilles à de grandes limaces déguisées.[3]

Chapter 2 Love 1) Comradeship

We shall see more of this theory of love being enfeebling – a favourite theme of the author's, – which leads one to suspect that the authorial voice is speaking here through Dominique's thoughts.

On the other hand, she experiences mixed emotions when she is first tussling with herself about whether or not to betray her feelings of love for Alban. Because she knows Alban thinks of her Platonically, she supresses the sensual side of herself:

> Je ne serai pas celle dont le corps toujours offre ou demande. Je resterai dure pour pouvoir vous soutenir ... et sans sourire que le sourire des glaciers éblouissants et brûlants de froid comme moi ...[4]

The word 'dure' suggests that there is no subservience in her decision. It is out of strength rather than weakness that she determines to maintain their comradeship on its Platonic level. For the moment, she has overcome the temptations within her to alter its state. Indeed, in lowering her face into his clasped hand, she touches it with her mouth, but the repetition of 'lèvres immobiles, lèvres immobiles'[5], followed by 'ne baisant pas'[6] assures us that, for the moment, Dominique will keep sentiment out of their friendship.

The first descriptions of Dominique are scattered liberally with such words as 'droite', 'forte', 'dure' and 'métal':

> Droite se tenait la fille ... droite, avec son nez droit, ses cheveux étroitement tordus ... sa bouche un peu dure.[7]

> ... la fille forte, avec ses épaules droites ... le dur visage.[8]

> ... elle avait l'uniformité du métal.[9]

These qualities imply a masculinity which exists within her female frame. Her dual sexuality is intimated in the description of her as 'hermaphrodite'.[10]

Her masculine characteristics are very much admired by Alban, who looks at Dominique with

> ... un noble regard d'homme, chargé d'admiration, de respect, de camaraderie, de gratitude, un regard pareil à une franche poignée de main, qui ne jouit ni ne s'attarde.[11]

Chapter 2 Love 1) Comradeship

Not only is she seen through Alban's eyes as strong, but

> ... tout en elle est toujours parfaitement vierge.[12]

The qualifying adjective confirms Alban's belief in the importance of maintaining their comradeship free from physical desire.

Dominique never wears lipstick, polishes her nails, or indulges in any other feminine frivolities, yet everything about her glows and gleams through rude health. There is a suggestion of non-sexuality about her perfection. The apparent contradiction in her sexlessness and her bisexuality, suggested earlier, is resolved if one thinks of the connotations of the word 'hermaphrodite', which is applied to her. There is the implication that, unlike the rest of the animal kingdom, where sexuality is distinctive, a hermaphrodite has no need to display sexual attraction, since the two sexes are contained within one body. The conflict is not in the male perception of this dual sexuality, but within Dominique herself.

Alban did not always confine his feelings for Dominique to those of Platonic friendship. When he first saw her running the 1,000 metres he was filled with desire, but he deliberately overcame his passion because, after he got to know her better, he deemed her worthy of much higher sentiments:

> ... elle lui avait révélé un sentiment qui à son point parfait, excluait le désir, que le désir eût dénaturé et déprécié. Pourquoi dès lors chercher en elle, qui y perdrait, ce plaisir que tant d'autres pouvaient lui donner en y gagnant?[13]

The very fact that his desire can be satisfied by 'tant d'autres' diminishes its value compared to the comradeship that he puts on so high a pedestal. This desire, which was 'dénaturé et déprécié' is in direct contrast to their friendship, which was 'une camaraderie émerveillée'.[14]

It is interesting that, although Alban seeks the cameraderie of men when he enlists, it is implicit in his friendship with Dominique that comradeship between male and female is rather special. This 'cameraderie émerveillée' was so important

> ... parceque l'un était homme et l'autre femme.[15]

This sentiment is expressed again in *Les Olympiques* when the narrator speaks of

> ... la camaraderie pure entre homme et femme... [16]

Whereas a sensual relationship in the Montherlantian novel involves a certain subservience by the female, as I shall discuss in the chapter on Heterosexual Love, the friendship which is so 'émerveillée' between male and female is based on equality:

> Ils s'étaient voulus et faits des pairs.[17]

In his friendship with other young men, Alban sensed there was a certain amount of self-interest, whereas in his friendship with Dominique this is absent and it is this which raises it above ordinary friendship:

> La discernant bien de l'amitié, il en avait fait quelque chose de plus charmant que l'amitié, parce que cela ne se contemplait pas soi-même ...[18]

Although there is this homage paid to the strong, female characters, such as Dominique, that is not to say that the narrator, or Alban, are dismissive of the Douces of their world, as will be seen later when discussing sensuality. Suffice it to say that each has her place in a man's world, but they are not to be interchanged, yet they are interdependent:

> ... il n'y aurait pas de Dominique, s'il n'y avait des Douce.[19]

The camaraderie which is pursued and extolled between men in the realms of war and school in Montherlant's *Le Songe* and *Les Garçons* respectively, is followed with as much gusto into the sports stadium in *Le Songe* and *Les Olympiques*. Such is the narrator's admiration for female athletes that his language becomes quite lyrical in his description of Mlle de Plémeur,

> ... avec son sourire au sommet de son être comme un bruit de cloches au sommet du ciel.[20]

The portrayal of comradeship is not confined to men, but, in *Le Songe*, we see it occurring equally strongly between two women. Suzanne Kestner and Dominique Soubrier are intense but friendly rivals:

> ... les camarades dont il n'est pas une à qui l'on veuille du mal ...[21]

Chapter 2 Love 1) Comradeship

However, it has to be admitted that these are two athletic women and, as such, are already partakers of a man's world, as we have seen in the chapter entitled *L'Ordre mâle.*

For all the glorification of camaraderie in *Le Songe*, the emphasis on it as a replacement for love points to a certain deficiency in the hero, Alban, who

> ... savait qu'il était capable d'amitié, il savait qu'il était capable de désir, il savait qu'il n'était pas capable d'amour.[22]

The admission of incapability implies that camaraderie is not so much a positive choice as a substitute, thus undermining comradeship.

Athletic women are praised not only for their aesthetic contribution to life via their fine muscular bodies, but also for their moral influence, although the narrator admits that this may not be the belief of many men. He feels that Platonic friendship between men and women is on a plane high above sensual relationships. Indeed, he makes a clear distinction between the body as an object of physical beauty, totally devoid of eroticism, which has its place in the sports stadium, and 'la chair', whose place is 'hors du club'.[23] By maintaining this differentiation, the narrator sees friendship between himself and female athletes

> ... élevée dans la hiérarchie du raffinement[24]

This is a sentiment experienced by Alban, whose friendship with Dominique is elevated to the realms of the sublime by the use of mystical words like 'infini' and 'divin':

> ... elle lui donnait le sentiment de l'infini[25]

Indeed, in Dominique, Alban saw

> ... une amie en qui l'on sent quelque chose de divin[26]

thus confirming the reverence placed on Platonic friendship between the two sexes.

2) Homosexual Love

> *J'ai mis* ange *au féminin. En effet, puisque les anges sont de purs esprits, je ne vois pas pourquoi on les représente exclusivement sous la forme mâle, sinon pour satisfaire la pédérastie inavouée du genre humain.*[27]

If absence of sensuality is a vital ingredient of comradeship between members of the opposite sex in Montherlant's prose, it is not necessarily so between two males. Homosexual love flourishes in the schoolboy world of Alban de Bricoule in *Les Garçons*. Mme de Bricoule's attitude to Alban's homosexuality is equivocal. She can not be taken as a representative of all women as she is very emotionally involved in the situation since she is Alban's mother. She has conflicting views which vary in direct proportion to a) how her own love-life is faring, and b) to what extent she feels she is losing her son's affection. For example, when he extricates himself from a potential kiss, her cries of

> Avec ça que tu ne les aimes pas, les caresses! Seulement, ça dépend avec qui. Tu caches ton jeu, c'est tout,[28]

indicate her insecurity and fears.

At the commencement of Alban's liaisons with young boys, Mme de Bricoule, even though she is

> ... une personne exceptionnellement libre d'esprit,[29]

is concerned enough to consult her mother, but the old lady is fanatical about Lord Byron, so if his lifestyle is good enough for him

> ... fertile en amitiés amoureuses pour de jeunes garçons ...[30]

then it is good enough for her grandson. Thus there is complicity on the part of these two women right from the outset.

Mme de Bricoule's attitude to Alban's homosexuality remains ambivalent throughout *Les Bestiaires* and *Les Garçons*. One day she would rage

> Penses-tu que je ne devine pas le genre de tes conversations avec tous ces petits voyous de l'école?[31]

Another day she would joke about the same things.

Chapter 2 Love 2) Homosexual Love

Sometimes she is positively encouraging by her fascination with his homosexuality, turning the conversation

> autour de 'ces choses'[32]

Alban finds her curiosity 'malsaine'.[33] She even goes so far as to invent a past 'amitié très tendre'[34] with one of her girlfriends at school, but it is a lie and she simply says it to curry favour with Alban in an attempt to enter his world.

Mme de Bricoule is blamed by both the narrator and Alban for sowing the seeds of homosexuality in his mind.

> Un mouvement venu de loin la poussait à l'attiser par des pointes, des allusions. Sans s'en rendre compte, elle lui eût donné le goût du fruit défendu, s'il avait eu besoin qu'on lui en donnât le goût.[35]

She is seen to be positively inciting Alban to homosexuality when, on picking up one of his books, 'Les Douze Césars', she quotes from it:

> Il épousa un jeune garçon, du nom de Pythagore,[36]

and, in a friendly voice, tells Alban that that is what he should do with his young friend. Yet, the next day she speaks about

> ... "ce sujet" avec un visage de menace et comme prêt à tout,[37]

showing inconsistency in her attitude.

One day, telling Alban to take his hands out of his pockets so that she can kiss him, she adds,

> ... ça vaut quand même mieux que de mettre la main dans la poche de son voisin,[38]

implying homosexuality. In his innocence he misunderstands the underlying meaning, thinking she is calling him a thief, but she confirms the idea of homosexuality with,

> Il ne s'agit pas de ça,[39]

with a meaning look. Alban is ashamed for his mother.

> Cette parole était entrée en lui, pour sa vie durant[40]

Responsibility for Alban's early leanings towards homosexuality is therefore placed

at his mother's door. Yet, earlier, he had already noted in his diary a reference to Serge:

> J'ai des désirs. [41]

Although during the last term of 1911 he only felt 'l'amour pur'[42] for Serge, by the beginning of 1912 he was experiencing the beginnings of 'une sensualité hésitante'.[43] Indeed, there is covert eroticism in Alban's enjoyment of handling a label, previously stuck on Serge's coat rack, in the knowledge that Serge had moistened it with his tongue, and in the treasuring of the penholder which Serge had

> ... pressé entre ses doigts, mis dans sa bouche, mordillé.[44]

Added to this there is phallic symbolism associated with the penholder as well as with the pencil which Serge lent Alban, and which the latter enjoyed kissing.

There is a celebration of homosexuality in the great joy Alban takes in savouring Serge's body odours. If he has the good fortune to sit at Serge's desk,

> ...il plongeait la tête par moments dans son pupitre, dans son odeur, et le reste du temps, la main glissé dans le pupitre, gardait cette main à l'intérieur de son béret, là où avaient été ses cheveux, et l'en retirait parfumée.[45]

Alban justifies his progression from innocent homosexual leanings to full-blown homosexuality by blaming his mother for putting ideas into his head that he might not have thought of for himself:

> D'abord ce sont les fiacres, et puis ça finit par la chambre d'hôtel.[46]

For all Alban professes to be 'scandalisé'[47] by the ideas his mother has implanted in his mind, he is quick to act on them, telling Serge,

> Ma mère me donne des idées: autant en profiter.[48]

In a perverse way, all the time he was at le Fronton basque, where he committed a homosexual act with Serge,

> ... il avait pensé qu'il se vengeait d'elle, en faisant ce qu'il faisait.[49]

This is further implication of blame on his mother – what she accused him of has escalated their homosexual relationship to a point of physical completion.

Chapter 2 Love 2) Homosexual Love

Mme de Bricoule's attitude to Alban's homosexuality is coloured by her own desire for Alban's love. At first she fears his love for other boys may diminish his love for her. Then she comes to believe that by encouraging his relationship with his friend Serge, and by talking about him as she would 'pour une fiancée possible de son fils',[50] it will bring her and her son closer together:

> Plus que jamais, par Serge, elle restait dans sa vie. Par Serge, elle le conservait.[51]

In contrast to Mme de Bricoule's ambivalent attitude to homosexuality there is that of the Superior, which is one of complicity, and that of the abbé de Pradts, which is one of direct encouragement, except in the case of Alban and Serge. For M. de Pradts, jealous of Alban because of his own homosexual interest in Serge, contrives, by moral persuasion, the break-up of their relationship. The Superior's role is more passive. He is blind to the realities around him and he does not see any harm in 'ces amitiés particulières'[52]. They consist simply of

> 'À se raccompagner les uns les autres à la sortie'. On avait beaucoup exagéré.[53]

His laxity is tantamount to encouragement of homosexuality.

> Le climat diffus du Parc était qu'entre garçons cela n'avait pas, au fond, si grande importance, mais qu'avec la femme c'était abominable.[54]

Thus there is the added suggestion that homosexual affairs are preferable to heterosexual relationships.

Despite this contrast in attitude between Mme de Bricoule and the Superior there are also some similarities. He desperately wants the trust of his pupils. She wants Alban's trust:

> Vouloir la confiance de son fils avait poussé Mme de Bricoule à sa politique aventureuse touchant Souplier; avoir confiance à tout prix en ses élèves avait poussé le supérieur à sa politique aventureuse avec eux, touchant leurs amitiés.[55]

There is an interesting interchange of genders in the homosexual relationships which must have some bearing on how the boys regard females. There is a rule

in the 'Protection' that boys do not have 'amitiés' with those of the same age, and it is the younger boy who is always referred to as the female. Whether this is only because the young boys are pre-puberty and soft of skin and therefore feminine in appearance, or whether it is an underlying need to have the two genders brought together in a denial of homosexuality, or whether it is putting the female in a subordinate position, is debatable.

The liaisons between the older and younger boys are likened to those between the two sexes. For example, Bonbon is in much demand by his peers, and they need to book their time with him a week ahead,

> Comme une jeune fille retenue pour une valse.[56]

Some of the younger boys, as they get older, reject the idea of the 'Protection' that they have formerly endorsed,

> ... comme faisant partie de leur enfance et de sa féminínité.[57]

They would reject advances with,

> Tu me prends donc pour une fille![58]

A few of the younger boys, confident in the security of their relationships with older boys, would become haughty and treat them with impertinence,

> ... à l'image de ces douces fiancées que l'alliance au doigt transforme illico en poisons.[59]

This is a certain indictment of women and creates an image of female dalliance.

Another similarity is drawn between women and young boys when Aymery de La Maisonfort looks at Alban,

> ... avec des yeux perçants de femme jalouse.[60]

Their femininity is further emphasised by the young boys being given feminine nick-names such as La Chienne, La Perle or La Fleur bleue.

This transposition of genders is exploited in Costals' relationship with Solange, in that she is given a boyish figure rather than a voluptuous feminine one, and Michel Raimond told me that Ram, in *La Rose de sable* 'est sans doute un

transposition d'un garçon'.[61] Again there is this similarity to a young boy because of her shape. Yet both these relationships fail, suggesting that, although there is an attempt by the author to imply tenuous links to homosexuality, in reality it is a coupling of the opposite sexes and as such it is found to be wanting.

3) Triangular Relationship; Incest

We have seen that Mme de Bricoule has ulterior motives for encouraging Alban's homosexuality. She uses Serge as a means of achieving a closer relationship with her son. When she speaks about Serge she professes familiarity by using his Christian name. This upsets Alban, as he does not feel she has the right to use it. However, when she suggests that it would have been nice if Serge had been her son, she touches on something which pleases Alban, thus achieving a small step towards gaining his affection. To consolidate this progress she proposes inviting Serge to dinner. Alban is jubilant that his mother has compromised herself by showing approval of his relationship with Serge. She, for her part, achieves the end she desires:

> Mme de Bricoule se félicita fort de parler aussi ouvertement de Souplier avec lui. Combien elle aimait cette atmosphère nouvelle![62]

Although she never meets Serge, Mme de Bricoule's life becomes entangled with his in a covertly sexual way. She dreams of him, and in so doing she reacts to him as a woman to a man, rather than to a small boy. In her dream he appears at the foot of her bed and she would have liked him to stay, but

> ... j'étais en bigoudis et ça me gênait ... je n'étais pas belle ...[63]

She daydreams about Serge's 'belles petites jambes nues'[64] and then says

> Au fond, je crois qu'il n'y a d'amitié vraie que celle qui est soutenue par les sens.[65]

The juxtaposition of these two sentences suggests that Mme de Bricoule is sensuously attracted to Serge.

In another dream she has Alban on her knee and when she kisses his eyelids she realises he has turned into Serge Souplier:

> ... elle confondait ces deux enfants, coupables ou non coupables, pour s'en faire un bien unique. Et lui, il pensait: "Si ma mère l'a vu si souvent en rêve, c'est que j'ai le droit de l'aimer."[66]

The two boys are confounded in another dream, this time one of Alban's. Serge is Alban and Mme de Bricoule addresses him as 'tu'.

Another time Alban dreams about his mother and Serge and there is a suggestion again of a sensual relationship. In the dream Serge ignores Alban in order to go towards Mme de Bricoule whom he takes by the arm and they disappear into the night. Mme de Bricoule turns to Serge saying,

> Heureusement qu'il fait noir. Tu ne vois pas mes rides.[67]

When Mme de Bricoule dies, Alban weeps excessively and in doing so senses that in his excess of weeping there are some tears for Serge, for whom he has not wept since their separation.

> Une fois de plus, sa mère et Serge sont mêlés.[68]

Some time after Mme de Bricoule's death, Alban ponders over the fact that his mother had loved Serge. He had become for her the image of the ideal man.

> Il avait été le "mâle", ce qu'elle avait raté dans son mari, dans ses flirts et dans son fils, mais lui il n'avait pas été raté, parce qu'il était le mâle en espérance, en possibilité et en songerie.[69]

Above all, she had confounded him with Alban and in so doing she had rediscovered

> ... le petit garçon qu'avait été son fils et qu'il n'était pas demeuré.[70]

She had loved Serge both as a mother and as a lover, this

> ... marmouset aux genoux doux et aux cernes d'un autre monde, petite bête de plaisir ...[71]

This triangular relationship reaches fulfillment when Alban realises that Serge would be the means of healing the estrangement between him and his mother.

> ... comme il aurait aimé davantage sa mère, d'aimer celui qu'il aimait![72]

Chapter 2 Love 3) Triangular Relationship; Incest

If Mme Bricoule's relationship with Serge is unusual, there is also the suggestion of an irregular bond between her and her son. There is a hint of incestuous love in *Les Bestiaires* and *Les Garçons*. Just as Mme de Bricoule is blamed (by Alban and the narrator) for sowing the seeds of homosexuality and encouraging it in Alban's mind, so also she could be accused of implanting the idea of incestuous love in his head.

As a young child Alban was in the habit of spending half an hour in bed with his mother before he himself went to bed, but when he was twelve years old he touched her where he should not have done,

> ... sans savoir même ce qu'il faisait.[73]

She banned him from her bed thereafter, telling him that he was now too big for such a custom. In contrast to his mother's adult reaction, in his innocence, Alban accepted her decision without a thought, just as what he had done had been without sexual knowledge.

When he was fourteen years old she was aware of him as a male rather than just as a son, for

> ... elle rarrangeait toujours ses cheveux quand son fils entrait dans sa chambre,[74]

and when she allows him to shave off his first growth of lip-hair, she responds in a sexual way:

> Elle lui trouvait l'air gigolo et ne pouvait pas faire que cela ne l'amusât.[75]

This un-maternal response to her son's masculinity has the effect of undermining the mother-figure - a topic which will be discussed in more detail in the following section, entitled 'Maternal Love'.

At sixteen, although Alban could not bear his mother to touch him, he thinks if he had been twenty when she was only eighteen he would have married her:

> Car elle l'éblouissait sur les photos d'elle prises à cet âge.[76]

Chapter 2 Love 3) Triangular Relationship; Incest

Although the hint of incestuous love is faint, it is nevertheless present in *Les Bestiaires* and *Les Garçons* and possibly serves the purpose of providing part of the background against which Alban makes his choice about love.

4) Maternal Love

> *... si l'amour est aveugle, l'amour maternel n'en doit pas être excepté.*[77]

Among the many relationships explored in Montherlant's prose work is that between a mother and her offspring. We shall see, in Part 2, when considering Montherlant's Drama, that this investigation reaches its zenith in the creation of Inès in *La Reine morte.*

There is a great similarity in the ambition for their children shown by Mme Auligny in *La Rose de sable* and Mme Dandillot in *Les Jeunes Filles.* Although the object pursued in each case is different – marriage for Solange Dandillot and a successful army career for Lucien Auligny, the aim for each matriarch is identical – the attainment of status in their bourgeois society – at the cost of the offspring's happiness where necessary. Just as

> ... le premier acte d'épouse de cette femme énergique fut de procurer un emploi à son mari ... et, sitôt casé, (elle) intrigua pour le faire avancer,[78]

so Mme Auligny sets to work on her son's social advancement. It is to this end that she projects him into the masculine world of the army. Her powers of persuasion coupled with her imperious attitude are such that Auligny sets off on a course in life which leads to his untimely death, for which his mother, indirectly, must be held partly responsible.

A question mark is thrown over Mme Auligny's motives behind her ambitions for her son. Had they been purely for his happiness, her dominance and scheming would be more acceptable, if misguided. However, there is a very

obvious element of self-glorification involved in her pursuit, on his behalf, of any advancement in his career.

From first being married, Mme Auligny's hope was

> ... celui d'avoir un fils, qui pût être officier.[79]

When her first-born was a girl, she consoled herself with the thought that she could at least be the mother-in-law of an officer. This daughter, like Lucien, became a victim of her mother's domination. Her upbringing led her to be stoical in the face of ill-health, and, as a result, she did not admit to her potentially fatal illness until it was too late. This is yet another death which can be laid indirectly at Mme Auligny's door.

The narrator points unequivocally at her high ambitions for her son, when he tells us rather humorously:

> Il naquit général de brigade, on ne voulait pas moins, comme si les huit années où on l'avait attendu devaient compter pour son avancement.[80]

Her influence on her son is such that in writing to her, he highlights and exaggerates certain aspects of his army life which he knows will please her. She, in her turn, has his letter copied several times for distribution among her friends. She is thrilled to the heart of her bourgeois soul that he is 'heureux comme un roi'[81] in the desert, and spending his leisure time reading Racine. The magic words 'Le désert, et Racine'[82] conjure up for her

> ... l'amour de la solitude de l'ascétisme, l'amour de Dieu, – toute la hauteur d'âme; tandis que le culte de Racine signifiait toute la tradition française, ... toute la haute culture française.[83]

The irony is that

> Cette belle flambée morale fut la première conséquence de l'amour d'une mineure dans l'âme du lieutenant Auligny.[84]

Thus his love for an Arab girl, of whom his mother would quite definitely disapprove, is the inspiration for the sort of letter which gives his mother such unfounded happiness. In this way the sincerity of his letter is undermined, but so, too, Mme Auligny's gullibility makes a mockery of her bourgeois pretensions.

Chapter 2 Love 4) Maternal Love

Mme Auligny, like other Montherlantian mothers in his prose work, such as Mme de Bricoule, Mme Dandillot and Mme Peyrony, is blind to the realities of her son's life. Just as when Lucien was a baby she said he 'ne pleurait jamais'[85] and he 'n'était jamais malade',[86] so, now, she assigns to him feelings and characteristics that belie the reality of the situation. In order to make a particularly dull life seem more interesting and romantic, Auligny paints a picture in his letters of a more heroic life, one in which he is alone in the desert with poor food supplies, which his mother further exaggerates to portray him

> ... au milieu de tout cela, toujours gai comme un pinson![87]

Like Mme de Bricoule, who was nicknamed by her son, 'Maman-doigt-dans-l'œil', Mme Auligny is blind to her son's needs. The presents she sends him are impracticable for his environment – such as the fly swat which can in no way cope with the large numbers which abound in the Sahara. Her selection of such ill-chosen gifts is symbolic of her blindness to his personal needs and feelings:

> Mme Auligny bourrait son fils de cadeaux dont il n'avait que faire, comme, toute sa vie, elle l'avait bourré d'idées et de sentiments qui ne lui étaient pas adaptés.[88]

Such is her imperception of her son's capability of original thought, and so determined is she to mould him to her own ideal, that she belittles any of his opinions that do not concur with hers or with those of the society she so esteems. Thus she dismisses his own heartfelt convictions on colonialism:

> Je ne savais pas que tu étais anarchiste! Je me demande qui a pu te donner ces idées-là.[89]

Like Mme Auligny, Mme Peyrony, in *Les Olympiques*, believes that her own viewpoints are paramount, and since her son's way of life conflicts with these, then, in her eyes, what he does is worthless. In contrast to Mme Auligny, who has ambitions for Lucien, Mme Peyrony takes little interest in her son's life, other than to disparage him.

The whole scene involving Mme Peyrony's visit to the stadium is aimed at undermining the type of woman she represents. The success of this subversion is achieved by making Mme Peyrony the sort of character who herself undermines others.

Her son always returns home as late as possible after matches to avoid the taunts aimed at him by his mother and sister, who are convinced that he is an idiot and constantly tell him so. However, just as for Mme Plémeur, her sport was her protection against life, so, with Jacques, 'le sport le protège'.[90] His sport is his only means of escaping from his mother, whom the narrator dubs 'le marais malsain'.[91] She so successfully undermines his confidence with her continuous disapproval of his sporting way of life that he begins to think that perhaps, after all, 'il fait quelque chose de douteux'.[92]

She has a vicious, mocking tongue – when his hands are chapped and require glycerine, she ridicules him with,

> Les mains gercées, un sportif![93]

The antithesis between Mme Peyrony and her son is highlighted by the contrast between his enthusiasm for exercise, which he considers wholesome, and her abhorrence of it, expressed in her belief that there is something rather unsavoury in the exposure of bare legs. In fact, his participation in the healthy, outdoor life is

> ... l'exact contrepied de ce qu'il y a chez eux ...[94]

Mme Peyrony is domineering and the portrayal of her husband as a weakling, without authority in his own household, serves to emphasise this. M. Peyrony closes his eyes to all that goes on at home, expending his energies in his mediocre position at work, his only use in life being to be the bread-winner. He is so insignificant that

> ... sa femme le volatilise et gémit.[95]

Similarly, Mme Auligny is a strong matriarchal figure, her influence over her son far outweighing any contribution M. Auligny may wish to make. The difference in their position is symbolised in the letters they each write to their son. M. Auligny's is only a small, folded note, contained within the more important letter of his wife. These little notes

> ... glissés humblement, comme il convient à quelqu'un qui est *en second*, dans les maîtresses-lettres de sa femme, ne parlaient jamais de choses importantes ou seulement sérieuses: ce rayon-là était réservé à Mme Auligny.[96]

Even in their grief over their son's death, M. Auligny is given no part to play on the 'stage' whereas Mme Auligny is acting her greatest rôle to date. Whereas she is

centre-stage, with her 'air de reine',[97] and her persistence in her false theories about her son to the last: 'Je suis sûre qu'il est mort en souriant',[98] her husband is not even in a supportive rôle, being seated 'un peu en retrait'.[99] He is not worthy of attention, since

> ... jamais n'avait était plus manifeste le discrédit qu'il y avait, dans cette société, à n'être ni officier, ni mort.[100]

The juxtaposition of the two pictures of 1) Mme Auligny, presiding over her guests like a prima donna, with her 'voix ... claironnante',[101] declaring, as she becomes more and more submerged in her tragic rôle:

> Pourquoi le bon Dieu ne m'a-t-il pas permis d'en avoir un autre, que je puisse le donner lui aussi![102]

and 2) M. Auligny, 'ivre, de douleur',[103] quietly and unobserved, retreating to the privacy of his room to weep genuine tears for his dead son, serves to emphasise at one and the same time, the sincerity and subservience of the father in contast to the superficiality and dominance of the mother.

Mme Auligny is transported from the reality of her grief to the realms of the sublime through the euphoria of having at last achieved the desired status within her bourgeois society brought about by Lucien's death, which, ironically, would

have been denied her, had Lucien lived. Montherlant creates a very apt simile which shows grief as a necessary fuel for the survival of her sense of sublimity:

> Il semblait que décidément, chez Mme Auligny, le sublime eût dévoré la douleur, comme une araignée dévore une mouche morte.[104]

Lucien's sympathy for the position of the Arabs was totally opposed to his mother's attitude towards them and, ironically, Guiscart gives the lie to Lucien's true feelings in the epitaph he composes for his friend, thus compounding the misunderstanding. He writes

> La fermeté de ses convictions était admirable. Il était de ces âmes en lesquelles il ne peut pas même y avoir de conflit ...[105]

whereas in reality, Auligny was full of self-doubt. Guiscart writes in this vein partly to console Lucien's mother, thus suggesting that she would prefer this false accolade to the truth.

The most horrific picture of this matriarch is drawn by means of a simile in which the narrator, having first described Mme Auligny's majesty and her grandeur in her sublime emotion, undermines this picture by telling us that she is

> ... admirable et épouvantable comme ces idoles des premiers âges qui enfantaient et dévoraient leurs enfants, dans un divin abîme d'inconscience.[106]

Although Mme Dandillot, in *Les Jeunes Filles*, is, like Mme Auligny, the major influence over her child, this is not so much because of any dominance over her husband such as we have seen in the Auligny household, as well as in the Peyrony family, but rather because her husband renounced any responsibility for his children.

Unlike Mme Auligny, who calls the tune in her marriage, having decided in the early days that, since she had 'épousé un pékin, c'est-à-dire un péquenot',[107] she would take full charge and steer both her husband's and her children's lives, Mme Dandillot reaches the decision to direct her daughter's life because of her husband's rejection of her, coupled with her son's disdain for her. Mme Auligny may have felt towards her husband

> ... une rancune et un dédain sourds qui devaient subsister pendant trente-cinq années de mariage,[108]

but Mme Dandillot

> ... sentie tant de fois méprisée par son mari, socialement et intellectuellement supérieur ...[109]

After her hopes are dashed that the birth of either of her children would bring her and her husband closer together, she comes to feel that 'elle n'avait guère besoin de l'amour de son mari'.[110] This is one of the many indictments against love within marraige that exist in the cycle of the novels of *Les Jeunes Filles*, which will be discussed in the section on Heterosexual Love.

In common with Mme Auligny, Mme Dandillot is blind to reality when it comes to directing the course of her child's future. Despite her own unfortunate experience of marriage, she is not deterred from encouraging a similar life for Solange. Notwithstanding the differences between Solange and Costals being

> ... un peu les mêmes qui avaient assombri son propre marriage ... il ne se présentait jamais à son esprit qu'il en pût sortir autre chose que du bonheur.[111]

This lack of judgement is generated by her ambition. Just as Mme Auligny's aims for her son were promoted by her allegiance to the social order existing within bourgeois society, so Mme Dandillot's aims are coloured by a similar desire to conform. For her, marriage equates with respectability. Ironically, she is quite happy to stoop to unworthy methods in order to procure the coveted social standing for herself and her daughter. To this end, she uses all her wiles to ensnare Costals for Solange.

Costals should have heeded the warning signs when he noticed,

> ... ses mains noueuses comme des serres d'oiseau de proie.[112]

When Mme Dandillot gained a temporary victory over him,

> Comme un chat qui emporte un oiseau dans sa gueule, elle ne désirait que jouir de sa proie à l'écart, au fond de la tanière familiale.[113]

This simile effectively places men as victims who are duped into marriage and presumably swallowed up by it, thus losing their identity and their freedom. This

aspect is pursued further in the section on Heterosexual Love.

In the pursuit of her objective, not only does Mme Dandillot turn a blind eye to the illicit sexual relationship Solange experiences with Costals, but she actually condones it, since this could be the means of entrapping him into marriage. She asks Solange,

> Tu sais qu'il y a à prendre certaines précautions?[114]

From this it would seem that Mme Dandillot is more interested in the marriage state as a goal than the happiness of her daughter, for she does not recognise that Costals is not ideal material for a husband.

Behind this 'aveuglement' there is a genuine love for her daughter which is evinced by the great anxiety she displays one night, having frightened herself by the thought that Solange had left home. When she discovers her fear to be unfounded, she climbs into bed with her to give and to take comfort. At that moment her love is so unselfish, that, just as Geneviève, another of Montherlant's mother-figures, would later reiterate to her son, Philippe, in the play, *L'Exil*, Mme Dandillot tells Solange,

> Je voudrais donner ma vie pour toi.[115]

It is at this point that maternal love is elevated to its highest plane. However, the narrator is careful not to let us think that maternal love is any more admirable than paternal love – in fact, at this point, he equates the two:

> Leurs deux mélodies de tendresse se rapprochaient, couraient l'une auprès de l'autre ...[116]

Another instance where mother-love is upheld as an ideal is that when Solange is reading a passage from a book which reminds her of her childhood. When Costals was a child his mother had been moved by the exact same words which affected Solange now and,

> Il lui semblait que descendait sur elle comme une mystérieuse indication.[117]

At this point it would seem that Costals is seeing in Solange the essence of motherhood and perceiving it as something commendable. Thinking of his own mother gives him one of his most intense feelings of emotion.

The narrator informs us that at the summit of the hierarchy of love, one would have to place the love of a father for a son, but he throws doubt on its existence. Therefore, as second best,

> ... c'est dans l'amour de la mère pour la fille que nous voyons la forme la plus parfaite de l'amour de l'être pour l'être.[118]

Indeed, Mme Dandillot's love for Solange was so strong that,

> ... au nom de cet amour, elle eût volé,[119]

Her love may be strong but, as we have seen, it is also suspect. Her devotion is not devoid of selfishness, despite her willingness to die for Solange. Such interludes of abnegation are only drops in the ocean compared to her prevailing ambition to conform to the standards of bourgeois society, via the achievement of marriage for Solange.

These conflicting elements can only be reconciled if one accepts that Mme Dandillot, like most of the other mothers in Montherlant's prose work, only exhibits her 'perfect love' briefly.

Although the narrator describes maternal love as the ideal, he queries the effect of its sole influence. In Solange we see a girl who has experienced no paternal guidance or affection. Therefore her development has been moulded by her mother alone. This Costals finds disquieting when he realises that Solange will probably become like her domineering mother. In turn, he fears that his position could become that of Solange's father in the Dandillot household – his own life stifled by the women. Mme Dandillot's influence over Solange is far-reaching, extending to when they are apart. Solange's exchange of letters with her mother, when she is at Genoa with Costals, serve to remind him that he is in a feminine universe for which he feels hostility:

Chapter 2 Love 4) Maternal Love

> Ces lettres qu'elle écrit à sa mère, et qu'elle reçoit d'elle ... je me doute bien qu'elles sont pleines de moi. Je n'aime pas cela ... Ces deux femmes qui patricotent ... Que ma vie était pure quand j'étais loin du gynécée![120]

If maternal love is questioned in the portrayal of Mesdames Auligny, Peyrony and Dandillot, there is an attempt to justify the rejection of such love in Costals' upbringing of his son. He removed Philippe, nicknamed Bruno, at an early age from his natural mother, believing maternal love to be corrupting. Yet the fact that he chose a middle-aged spinster, rather than a man, indicates only a partial rejection of the mother figure. Despite J. Marks' assertion that Costals removed Philippe from his mother 'so that the boy may not be contaminated by female influence',[121] he would surely receive some direction from the guiding hand of the surrogate mother.

Although Costals admits to having had a very nice mother himself, he does not subscribe to the convention of

> ... de tenir pour sacré le mot *mère*.[122]

The unselfish aspect of his own parental love is displayed when he forgoes his own desire for Bruno's company, having heard from him that he is 'parfaitement heureux'[123] with friends in England.

The purpose of a mother in Costals' eyes is simply one of service in producing the child. He calls Philippe's mother 'l'intermédiare'[124] and she was 'chosen' just as a bitch would be for a pedigree dog. Therefore the position of a mother is seen to be subordinate to a father, according to Costals. The narrator endorses this point of view when he tells us Costals,

> ... était convaincu, ... de la détestable influence qu'ont en général les mères sur les enfants.[125]

Although this may seem to be a contradiction of the previously quoted assertion by the narrator that maternal love for a daughter can be the most perfect, one must take note of the word 'général' to see what he thinks of mothers as a whole.

Costals' relations with his son reflect his attitude to women in that, just as he believes marriage ruins a relationship, so he is convinced from experience,

> ... qu'un homme nerveux ne peut aimer un être avec lequel il cohabite, ou seulement qu'il voit tous les jours.[126]

According to Costals, the arrangment with his son had worked very satisfactorily for fourteen years, but the narrator undermines Costals' theory by saying, 'ce qui ne prouve rien'.[127]

If paternal love for a son is voiced as the ideal in the cycle of *Les Jeunes Filles*, and the portrait of maternal love only shows occasional glimpses deserving of praise in the tetralogy and other prose work, there is one mother, who plays a small part in *La Rose de Sable*, who comes near to perfection. Like the perfect lover in Montherlantian novels, she is an Arab. Jilani's mother has total authority in her household, but the narrative tone is one of respect for, rather than any denigration of, this dominant position. Although, in the context of the novel, some believe that Arab women are inferior beings to their men-folk, through Bonnel's words, we are given to suppose that,

> La femme arabe est beaucoup moins bête de somme qu'on ne le dit. Elle travaille dur, certes, mais, précisément, ce travail lui donne de l'autorité.[128]

Indeed, the description of this matriarchal figure is totally opposed to that of any other mother in Montherlant's prose work. In contrast with the underlying derision seen at times in the portrayal of the European mothers, there is a sincerity in the imagery used to depict her as,

> Sainte Elisabeth! La cousine de la Vierge! ...
> ... grande dame. La douceur, la finesse et la supériorité, combinées dans son air, évoquaient une abbesse ...[129]

Mme de Bricoule, in *Les Bestiaires* and *Les Garçons*, does not hold the same authoritative position in her household as Jilani's mother. Nor does she have the same influence over her son that Mme Auligny does over Lucien. Nevertheless, because her husband avoids any close relationship with Alban (he was 'terrorisé à

l'idée d'une quinzaine en tête à tête avec son fils')[130] Mme de Bricoule was a stronger presence in Alban's life than any male. In this way her household can be seen to be similar to all the other families in the prose work studied. It is the mother who forms the child in these novels and in *La Rose de sable, Les Olympiques* and the tetralogy of *Les Jeunes Filles*, we have been shown that these mothers have been blinded by their own beliefs or ambitions to the detriment of the happiness of their offspring. We shall see if Mme de Bricoule achieves elevation to that high place of respect accorded Jilani's mother, and briefly reached by Mme Dandillot.

Mme de Bricoule's love for her son, Alban, exhibits a certain amount of indulgence. She agrees to his return to Andalusia, convincing herself that there is nothing to fear in bull-fighting, Besides, she is tempted to

> ... voir son fils heureux et de le voir heureux à cause d'elle,[131]

although she does wonder, fleetingly, if she is neglecting her maternal duties by allowing Alban to go off to Spain unsupervised – this thought having been planted in her head by her virtuous friend, Thérèse Cahuzac, whose son, in contrast to Alban, is tied to her apron strings.

Mme de Bricoule had hoped to win a kiss or some emotional response from Alban because of her permissiveness, but in this she was disappointed. Although he thanked her,

> ... il n'eut pas un mouvement vers elle.[132]

To please Alban, Mme de Bricoule yields to his request to shave off his moustache, even though she knows her dead husband would have disapproved. She imposes a condition that he should pay all his family calls before shaving it off to prevent his relatives from blaming her for her indulgence.

Alban manipulates her permissiveness to his own advantage. His young friend, Serge Souplier, is about to leave the school Maucornet, and will commence at

Notre-Dame du Parc in April. Alban has no trouble in persuading his mother that le Parc would be a better school for him, despite the fact that she is forewarned by M. Maucornet that le Parc 'croulait par les mœurs'[133] – knowledge which she is later at pains to keep to herself when she is attacking the Superior for the low moral standards of his school. If he knew of her previous cognizance he would wonder why she had chosen to send Alban there in the first place. Thus there is an undermining of her maternal responsibility.

Her indulgence towards Alban is contrasted with the Superior's attitude. He believes

> On doit être sévère parce qu'on aime.[134]

Mme de Bricoule's liberality may be looked upon as a form of selflessness, but her love takes less honourable forms, too. She is a possessive mother who is prone to jealousy. When Alban strokes his cat, le Bleu, she explodes,

> Tu as quand tu caresses ce chat des expressions que je ne t'ai jamais vues. Tu te trahis! Tu t'imagines que c'est Souplier![135]

Her competition with Serge for Alban's affections colours her attitude towards her son as well as his towards her. Even before she knew of their relationship she sensed his estrangement, which came with the onset of puberty. She preferred him 'imberbe' as it makes him seem more like the

> ... petit garçon dont elle se persuadait, prise au mirage du passé, qu'il avait été plus affectueux que le jeune homme.[136]

The alienation between mother and son is compounded by duplicity. Alban constantly deludes his mother, but he would argue that it was she who led him, by her own example, to be deceitful, for it was she who first broke into his filing cabinet, giving him the idea of breaking into her desk. However, she is prompted to do this by his secrecy. She desperately wants to share his life but he rejects all her efforts.

There is a cruelty in their relationship which, on Alban's side, takes the form of persistently excluding his mother from his life. He is quick to extricate himself

from potential kisses. One time, a kiss aimed for his face lands on his hair, because of his evasive action.

> Elle avait senti la contraction de ses muscles dans son effort pour lui échapper.[137]

Mme de Bricoule sometimes returns Alban's emotional cruelty. She resorts to deliberately making Alban blush at times, by mentioning certain names.

> C'était devenu pour elle un jeu cruel de le faire rougir, et presque la seule prise sur lui.[138]

She encourages Alban's relationship with Serge, as it is the one thing that is of common interest to them, and therefore a means of drawing them closer together. Once Alban starts pursuing a 'pure' relationship with Serge there is no need for him to hide things from his mother. Perversely, this makes matters worse between them. In the silences that arise she demands that he speak, lie even. Then, realising that he has no need to lie any more, she mutters under her breath, 'Fini le bon temps,'[139] intimating that the intimacy between them has vanished.

Mme de Bricoule is an invalid who is confined most of the time indoors. It is perhaps because of this that her life revolves around her only son so much. She desperately wants his friendship – something which he frequently rejects as much as he does her love. As he approaches puberty she hopes that,

> Le temps était ... venu où elle pourrait parler avec lui librement![140]

Sadly, her hopes are not fulfilled as Alban prefers the camaraderie of his schoolfriends to that of his mother, although he does once begin a letter to her when he is in Andalucia and addresses her 'Chère Maman et amie.'[141] Significantly, he does not get beyond this introduction. Therefore Mme de Bricoule never knows this feeling he had for her, just as she never knows the extent of his love for her, because the glimpses of it are not only rare, but are not revealed by Alban.

Her attempts at camaraderie are sometimes at variance with her maternal standpoint:

> ... un jour elle était la mère, et un jour la camarade.[142]

Because of the desire to have her love and friendship reciprocated there is a constant conflict between her roles of mother and friend. She tries to promote intimacy between them by expressing great curiosity about Alban's schoolfriends and their 'amitiés particulières'. She encourages Alban to talk about them and reciprocates by exchanging confidences about her love-affair with Chanto. Thus, Alban's relationship with his mother is not conventional.

When she is dying she no longer wants him by her bedside all the time, but only when he can be of use to her:

> Le fils adoré n'était plus conçu que dans l'emploi de larbin.[143]

This is because she is experiencing 'la faiblesse' and the 'colères de l'avant-tombe.'[144]

In life she was totally absorbed with her son, but in dying she 'n'était pleine que de sa mort.'[145]

Finally, her mother love is extinguished:

> Tout ce qu'elle avait d'amour pour lui se retirait en même temps que la chaleur se retirait de son corps aux approches de la fin.[146]

There are very few times when Alban comes close to his mother either in friendship or in love. His relationship with Serge gives them a common interest and a certain intimacy develops from this, but once the liaison is finished, that bond between mother and son is broken:

> Plus jamais chez lui une confidence, jamais un abandon, jamais, au grand jamais un élan.[147]

This would seem to undermine maternal love, since it would appear at this point that it can not exist on its own merits. However, when his mother is dying, Alban comes to recognise the depth of her love for him, and with that knowledge

comes a reciprocation of love for her, but their estrangement is such that he is unable to make it known to her. He recognises that she has been the only person ever to have truly loved him – his love for Serge never having been fully returned – and 'Comme il avait mal rendu cet amour!'[148] Thus he gives recognition to the fact that her maternal love was far stronger than his filial love.

It can be seen that, in his prose work, Montherlant's conception of maternal love encompasses selfishness, 'aveuglement', ambition and dominance, with only occasional glimpses of self–sacrifice. Without exception, all the mothers he portrays exert more influence over their offspring than the fathers, whether it be for reasons of the physical absence of the paternal parent, or, more usually, because the father is in the shadow of the matriarch.

5) Heterosexual Love

> *L'homme ne peut guère avoir pour la femme que du désir, qui assomme la femme; la femme ne peut guère avoir pour l'homme que de la tendresse, qui assomme l'homme.*149

a) Contrast between Heterosexual and Homosexual Love

Homosexual love and heterosexual love are contrasted in *Les Bestiaires* and *Les Garçons*. The comparison is drawn between Alban's love for Serge:

> Même quand tu (Serge) ne t'occupes pas de moi (Alban), je t'aime toujours autant,[150]

and the short–lived, heterosexual affairs of his mother:

> Il y avait toujours et de suite, quelqu'un à qui elle portait intérêt: son médecin – un vague cercleux, ami de son mari, – un guitariste italien ...[151]

Alban's faithfulness to Serge, which is to last long after their break–up, is contrasted sharply with Mme de Bricoule's current lover, who has let her down recently by not visiting when he had promised. Ironically, he had recently given her a bottle of perfume called 'Fidelis'! Her failure in love undermines the concept of heterosexual love.

Her self-absorption with her emotional problems makes her forget her worries about Alban's morals:

> Il n'était plus question qu'Alban fût un dévoyé; il était un confident.[152]

Thus heterosexual love is seen to be undermined in another way. When she is playing her mother-role she is much less self-interested.

When his mother is dying she shows Alban her love-letters. He recognises that she wants him to see that she had been loved. However,

> Il voyait seulement qu'elle avait aimé un imbécile, et il en était consterné.[153]

This, by implication, invalidates heterosexual love.

Alban's exploits with women only serve to prove to him that such relationships are not worthwhile other than as a transitory fulfilment of the flesh.

He comes into contact with several females, some of which serve simply as titillation, such as a woman he sees in the crowd watching the Palm Sunday procession. With the pressure of the crowd pushing him, he presses his body up against hers. She is not a reluctant recipient of his desires. Her compliance suggests the debasing of women as sex objects. She is swept away with the crowd, but,

> Heureusement qu'il y a plus d'une femme dans notre vallée de pénitence.[154]

Alban is amazed at how easily one object of desire is replaced by another.

In contrast to this, Alban has an experience in a train which leaves him with a feeling of esteem for a particular female – Soledad. In the train he sees a pretty girl. At first he thinks she is no different from Soledad. He reacts to her as he did to the woman in the crowd, sensually, as if she is just a sex object, and he thinks of her naked in his arms. However, this time his desire is quenched when he realises he has no desire to remove Soledad's clothes. In contrast to his abuse of the woman in the crowd, he feels respect for Soledad.

> Il lui parut, et ce fut la première fois, que pour un geste amical d'elle il donnerait la possession de *cela*.[155]

Alban's esteem is short-lived, for not long afterwards he has improper feelings about a figure of the Virgin in a procession.

> ... il aima davantage la Vierge, pour l'avoir offensée. En même temps il aima davantage Soledad, pour l'avoir un instant trompée.[156]

The juxtaposition of impropriety and love has the effect of debasing both Soledad and heterosexual love.

Alban's love for Soledad takes second place to bull-fighting (and why not? - He is only an adolescent). When there is the opportunity of seeing his favourite Matador perform he forgoes an afternoon with Soledad in favour of the bull-fight. However, this choice he makes is to have repercussions later. In making excuses for his absence Alban thinks he has convinced Soledad. Mistakenly, he believes he knows how to handle women.

> Décidément, pensait Alban, les femmes sont plus faciles à manier que les chevaux. Elles se prendront toujours à une goutte de cette sorte de miel.[157]

The respect he had felt for Soledad, as well as all his love, disappears when she reveals the cruel side of her nature. She decides to inflict a punishment for his absence from her side. He had been begging her to be allowed to kiss her on the mouth. She now agrees to this on one condition - that he should fight the fierce bull, le Mauvais Ange, an animal of which Alban is mortally afraid.

> Alban fronçait les sourcils ... pour discerner ce qu'il y avait dans cette femme qui était coupable, et ce qu'il y avait qui était innocent.[158]

Soledad's wickedness is heightened by the fact that she already knows of Alban's fear. It makes him question her worth:

> Vous me demandez de risquer ma mort, et moi je me demande si vous valez qu'on la risque pour vous.[159]

They had earlier made an arrangement that Soledad would leave a message on a certain seat to indicate what liberties Alban could take with her (as she had

been too modest to tell him to his face). Soledad now tells him that in fact she had written nothing in order to make a fool of him. This makes Alban determined to kill the bull, allowing Soledad to think that she has the whip hand, expecting him to fly into her arms afterwards to collect his reward. However, to punish and insult her, Alban was determined not to go to her.

Soledad has lost honour by asking him to risk his life for such a triviality.

After his successful fight Alban is a disillusioned, if enlightened, young man:

> Assez de femmes ont diminué, et quelque fois mortellement, l'homme devant sont épreuve ... À d'autres! À d'autres![160]

Despite his disenchantment with Soledad, Alban still had heterosexual leanings when he first entered Le Parc, but

> Alban y avait tu ses rêveries hétérosexuelles aussi bien que son aventure avec Soledad, tant par pudeur que par un peu de honte à montrer, dans ce milieu, que les femmes l'intéressaient elles aussi.[161]

On the other hand, when he initiates the reform of the 'Protection', it is for virtue's sake, 'ce n'avait pas été pour les femmes.'[162]

In the tetralogy, *Les Jeunes Filles*, Costals brings the sexual act down to the level of the farmyard when he writes to Andrée,

> Vous n'avez pas idée de ce que c'est que cette singerie,[163]

a sentiment to be echoed later by Alvaro in the play, *Le Maître de Santiago*:

> Et tout cet amour entre hommes et femmes est une singerie.[164]

b) Loss of Liberty

The authorial belief that the ideal is to love without that love being reciprocated (see the quotation at the head of Chapter 2, Love) is echoed by several of his heroes. We have already seen that Alban was unconcerned that his love for Serge was not returned. We see this viewpoint repeated in Guiscart's letter to Auligny, where he asserts

> ... que l'idéal de l'amour n'est pas l'amour partagé, mais d'aimer sans qu'on vous le rende,[165]

so that the male's 'liberté d'esprit' and 'liberté de mouvement'[166] are kept intact. Ram, in *La Rose de sable*, epitomises the ideal lover since she gives her body without expecting that to give her any claims on Auligny. Similarly, Rhadidja has no wish to bind Costals in the way that Western women want to possess him.

In Solange's pursuit of Costals, she says she is happy to allow him his freedom to think and to work, whereas Andrée endeavours to infiltrate his mind, and this Costals finds suffocating. His frequently reiterated line of defence against marriage is that it is constricting to the artist. It diminishes his literary powers. Despite Solange's protestations that she will not intrude on his work, he feels a constraint enter their relationship:

> Je brûlais; elle m'éteint. Je marchais sur les eaux; elle se met à mon bras: j'enfonce.[167]

This is an indictment against too close a relationship between two people. Costals believes that,

> Le mariage sans divorce, le mariage chrétien, est, pour l'homme, une monstrosité.[168]

Love, too, he deems constricting:

> Un homme qui est aimé est prisonnier.[169]

Again, this is an echo of the author's own belief of

> Désir de *rester libre*, de *se préserver*. Un homme qui est aimé est prisonnier. Cela est trop connu, n'y insistons pas.[170]

The prison metaphor recurs several times in the tetralogy of *Les Jeunes Filles*. As Costals' desire for Solange is on the wain he observes her on his bed, lit up by the glow from an electric sign outside, shining through the shutters, and her face is streaked with light and darkness,

> ... comme si elle était derrière les barreaux d'une prison: cette prison figurée était son amour pour lui, mais il ne s'en doutait guère.[171]

Costals sees love as a prison yet he cheerfully embraces the threat of another sort of prison in his liaison with Rhadidja. The leprosy which she could have

transmitted to him is another metaphor for the chains which he is constantly trying to escape in marriage. After all, as Jeanne Sandelion comments,

> ... la prison conjugale a tout de même des portes de sortie; la maladrerie n'en a pas.[172]

Costals would readily sacrifice his body in the name of love, but never his soul, as he feels the first would not impede his literary outpourings, whereas the second most certainly would.

It is during his sojourn at Genoa with Solange that the suppression of his literary output reaches its zenith by being completely (albeit temporarily) extinguished. It is Solange's close proximity which is the cause. She so debilitates his creativity that she causes him to reach a pitch of nervous exhaustion which results in him falling asleep for many hours. Even after waking, he lay stretched out on his bed from afternoon until evening,

> ... les yeux fermés, essayant de récupérer sa force, de faire revenir en lui son âme, que la femme avait bue.[173]

Just as a vampire causes the death of its victim by sucking it dry of blood, so Solange had metaphorically drunk Costal's spirit dry.

His debilitated state is a foreshadowing of the worries of Malalesta, in the play of that name, who accuses Isotta of enfeebling him with her love:

> Aimez-moi un peu moins, Isotta ... votre tremblement altère ma stabilité ... votre fiévreuse tendresse m'a fatigué bien des fois.[174]

It is only when Costals is alone after Solange's departure that his creative talents return:

> Et il était oppressé, de sa création qui tapait à l'intérieur de lui pour sortir, car sa force était revenue. Il était de nouveau lui-même. Il était de nouveau un homme.[175]

Once more the love of a woman is shown to be a stifling experience snuffing out the creative talent of the artist.

So great is Costals' feeling of imprisonment that, whilst admitting to himself that he loves Solange, because he feels 'rattrapé',[176] on the same day that he

writes a love-letter to her, he writes a letter of assignation to Rachel Guigui, a past lover, thus attempting to assert his sense of freedom.

Costals can see in M. Dandillot the man he himself could become - a man trapped in a female environment - and this frightens him. The confinement to this apartment because of his terminal illness is the physical manifestation of M. Dandillot's sense of imprisonment in an unfulfilled life. Costals sees this as a nightmarish mirror-image of his own future.

Solange's idea of marriage is contrasted sharply with that of Costals, she seeing it as 'le berceau de son amour,'[177] whereas it is 'le tombeau de l'amour pour Costals.'[178]

It is this conflict between their opposing attitudes to marriage which is the main factor which leads to the final break-up of their relationship. The reader is being induced to believe that the pursuit of marriage is the killer of love.

Unusually, in *La Rose de sable*, instead of a man, it is Ram who feels herself to be a prisoner, because of the tight way that Auligny holds her, but this is a completely different kind of captivity from that which Costals fears. Hers is not the enslavement of the mind with its resultant restriction of artistic inspiration, but, as Auligny recognises, she is

> ... prisonnière de mon grade, prisonnière de mon argent, une captive dans le lit du vainqueur.[179]

It is in this novel that there is an example of a successful heterosexual bond - unusual in the prose work under study. It is interesting to note, however, that the couple in question - Colonel Rugot and his wife - do not marry until they have reached forty-nine and fifty-one years of age respectively, and that is a reflection of the author's own belief in late marriage. Commenting to Elisabeth Zehrfuss on the marriage of an elderly gentleman he tells her,

> ... le fait de se marier à 75 ans m'est sympathique, puisque, moi aussi - dès le plus tendre âge - j'ai pensé que je me marierais à partir de 65 ans.[180]

Colonel Rugot, like Costals, believed that marriage would be detrimental to his chosen career, and that is why he left this momentous step until late in life:

> ... il s'était marié quand il s'était senti un homme arrivé au terme de sa carrière, que le mariage pouvait diminuer sans que cela tirât à conséquence.[181]

Unlike any of the other married couples in Montherlant's prose, they have an affinity and an intimacy manifested in Mme Rugot's 'imperceptibles clins d'œil à son mari'[182] when someone commits a blunder. Their marriage is successful because each has nothing to lose. Colonel Rugot continues his career without hindrance and Mme Rugot carries on her good works among the poor.

Conversely, Costals is terrified of such a total commitment as marriage. This is reflected in his treatment of women and results in cruelty towards them when he fears his single status is threatened. He directs his sadism at Andrée by inviting her to look over an apartment with him – an intimate gesture which brings her delirious happiness – and then, when showing her around, he emphasises that the bedroom will be used for his conquests of women.

> Ne l'avait-il élevée au septième ciel, que pour la replonger dans le gouffre?[183]

To compound his cruelty towards this woman who feels, 'Ah! comme j'aurais bien fait l'épouse d'un artiste',[184] he spends five whole minutes expounding his theories against marriage for writers. Andrée is being used as a sounding board for Costals' philosophising. He is so carried away with his own rhetoric that he forgets he is talking to a mere female:

> Voyez quelle confiance j'ai en vous... Je vous parle comme à un homme.[185]

This is reminiscent of Alban's treatment of Dominique as a brother in their relationship. However, because of the circumstances, there is the underlying implication that Costals considers women inferior to men.

Heterosexual love, as distinct from carnal desire and Platonic friendship, is not allowed to flourish in Montherlant's prose works. When Dominique exposes her

love for Alban it is snuffed out in favour of the cerebral friendship which Alban esteems more highly. Nor does he allow *himself* to indulge in heterosexual love. The only glimpses we have of such a sentiment are very brief, and one such insight is after he sacrifices his own desire for Dominique for the sake of maintaining their friendship, which he deems very precious and estimable:

> Je t'aime,

he tells Dominque.

> Ne meurs pas et n'aie pas peur puisque je t'aime ... j'ai connu l'affection et l'amitié et la luxure, mais ce que je te donne en cette minute est vierge comme au jour de ma naissance.[186]

Alban feels very strongly that physical love (or desire) and cerebral love (or friendship) should be kept totally separate and he has very strong reasons for believing this. These are that received love is 1) debilitating:

> Je n'ai pas besoin d'amour. Je suis fort quand je donne et moins fort quand je reçois.[187]

and 2) a constraint on male freedom. As we have seen, these are recurring themes throughout Montherlant's works.

Alban can see from Dominique's face that she loves him before she admits to it. This prevents him from mentioning the recent death of his friend, Prinet, deeming it a 'sacrilège à parler de cette mort devant une femme amoureuse'.[188] Therefore, the implication is that love is an intrusion in their relationship. It has altered it so that there is a constraint between them, whereas before there was freedom. When he begs her,

> ... ne me faites pas ce don qui nous diminue l'un et l'autre,[189]

he is confirming the Montherlantian idea of love being debilitating.

Not only is it enfeebling but it is seen as a sinister, corruptive force:

> Il la vit sinistre comme le maladie ... Et la guerre et la paix étaient corrompues, toutes deux.[190]

On the other hand, when Alban rejects the constraining love that Dominique offers, he returns to the field with a light heart and he feels like a

... roi libre et pur comme aux jours de (ses) seize ans garçonniers![191]

In contrast to Dominique, Douce allows Alban his freedom of self because she does not bind him with love. She simply provides pleasure through her sensuality, with no demands or restrictions, just as the Arab women, Rhadidja and Ram, make no claims on Costals and Auligny respectively.

The preservation of male liberty is also an underlying theme in *La Petite Infante de Castille.* The narrator contemplates the fact that from their first meeting he will tell the infante that he can not keep her for long and at each subsequent meeting he will make sure that she is aware that there will ultimately be a parting of the ways.

This is a foreshadowing of the way Costals will behave in *Les Jeunes Filles.* He is terrified of being trapped in a liaison that even when he is in the first flush of desire he is looking for escape routes to guard against the day when he wants to break with the woman. The features of Solange's face that he found unattractive,

> ... il les voyait comme les portes de secours d'une salle, par où le cas échéant on pourra s'échapper, ou comme les clauses équivoques d'un contrat: c'était ce menton un peu lourd qui lui permettrait un jour de la quitter le coeur léger.[192]

Women, for Costals, are obviously there to be picked up and set down at *his* will. In this way he maintains his freedom.

Similarly, the narrator, in *La Petite Infante de Castille,* ensures his independence, although in a different way. He refuses to act on his desire because,

> Se donnant, elle eût satisfait mes sens; se refusant, elle eût allumé mon cœur; disparaissant, elle me faisait largesse de ma liberté.[193]

This is an affirmation of this Montherlantian ethos.

Guiscart, too, fits into this mould of the autonomous hero. He makes sure that

> ... son désir n'habitait que son cervau, ce qui lui permettait cette maîtrise de soi.[194]

And, like Costals, he always makes sure before making love for the first time,

> qu'il avait pris déjà les mesures pour se débarasser d'eux après la seconde.[195]

Costals contrives other ways of maintaining his sense of self-determination. By the abitrariness of his choice of Solange:

> Je ne sais pourquoi je t'ai choisie,[196]

and

> Prise presque au hasard,[197]

he effectively denies love and in so doing affirms his control of himself. Solange compounds his sense of independence at this stage by not understanding him. Her inability to permeate his mind leaves it and him intact.

If Costals and Alban fear their loss of liberty, certain female characters embrace it. Solange does so by marrying without love for the sake of conformity and stagnates as a result. She is in effect a prisoner of her bourgeois upbringing.

Thérèse ends up confined by her family to an asylum. It is because Thérèse is 1) outside society because of her ideals which her family do not comprehend, and 2) imprisoned by others, that Costals relates to her more than to the other females in the cycle of *Les Jeunes Filles*, as he can see in Thérèse a reflection of his own position and fears.

Andrée wishes to escape the constricting atmosphere of her small village where she dwells amidst a mediocre family who repress individuality, yet she chooses to return there after her brief employment in Paris, believing, mistakenly, that her 'vie intérieure' is stifled in the city office. The reality is that she could not cope with her new-found freedom and she preferred instead to return to an environment which could only serve to encourage her illusions as she drew more and more within herself. What Costals had offered her in obtaining for her the employment in Paris was an escape to a wider world and reality. Saint-Léonard,

her home village, was as stifling to her development as the Dandillot household was to M. Dandillot. He stagnates there and dies. Andrée stagnates, regresses. Saint-Léonard, a place 'assez isolée déja de l'humanité',[198] is more isolated still in winter with the snow and cold, and its isolation is a metaphor for Andrée's dissociation from reality. In effect, her self-imprisonment is perpetuated by her own blindness to reality. Her letters to Costals reveal her self-delusion, as I shall demonstrate in section (e) of this chapter. Costals, in his turn, by never responding to any of the content, conspires to keep himself free from the imprisonment that he constantly fears from emotional entanglement.

c) Sacrifice

There is a sacrificial element in love, be it of the unselfish kind, where a person relinquishes something he or she wants, or be it egotistic, where the lover sacrifices the loved one to his or her demands.

There is a parallel drawn between *Le Songe* and the first part of *La Petite Infante de Castille* in the hero's renunciation of the female he desires. In both works as we have seen, the hero feels his personal freedom is of paramount importance. He is also pursuing self-ennoblement - Alban sacrifices Dominique's sentimentality for courage.

This idea of Dominique as a sacrifice is pursued by Alban. He reflects on the hurt he has inflicted on her and muses over the thought that by so doing, who knows, perhaps he has caused one of his comrades-in-arms to have escaped harm:

> ... les voix des morts ... réclamaient un sacrifice ... Iphigénie a été égorgée sur l'autel.[199]

The narrator sacrifices his own desires for la petite infante because this renunciation gives him strength. In dreaming of all the variations of happiness between him and la petite infante, such as marrying her and raising children, or having her as a mistress, he thinks to himself,

> Toutes ces images, tout ce bonheur, *dont j'étais maître*, je les précipitais, comme les vagues d'hier soir ...[200]

Thus his renunciation is not without a certain amount of *self*-sacrifice.

There is a difference in the reaction of the rebuffed women in these two works. There is no evidence in the text that la petite infante cares one way or another about being rejected. On the contrary, she seems quite indifferent to it. 'Eh bien', she says, 'je vous enverrai ma photographie',[201] as if that would be a substitute for anything that might have developed between them. After all, there has been little time for a relationship to have evolved.

In contrast, Alban's rejection of Dominique leaves her devastated. This is because she is no longer in tune with his idea of an elevated, Platonic relationship between them. He curbs his desire so that he is not a party to changing her from something pure to impure, at the same time sacrificing his own pleasure to keep their relations on an exalted plane:

> Mais, alors, je sacrifie mon plaisir? ... J'aime assez pour sacrifier? ...[202]

In making this personal sacrifice he is putting Dominique back on the pedestal he had created for her, and reaffirming the importance of their Platonic relationship.

His self-sacrifice is further emphasised by the very fact that he had been tempted to yield to self-gratification. In fact, he had felt that to indulge his desire was his due, since Dominique had destroyed their cerebral relationship which he had valued so highly, and was therefore, in his eyes, reduced to the realms of the flesh. He would not return to the Front and his world of 'l'ordre mâle' 'avant d'avoir sacrifié à son désir ce qui lui est dû'.[203]

This is identical to his decision in *Les Bestiaires*, when Soledad fell from grace by insisting he should risk his life fighting the vicious bull, Le Mauvais Ange. However, his eventual rejection of her was purely to maintain his own

freedom, as well as to punish her, whereas his renunciation of Dominique is for the sake of her purity of soul, as well as for the preservation of his own liberty.

I pointed out in the chapter headed L'Ordre Mâle the correlation between Alban's rejection of Soledad and the bull-fight. The slaying of Le Mauvais Ange can be seen as a metaphor for Alban's abandonment of Soledad. There is an overt parallel drawn between the succession of plunging and extracting movements of the sword and the sexual act itself. As the fight progresses the narration passes into the realms of the mystical:

> ... c'était une incantation religieuse qu'élevaient ces gestes purs, plus beaux que ceux de l'amour ...[204]

However, the final thrust is again related to the sexual act when the bull

> ... arriva avec emphase à la cime de son spasme, comme l'homme à la cime de son plaisir, et, comme lui, elle y resta immobile.[205]

There comes the realisation for Alban that the bull had taken over his passions from the moment he rejected Soledad.

The sacrifice of Soledad, intermingled as it is with the sacrifice of the bull, becomes a symbol by which the narrator, through Alban, is able to express the heights to which such an offering leads. It in turn becomes intermingled with an oblation when the lyrical language links the killing of the bull with Christianity:

> L'église du dieu des chrétiens dominait tout cela, de sa haute masse pleine de bénédictions. La divinité du sang fumait comme de la chaleur.[206]

The young man, Jésus, epitomises the sacrifice which is inherent in this novel, not only in the obvious choice of his name, but in his association with blood as he proceeds to carve up the dead bull. Alban overcome by 'une émotion religieuse',[207] in his imagination confounds the dead bull and the young man with Christ:

> ... voyait-on Jésus mort sur la table d'opération, nu jusqu'aux reins avec une poitrine de Patrocle, et une plaie lumineuse comme un sourire?[208]

Alban's association of sacrifice with religion has the effect of ennobling his renouncement of Soledad.

There is no confusion with religion in the sacrifice to be found in the heterosexual love in *La Rose de sable* nor is it confined to the sacrifice of the female. Although Auligny donates Ram to his friend, Guiscart, for sex, Guiscart curbs his desire partly in deference to the regard he feels for her and partly out of respect for his friend, who he feels would come to regret his 'gift'.

Auligny, too, indulges in self-sacrifice in his love-affair with Ram, being content to submerge his own passions until Ram is ready to be seduced.

Although the narrator disputes the fact that Auligny loves Ram, since he has not experienced any jealousy or worries because of her, yet the lieutenant would like to test his love by being forced to make the ultimate sacrifice, by contracting leprosy or something equally dreadful. This sentiment sees its counterpart in Costals' desire to prove his love for Rhadidja by wishing to contract her leprosy.

If it is sacrifice of self that Costals wishes in his relations with Rhadidja, it is sacrifice of others in his association with other women.

There is a complex connection in Costals' mind between Solange and Andrée. He sees Andrée as a threat to his conquest of Solange. Without him sacrificing Andrée he is unable to possess the younger woman. The first piece of evidence for this is in the scene where he first attempts the seduction of Solange. It is unsuccessful and, significantly, being next to Solange, first thinking of Thérèse, he then imagines he sees Andrée at the foot of the bed.

On a subsequent occasion, a further attempt at seduction is interrupted by Andrée hammering violently on his door. His inability to possess Solange therefore becomes indissolubly linked in his mind with Andrée and her aggressive action:

> Ainsi donc cette femme ne se contenait pas de l'assommer à distance ... Elle le dérangeait dans *ce qu'il aimait*, elle qui était *ce qu'il n'aimait pas*.[209]

His only means of succeeding with Solange is to 'kill off' Andrée. It is essential for Solange to be a participator in the treachery in order that she should see what happens to those who get in his way – a veiled reference to his future sacrifice of Solange, which I have already shown to be essential to Costals for his preservation of mind and spirit.

Costals first involves Solange by asking her to read the address and to post the letter to Andrée inviting her to the rendez-vous. There follows a long and cruel scene between Costals and Andrée with Solange further involved by being forced to overhear from behind a curtain. The revelation to Andrée of Costals' true feelings of disdain for her is effectively his method of sacrificing her so that his own desires for Solange can be fulfilled. Telling Solange,

> Sans image, ce qu'il faudrait maintenant, c'est qu'elle se tue, pour que j'en sois *vraiment* débarrassé,[210]

Costals is affirming his need to be totally rid of Andrée.

The sandwiching of the scene of the 'killing off' of Andrée between the two scenes immediately either side of it of a) the unsuccessful seduction of Solange and b) the accomplishment of the possession of her is a significant structural affirmation of the necessity and success of the sacrifice for Costals.

d) Submission

The submission of women to men pervades Montherlant's prose work. For Costals, a woman's role is subservient to that of the male. The women themselves compound this theory of female subjugation in the tetralogy of *Les Jeunes Filles*. Thérèse writes to Costals that

> ... Dieu a créé l'homme pour Sa gloire, et la femme pour la gloire de l'homme.[211]

One wonders how many women would really feel like this. Thérèse is certainly an extreme portrayal of a woman who is confused about her own identity and also

that of Costals, whom she confounds with God, believing him to be her spiritual father, in charge of her life:

> Vous seul pouvez ma vie. Donnez-moi la vie, afin que je sois bien sûre de l'avoir éternellement.[212]

There is a similarity here with Mariana in *Le Maître de Santiago*, whose language of prayer suggests that she may be intermingling 'père' and 'Père'.

Thérèse's choice of her pseudonym 'Marie' and the heading of her letters to Costals with N-S, J-C, (Notre Seigneur, Jésus Christ) and adding the sign of the cross, confirm her confusion. Nonetheless, there is a sincerity in her religiosity which, although Costals is a professed atheist, he recognises as a freedom of spirit within her which is struggling to assert itself but which is constantly smothered by her insensitive family. Because of this, Costals identifies with Thérèse in a way which he never does with Andrée. He, too, has an inner self, which he guards jealously and takes steps to ensure that it is not stifled as I demonstrated in section (b), 'Loss of Liberty'.

It is because Thérèse believes that it is God's will that woman is made for the glory of man, and that God had told her to love Costals, that she revels in submitting herself to his will. Her subjugation is so extreme that when Costals writes to tell her that he will have pity on her at a certain time on a specific date, she undergoes a pseudo-religious, pseudo-sexual experience at that precise time!

Andrée, too, has a desire to be dominated. She writes to Costals,

> Ma vérité de femme est d'aimer dans la soumission et le respect.[213]

As for Solange, (with reference to Costals),

> Sa domination sur elle était absolue, et il le savait ... elle était subjuguée.[214]

This submission is common to all the women in the tetralogy. Just as Mme Dandillot's subjection is not so much to her husband, as to the marital state itself,

so Solange, who, having lost Costals, submits to the expected requirements of bourgeois society by marrying someone else, despite the fact that she does not love her husband.

The narrator confirms this theme of woman's subordination to man:

> Le garçon sait que son avenir sera ce qu'il voudra; la jeune fille sait que son avenir sera ce qu'un homme voudra.[215]

This is an observation by the narrator, and not necessarily a mode of action which he condones. Indeed, there is occasionally an underlying sympathy towards women inherent in the narrator's statements. For surely,

> L'homme prend et rejette; la femme se donne, et on ne reprend pas, ou on reprend mal, ce qu'on a une fois donné,[216]

if not exactly a sympathetic remark towards women, must at least, be an indictment against men. However, it has to be admitted that such underlying currents are so well hidden in the tetralogy as to be almost indiscernible.

There are nine or ten consecutive pages on the theme of woman's subordination and her desire for happiness, which takes the form of a philosophical tract. There is no doubt some significance intended in the fact that this immediately follows a letter from Andrée, written on her thirtieth birthday, full of despair at what she has missed out on in life and offering herself to Costals for a sexual relationship for a brief period in order to have something more to remember in her empty, sterile life than the psychological satisfaction she has so far derived from their one-sided relationship.

Throughout the essay the narrator makes clear his firm belief that

> Une femme ne peut jamais se réaliser complètement: elle dépend trop de l'homme.[217]

In contrast to Andrée, whose simmering, frustrated desire under the guise of 'amitié', bursts forth out of desperation, Dominique, in *Le Songe*, has no self-delusion. She recognises her feelings for Alban, but she curbs them, not because of any aspirations to a higher morality, which guide Alban's actions, but

because she knew it was what *he* wanted. There is a paradox here. I have demonstrated, in the section on Comradeship, that Dominique's decision to control her sensuality is a conscious one, and one that has a certain strength about it. Yet here we have the female playing an inferior role to the male, negating her own wishes in favour of his! Dominique senses within herself

> ... l'opposition irréductible entre l'ordre du sport et l'ordre du cœur ...[218]

In fighting her feelings of suffocation and quickly beating heart at Alban's departure for war, she is fighting her natural instincts. Because there is a conflict within her, it suggests to me that her decision is positive, rather than submissive.

Rhadidja's subjection to Costals is bound up with tradition. Costals makes it obvious that he prefers the customary, subservient position of the Arab woman to those in the Western hemisphere. Rhadidja fulfills all his requirements in a woman – she is young, beautiful, sexually willing, but, most important of all, she makes no demands on him. She is there to be used, as and when Costals pleases. He retains his freedom with her. Despite this liberty he has, or perhaps because of it, his attachment to her is such that he thinks:

> "S'il fallait sauver Rhadidja des flammes au péril de ma vie, le ferais-je?" Réponse: "Oui".[219]

With Rhadidja there is not the pressure of European society's conformity and rules. His preference for her primitiveness and a sexuality combined with indifference is in contrast to the determined pursuit by Andrée and Solange and it serves to emphasise the constrictions of their European love.

This contrast between European and Arab women is confirmed by Colonel Rugot in *La Rose de sable* who tells Auligny that European wives are a nuisance and a set-back to their husbands, who find themselves 'enchaînés'[220]. Whereas, not only is the Arab woman no trouble,

> Bien plus, la femme indigène, par sa soumission, sa tranquilleté, son absence de complications sentimentales, son côté *nature*, est une aide pour l'officier dans sa vie rude.[221]

Ram's submission to Auligny is manifested in her passivity and her 'docilité automatique'[222] – a docility not unlike that of Solange in her relationship with Costals. Just as Solange always responded with a 'oui', Ram's usual reply to Auligny's requests were 'si vous voulez'. Her habitual reaction of

> Jamais un non, jamais une observation, jamais une question,[223]

however, belies her inner feelings. Auligny could see by her face during love-making that she had enjoyed the experience, despite her assertion that 'ça m'est egal',[224] and conversely, whilst asleep, she is far from passive, rejecting his advances, showing a positive resistance which is alien to her awakened self. But her veneer of passivity returns on waking and her smile illustrates subservience rather than true pleasure.

Her habit of concealing her true feelings can be interpreted as a subversion under the guise of submission. It is only when Auligny expresses his wish to take her away with him that Ram asserts herself. Even then, she maintains the veneer of submission, at first not refusing, simply not turning up to meet him and thus evading the issue of departure. She derives strength for her decision from her closeness to her father and Auligny interprets the physical proximity of Ram and her father, when she rests her foot on his, as a symbol of their complicity against him.

As Auligny's love for Ram blossoms, so his love for the whole indigenous population grows. With these sentiments there comes a feeling of profound pity for Ram and her race. Ironically, Ram reciprocates his pity with a sympathy for him. A further irony is that whereas the submission of the European women in Montherlant's prose work places them as victims, there is a role-reversal in the position of Ram and Auligny. The previously passive Ram reveals a determination to stay which Auligny cannot alter. She remains master of herself despite her veneer of submission. She does indeed merit the name of 'la rose de sable', given to her by Auligny, because, like the desert stone,

> ... elle était en surface toute grâce florale, et en réalité froide et inerte comme ces pierres.[225]

The humility and pain that Auligny experiences through Ram's rejection effectively classifies him as a victim, a status which is usually reserved for Montherlantian females.

There is a certain symbolism in the location of Auligny at the back of the procession when he meets Ram and her family returning from work in the palm grove:

> ... Bou Djemaa le premier, Ram au flanc de l'âne, Regragui et Auligny derrière, Auligny faisant garde-frein.[226]

The position of Auligny as a victim is confirmed in his feeling 'plus esclave et plus misérable que l'âne'.[227]

Just as Auligny's esteem for the Arab race had increased parallel with his love for Ram, so when the heat and his resultant lethargy combined with Ram's simplicity and passivity diminish his ardour, his compassion for the Arab race decreases.

Ram's final desertion signifies his loss of belief and hope and reveals it to him as

> ... une illusion de son imagination et de son cœur.[228]

e) Selfishness; Self-Delusion

So far, we have seen that heterosexual love in Montherlant's prose work has many components and many of its aspects have been seen to be negative. To add to this, there can be found a certain selfishness in the composition of love, as well as an element of self-delusion in some of the women.

These attributes are manifested in the tetralogy of *Les Jeunes Filles*. The women portrayed, with the exception of Rhadidja, have their own interests at heart in their pursuit of love.

Thérèse's love is less demanding than the all-consuming passion of Andrée or the quiet, determined emotion of Solange. Thérèse, however, is a confused,

religious fanatic – confused, in that she substitutes Costals name for the Blessed Virgin's during the Litany, and she constantly interchanges God and Costals in her thoughts. Yet he accords her a certain respect that he does not show the others. He answers her letters as though they were from someone lucid. This throws a question mark over the merit of heterosexual love, showing that one kind of love worthy of respect is from someone on the fringe of insanity, and therefore, by implication, making a mockery of love.

Thérèse does not demand too much of Costals – simply

> Aimez–moi seulement un petit brin de ce que je vous aime, et l'Eternité nous prendra dans ses bras.[229]

Rhadidja's love is the most unselfish portrayal in the tetralogy. She is an Arab and this is a comment on the difference there is in love between the European and the Arab. She fulfills the rôle that Costals demands in his lovers – that is she makes no claims on his mind. She is as indifferent to his comings and goings as Solange and Andrée are possessive of him. In fact her lack of demand on him elicits the best in Costals' love.

It is only with Rhadidja that we glimpse an unselfish side to his passion – so much so that he is prepared to risk contamination with leprosy from her. In fact, he almost desires it, to prove his love:

> "Ah! qu'elle me donne la lèpre!" Comme une femme pense de l'homme qu'elle aime: "Ah! qu'il me donne un enfant!"[230]

Andrée's pursuit of Costals is as selfish in its own way as Costals' treatment of most of the women in his life. For all she professes that her love is one of renunciation and self–sacrifice, the very fact that it is for her own gratification that she desires Costals undermines the concept of love.

In her relationship with Costals, Andrée is the butt of his ridicule and sadism. Much of the time she does not see this. Most of the time she accepts it. Instead of this making of her a martyr, it merely shows her to be a fool.

However, in one of her last letters to Costals, after an absence of communication between them of fifteen months, she seems to have regained her equilibrium. She can finally view Costals unemotionally and she recognises him as a man who rejects normal values:

> Et cette fameuse lucidité, qui ne cherche jamais qu'a outrager ce que quelqu'un d'honnête doit tenir pour saint, qui même vous disqualifie en tant que romancier, car que vaut la vision d'un homme qui refuse les valeurs normales?[231]

Unfortunately her enlightenment is short-lived and in her next letter she refutes all the balanced judgements she has made and hotly pursues Costals to Paris, thus undermining her own logic. Her love is therefore shown to be irrational as well as selfish.

Solange Dandillot is a young woman who, until she meets Costals, has never loved anyone other than her mother. When she sees his attraction towards her, she submits to it rather than reciprocates it at first. Their meeting was purely circumstantial and there is a certain passivity about Solange's acceptance of the situation. There is no hint at the beginning of their relationship of the selfishness which will become part of her make-up when she pursues marriage.

In contrast to Costals' love, hers is not based on sexuality:

> Des caresses de sa volupté elle n'avait jamais éprouvé nul plaisir: elle était froide de nature, puisque jeune fille, et froide d'hérédité ...[232]

Initially she is acquiescent, agreeing to everything Costals suggests, whether it be a walk in the Bois de Boulogne, to make love, or to go to a concert. It is only as her love grows for him that we begin to see that she has a will of her own, and her determination is channelled into her desire to marry him. She becomes calculating as she decides on what policy to adopt in order to achieve her ends:

> ... ne parler jamais de ce mariage, attendre qu'il en parlât, afin de pouvoir toujours lui dire: "Mais qui a parlé de mariage le premier?"[233]

At first, her love deepens in inverse proportion to his rejection of her.

When he sends for her to join him in Gênoà she is a very different Solange from the apathetic, frigid girl he left behind. The hope which he inspires in her (only to be predictably knocked down again later) gives her a false sense of security:

> Et son amour, qui attendait pour se lâcher bride de voir devant lui cette longue route libre, déferla dans toute sa force, comme une luge lancée sur une pente.[234]

With the bursting forth of her love, Solange becomes less frigid. Previously,

> ... elle n'avait pas une envie très pressante de se livrer à ses embrassements,[235]

whereas now,

> Elle cherchait sans cesse son contact: cela était nouveau.[236]

The narrator leaves us in no doubt as to the reason for the complete reversal of this aspect of Solange's character. For the very first time in her life she wanted something and

> Elle y avait engagé une volonté neuve, une force fraîche, disponible depuis vingt et un ans.[237]

The force that was driving her on, that she desired so much, was not so much the man: 'Ce qu'elle aimait, ce n'était pas lui, c'était le mariage'[238]. This suggests that her love is not genuine. It is a convenience which suits her objective. There is the intimation here that she is incapable of love in its pure state.

Solange is a victim of her bourgeois upbringing, seeing the marriage state as desirable because it is expected by society, and she pursues this regardless of any diminuition of love on Costals' part. So great is her determination to enter into the conjugal bond that she is quick to flout convention to this end:

> Bravant les convenances quand elle le croyait nécessaire pour obtenir le mariage, Mlle Dandillot se retrouvait très bourgeoise quand il ne s'agissait plus que de les braver par amour.[239]

As a result she earns Costals' disdain for prostituting herself in order to get married. Mme Dandillot, too, was prepared to lower her principles in order to ensnare Costals for her daughter. She was quite prepared to condone his adultery, but her hasty disregard for it disgusted Costals.

Chapter 2 Love 5) Heterosexual Love

After her sojourn in Geneva with Costals, Solange's love diminishes, but her longing for marriage increases, and the placid, mediocre, boring girl demonstrates a tenacity in clinging to the idea of marriage that can only be matched by Andrée's obstinacy and determination to win Costal's love.

Solange's love, instead of it allowing her to accept Costals with all his faults, simply blinds her to reality. She finds it expedient to ignore what she does not want to know – (like Mme Dandillot, who did not want to face the reality of her daughter's sexual liaison with Costals). Solange tells Costals,

> Si j'allais trouver dans votre vie, dans votre passé, des motifs de souffrance! J'aime mieux garder l'illusion que votre bonheur n'a commencé qu'avec moi.[240]

There is a parallel to be drawn between Solange's delusion and Andrée's rejection of reality. Andrée lives in such a fantasy world that she constantly attributes thoughts and feelings to Costals that he never has. In one of her many letters to him, few of which he opens, she tells him,

> ... nous savons ensemble des choses que les autres ne savent pas, des choses que vous ne m'avez même pas dites et que pourtant vous n'avez dites qu'à moi.[241]

She is so bound up with her own emotions that she does not see that Costals can never love her. Yet she is portrayed as 'une fille intelligente, et presque exceptionnelle'.[242] Her self-delusion is so great that in the letters with which she bombards him she declares not only her love and admiration for him, but her certain knowledge of his love for her!

She derives the illusion of a closeness between them, not from the content of Costals' letters, but merely from the receipt of them. She therefore places more importance on their frequency and length (both of which Costals purposely curtails) than on their content:

> Ecrivez-moi n'importe quoi, mais écrivez-moi. Ne fût-ce qu'une enveloppe vide ... pour que je sache que vous êtes vivant.[243]

Contrary to Robert Johnson's assertion that she is convincing when she tries to prove that Costals really loves her and that 'everything she says (and writes)

seems rational'[244] I would suggest that the only person Andrée convinces is herself and that with an irrationality born of self-delusion she misinterprets

> ... la politesse pour un vif intérêt, la bienveillance pour de la préférence, la pitié pour de l'amitié.[245]

Having reached the age of thirty and not having found a man to love and be loved by, she transforms her cerebral admiration for Costals into a love based on fantasy. This creates the impression that such love is being ridiculed. Hers is a love based on illusion. She is so blind to Costals' indifference to her that she deludes herself that some of his most obvious rejections are actually to be interpreted as encouragement:

> On n'a un tel mouvement de rage que quand on aime.[246]

She is shown to be foolish when she bases her belief in Costals' love on the fact that when their legs brushed each other in the taxi and he sharply withdrew his,

> J'ai compris alors que c'était avec votre âme que vous m'aimiez. 'La femme dont on ne jouit pas est la femme qu'on aime' (Baudelaire).[247]

The love that Andrée feels is further undermined because it becomes absurd when she retreats so far into her fantasy world that she imagines he comes to her in the night and she undergoes a similar pseudo-sexual experience to that sustained by Thérèse (although the latter's was also bound up with religion).

In the beginning Andrée declared, 'L'amour irrégulier me dégoûte'[248] and that she had for him 'une passion calme et froide'.[249] However, her high ideals degenerate to the level of desire for sexual gratification. No longer is she satisfied with their 'amitié purement platonique, intelligente et froide'[250], and she wishes to exchange their friendship for a two months' sexual relationship. This is further evidence that heterosexual love is on a lower plane than the Platonic love already discussed under 'Comradeship'.

There is an underlying mockery of Andrée's love when she tells Costals that she has no need of physical love, rather it is really her conscience that tells her she ought to experience it!

She is shown at her most ridiculous when she accuses Costals of homosexuality, since it is based on the gossip of a middle-aged woman, spurned by him, to whom, in order to escape her pursuit, Costals had mischievously and intentionally suggested such deviation by his 'revelation' that 'je n'avais pas le désir des femmes'[251]. Her absurdity is compounded by her justification for her belief by comparing Costals with one of Proust's homosexual characters with such proof as,

> Vous aimez la force, – comme lui. Vous faites de longues marches, – comme lui. Vous ne portez pas de bagues, – comme lui.[252]

Her self-delusion is complete as she blames his lack of interest in her, not on natural aversion to an ugly, provincial woman, but on his homosexuality!

> Maintenant je comprends pourquoi je vous parassais si peu désirable! Et moi qui me torturais, qui allais à mon miroir! Pourquoi vous n'aviez pas besoin de moi. Parbleu, puisque la femme était en vous.[253]

Costals and Andrée, although they encounter each other physically, never meet intellectually or emotionally. They are always on different planes. Not even their letters answer each other. Indeed, the letters are a literary echo of their lack of communication at all levels.

Like Andrée's love, Thérèse's emotions are self-destructive, but to a pitch where she undergoes a religious-sexual-emotional break-down at the precise time that Costals says that he will have pity on her. This demonstrates her emotional dependence on him.

I can not agree with Robert B. Johnson who claims that because Montherlant uses Thérèse to serve as an example of a feminine mind incapable of intellectual powers, for she cannot cope with religion, that there remains the implication that women in general can not cope with it[254]. I do not see that Thérèse must be a generalisation. Rather, she is a character portrayal of one type of woman. The author himself was well aware of the dangers of generalising. In a letter to Mme

Elisabeth Zehrfuss he wrote, 'On ne peut généraliser sur *rien*'[255], and in a reference to the heroes of *Le Songe*, he wrote to her, 'Il faut donc ne voir là que des individus et ne pas généraliser'[256].

To confound those critics who would suppose that Montherlant believed all women to be like those in *Les Jeunes Filles*, I would quote the reaction of Andrée's friend, who, when she was told that Costals' reserve must surely be proof of his love, simply laughed in Andrée's face. She did not suffer from the same illusions as Andrée. Montherlant is acknowledging that there are more balanced women in the world than Andrée, or indeed Thérèse, but he has not chosen to portray them. The author, in a letter to Mme Elisabeth Zehrfuss, maintained that, although *Les Jeunes Filles* was a totally different book from *Le Songe*, he had not changed his ideas with regard to males and females, listing his constants as 'goût physique' and 'peut d'estime pour son intelligence'[257], but that his opinion of their characters depended on the young people he mixed with – 'tantôt attendri, tantôt méchant, selon qu'elles étaient bonnes ou mauvaises'[258].

Chapter 2 Love

Notes

1. Henry de Montherlant, *Sur les Héros du 'Songe'*, line 1. This reference and all other references to this article relate to the original manuscript which rests with Mme. Elisabeth Zehrfuss.

2. *Ibid.*, lines 14–18.

3. Montherlant, *Le Songe*, p. 20.

4. Montherlant, *Le Songe*, p. 101.

5. *Ibid.*, p. 102.

6. *Ibid.*, p. 102.

7. *Ibid.*, p. 13.

8. *Ibid.*, p. 15.

9. *Ibid.*, p. 18.

10. *Ibid.*, p. 43.

11. *Ibid.*, p. 13.

12. Montherlant, *Le Songe*, p. 107.

13. *Ibid.*, p. 18.

14. *Ibid.*, p. 19.

15. *Ibid.*, p. 19.

16. Montherlant, *Les Olympiques*, p. 280.

17. Montherlant, *Le Songe*, p. 19.

18. *Ibid.*, p. 19.

19. *Ibid.*, p. 31.

20. Montherlant, *Les Olympiques*, p. 281.

21. *Ibid.*, p. 37.

22. Montherlant, *Le Songe*, p. 19.

23. Montherlant, *Les Olympiques*, p. 280.

24. *Ibid.*, p. 280.

25. Montherlant, *Le Songe*, p. 21.

26. *Ibid.*, p. 13.

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27. Montherlant, *Les Jeunes Filles*, p. 1024.

28. Montherlant, *Les Garçons*, p. 486.

29. *Ibid.*, p. 474.

30. *Ibid.*, p. 474.

31. Montherlant, *Les Bestiaires*, p. 504.

32. Montherlant, *Les Garçons*, p. 482.

33. *Ibid.*, p. 482.

34. *Ibid.*, p. 482.

35. Montherlant, *Les Bestiaires*, p. 503.

36. Montherlant, *Les Garçons*, p. 487.

37. *Ibid.*, p. 487.

38. *Ibid.*, p. 486.

39 *Ibid.*, p. 486.

40. *Ibid.*, p. 487.

41. Montherlant, *Les Garçons*, p. 479.

42. *Ibid.*, p. 478.

43. *Ibid.*, p. 478.

44. *Ibid.*, p. 476.

45. *Ibid.*, p. 477.

46. *Ibid.*, p. 561.

47. *Ibid.*, p. 563.

48. *Ibid.*, p. 563.

49. *Ibid.*, p. 564.

50. Montherlant, *Les Garçons*, p. 642.

51. *Ibid.*, p. 643.

52. *Ibid.*, p. 636.

53. *Ibid.*, p. 636

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54. *Ibid.*, p. 732.

55. *Ibid.*, p. 734.

56. Montherlant, *Les Garçons*, p. 516.

57. *Ibid.*, p. 507.

58. *Ibid.*, p. 507.

59. *Ibid.*, p. 507.

60. *Ibid.*, p. 547.

61. Michel Raimond conveyed this and much other critical observation to me in an interview with him, which I recorded, 29 July 1988.

62. Montherlant, *Les Garçons*, p. 642.

63. *Ibid.*, p. 649.

64. *Ibid.*, p. 650.

65. *Ibid.*, p. 650.

66. Montherlant, *Les Garçons*, p. 778.

67. *Ibid.*, p. 822.

68. *Ibid.*, p. 817.

69. *Ibid.*, p. 823.

70. *Ibid.*, p. 823.

71. *Ibid.*, p. 823.

72. *Ibid.*, p. 824.

73. Montherlant, *Les Garçons*, p. 472.

74. *Ibid.*, p. 475.

75. Montherlant, *Les Bestiaires*, p. 391.

76. Montherlant, *Les Garçons*, p. 775.

77. Montherlant, *La Rose de sable*, p. 303.

78. *Ibid.*, p. 29.

79. Montherlant, *La Rose de sable*, p. 29.

80. *Ibid.*, p. 29.

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81. *Ibid.*, p. 103.

82. *Ibid.*, p. 104.

83. *Ibid.*, p. 104.

84. *Ibid.*, p. 103.

85. Montherlant, *La Rose de sable*, p. 210.

86. *Ibid.*, p. 210.

87. *Ibid.*, p. 210.

88. *Ibid.*, p. 303.

89. *Ibid.*, p. 335.

90. Montherlant, *Les Olympiques*, p. 245.

91. *Ibid.*, p. 246.

92. *Ibid.*, p. 246.

93. *Ibid.*, p. 246.

94. *Ibid.*, p. 245.

95. *Ibid.*, p. 243.

96. Montherlant, *La Rose de sable*, p. 56.

97. *Ibid.*, p. 417.

98. *Ibid.*, p. 417.

99. *Ibid.*, p. 417.

100. *Ibid.*, p. 417.

101. *Ibid.*, p. 418.

102. *Ibid.*, p. 418.

103. *Ibid.*, p. 415.

104. Montherlant, *La Rose de sable*, p. 418.

105. *Ibid.*, p. 413.

106. *Ibid.*, p. 418.

107. *Ibid.*, p. 29.

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108. Montherlant, *La Rose de sable*, p. 29.

109. Montherlant, *Le Démon du bien*, p. 1264.

110. *Ibid.*, p. 1265.

111. *Ibid.*, p. 1266.

112. *Ibid.*, p. 1268.

113. Montherlant, *Les Lépreuses*, p. 1389.

114. Montherlant, *Le Démon du bien*, p. 1246.

115. Montherlant, *Les Lépreuses*, p. 1465.

116. *Ibid.*, p. 1466.

117. Montherlant, *Pitié pour les femmes*, p. 1126.

118. Montherlant, *Les Lépreuses*, p. 1461.

119. *Ibid.*, p. 1381.

120. Montherlant, *Le Démon du bien*, p. 1344.

121. J. Marks, *Introduction to Le Maître de Santiago*, p. xx.

122. Montherlant, *Les Lépreuses*, p. 1415.

123. Montherlant, *Le Démon du bien*, p. 1313.

124. Montherlant, *Les Jeunes Filles*, p. 990.

125. *Ibid.*, p. 990.

126. Montherlant, *Les Jeunes Filles*, p. 990.

127. *Ibid.*, p. 991.

128. Montherlant, *La Rose de sable*, p. 275.

129. *Ibid.*, p. 276.

130. Montherlant, *Les Bestiaires*, p. 385.

131. *Ibid.*, p. 391.

132. *Ibid.*, p. 391.

133. Montherlant, *Les Garçons*, p. 635.

134. *Ibid.*, p. 446.

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135. *Ibid.*, p. 662.

136. Montherlant, *Les Bestiaires*, p. 388.

137. Montherlant, *Les Garçons*, p. 486.

138. Montherlant, *Les Bestiaires*, p. 503.

139. Montherlant, *Les Garçons*, p. 653.

140. Montherlant, *Les Bestiaires*, p. 391.

141. *Ibid.*, p. 453.

142. Montherlant, *Les Bestiaires*, p. 504.

143. Montherlant, *Les Garçons*, p. 806.

144. *Ibid.*, p. 807.

145. *Ibid.*, p. 807.

146. *Ibid.*, p. 807.

147. *Ibid.*, p. 760.

148. Montherlant, *Les Garçons*, p. 820.

149. Montherlant, *Les Jeunes Filles*, p. 1010.

150. Montherlant, *Les Garçons*, p. 481.

151. *Ibid.*, p. 474.

152. Montherlant, *Les Garçons*, p. 564.

153. *Ibid.*, p. 758.

154. Montherlant, *Les Bestiaires*, p. 474.

155. Montherlant, *Les Bestiaires*, p. 458.

156. *Ibid.*, p. 475.

157. *Ibid.*, p. 484.

158. *Ibid.*, p. 493.

159. *Ibid.*, p. 494.

160. Montherlant, *Les Bestiaires*, p. 563.

161. Montherlant, *Les Garçons*, p. 802.

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162. *Ibid.*, p. 802.

163. Montherlant, *Les Jeunes Filles*, p. 1019.

164. Montherlant, *Le Maître de Santiago*, Act 2. Sc. 2., p. 505.

165. Montherlant, *La Rose de sable*, p. 121.

166. Montherlant, *La Rose de sable*, p. 121.

167. Montherlant, *Le Démon du bien*, p. 1342.

168. *Ibid.*, p. 1233.

169. Montherlant, *Les Jeunes Filles*, p. 945.

170. Montherlant, *Sur les Héros du 'Songe'*, lines 85 and 86.

171. Montherlant, *Pitié pour les femmes*, p. 1135.

172. Jeanne Sandelion, *Montherlant et les femmes*, p. 103.

173. Montherlant, *Le Démon du bien*, p. 1364.

174. Montherlant, *Malatesta*, Act 4. Sc. 8., p. 403.

175. Montherlant, *Le Démon du bien*, p. 1364.

176. Montherlant, *Pitié pour les femmes*, p. 1215.

177. Montherlant, *Le Démon du bien*, p. 1333.

178. *Ibid.*, p. 1333.

179. Montherlant, *La Rose de sable*, p. 126.

180. Montherlant, letter to Elisabeth Zehrfuss, 15 February 1938.

181. Montherlant, *La Rose de sable*, p. 50.

182. *Ibid.*, p. 51.

183. Montherlant, *Les Jeunes Filles*, p. 966.

184. *Ibid.*, p. 937.

185. *Ibid.*, p. 966.

186. Montherlant, *Le Songe*, p. 211.

187. *Ibid.*, p. 216.

188. *Ibid.*, p. 175.

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189. *Ibid.*, p. 176.

190. *Ibid.*, p. 176.

191. Montherlant, *Le Songe*, p. 214.

192. Montherlant, *Les Jeunes Filles*, p. 1039.

193. Montherlant, *La Petite Infante de Castille*, p. 632.

194. Montherlant, *La Rose de sable*, p. 197.

195. Montherlant, *La Rose de sable*, p. 136.

196. Montherlant, *Pitié pour les femmes*, p. 1156.

197. *Ibid.*, p. 1156.

198. Montherlant, *Les Jeunes Filles*, p. 951.

199. Montherlant, *Le Songe,* p. 216.

200. Montherlant, *La Petite Infante de Castille*, p. 631.

201. *Ibid.*, p. 630.

202. Montherlant, *Le Songe*, p. 210.

203. *Ibid.*, p. 204.

204. Montherlant, *Les Bestiaires*, p. 560.

205. *Ibid.*, p. 561.

206. *Ibid.*, p. 565.

207. *Ibid.*, p. 565.

208. *Ibid.*, p. 565.

209. Montherlant, *Pitié pour les femmes*, p. 1136.

210. Montherlant, *Pitié pour les femmes*, p. 1155.

211. Montherlant, *Les Jeunes Filles*, p. 920.

212. Montherlant, *Les Jeunes Filles*, p. 931.

213. *Ibid.*, p. 1016.

214. *Ibid.*, p. 1056.

215. Montherlant, *Les Jeunes Filles*, p. 1006.

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216. *Ibid.*, p. 1010.

217. *Ibid.*, p. 1008.

218. Montherlant, *Le Songe*, p. 21.

219. Montherlant, *Les Lépreuses*, p. 1435.

220. Montherlant, *La Rose de sable*, p. 111.

221. *Ibid.*, p. 112.

222. Montherlant, *La Rose de sable*, p. 253.

223. *Ibid.*, p. 253.

224. *Ibid.*, p. 232.

225. Montherlant, *La Rose de sable*, p. 126.

226. *Ibid.*, p. 353.

227. *Ibid.*, p. 353.

228. *Ibid.*, p. 342.

229. Montherlant, *Les Jeunes Filles*, p. 946.

230. Montherlant, *Les Lépreuses*, p. 1445.

231. Montherlant, *Les Lépreuses*, p. 1524.

232. Montherlant, *Le Démon du bien*, p. 1245.

233. *Ibid.*, p. 1243.

234. Montherlant, *Le Démon du bien*, p. 1320.

235. *Ibid.*, p. 1294.

236. *Ibid.*, p. 1332.

237. *Ibid.*, p. 1333.

238. *Ibid.*, p. 1358.

239. Montherlant, *Les Lépreuses*, p. 1423.

240. Montherlant, *Le Démon du bien*, p. 1340.

241. Montherlant, *Les Lépreuses*, p. 1381.

242. Montherlant, *Pitié pour les femmes*, p. 1192.

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243. Montherlant, *Les Jeunes Filles*, p. 998.

244. See Robert B. Johnson, *Henry de Montherlant*, p. 59.

245. Montherlant, *Les Jeunes Filles*, p. 1012.

246. *Ibid.*, p. 952.

247. *Ibid.*, p. 1075.

248. *Ibid.*, p. 937.

249. *Ibid.*, p. 940.

250. *Ibid.*, p. 1000.

251. Montherlant, *Les Jeunes Filles*, p. 1021.

252. Montherlant, *Pitié pour les femmes*, p. 1185.

253. *Ibid.*, p. 1186.

254. See Robert B. Johnson, *op. cit.*, p. 62.

255. Montherlant, letter to Elisabeth Zehrfuss, 15 September 1934.

256. Montherlant, letter to Elisabeth Zehrfuss, 8 December 1934.

257. Montherlant, letter to Elisabeth Zehrfuss, 23 December 1934.

258. Montherlant, letter to Elisabeth Zehrfuss, 23 December 1934.

CHAPTER 3 SENSUALITY; DESIRE

... la volupté et l'amour sont choses distinctes.[1]

In the previous chapter I explored the many, diverse aspects which are part of the make-up of love in Montherlant's prose. In the author's concept of relationships, sensuality and desire are not part of love, be it Platonic, homosexual or heterosexual. In this chapter I shall examine how important these two emotions are in comparison to love and use the investigation as a means of discovering how women are treated within the framework of sensuality and desire.

Alban's Platonic friendship with Dominique is one which he values highly and he demonstrates this by according her what is, in his eyes, a very high accolade:

> Vous avez été mon frère et mon fils.[2]

The fact that he sees her as a brother and a son rather than as a sister and a daughter could imply a male hierarchy. However, it can also be interpreted as evidence that Alban simply does not see her as feminine, but as a-sexual. By keeping desire and passion out of their relationship he is denying Dominique her sexuality, but he does so out of a belief that it moves their relationship onto a higher plane.

The conception of the ideal woman that is created in *Le Songe* and *Les Olympiques* is achieved at the expense of a normal life. Such women are expected to deny their sexuality by not having carnal affairs, but by adhering to virginal friendships. Dominique reflects that,

> ... parmi ses camarades de Palestra, toutes celles qui atteignaient la grande classe athlétique avaient le cœur libre.[3]

Similarly, Mme de Plémeur believes she will not marry.

The two women sublimate their desire in their sport, just as Alban sublimates his in *Le Songe* by volunteering for war and the camaraderie it provides. In *Les Olympiques* the narrator redirects Alban's desires into the comradeship of men and women.

Once Dominique admits to her feelings of desire she is no longer worthy of Alban's esteem. She can now only exist for him in the realms of carnal pleasure.

He regrets this change, thus implying it is a change for the worse, that carnal love is a corruption of cerebral love.

> Elle, moi, ce grand souvenir: tout corrompu pour une minute de vertige.[4]

Yet, for all we are led to believe that this carnal love does not bring happiness:

> Ah! triste amour! Un bock de bière en été donne davantage de bonheur,[5]

we are not encouraged to think that adhering strictly to a life of rigid training, to the exclusion of desire, will lead to a happier life. In *Les Olympiques* Mlle de Plémeur,

> Dans une certaine mesure ... payait d'être saine en n'étant pas heureuse.[6]

However, hers was not a balanced life, since she had trained her body to the exclusion of all else in her life:

> Le sport était l'unique hausse-col de Mlle de Plémeur, son armature, son couvent.[7]

The excess of physical activity is being undermined as well as there being the suggestion here that all sport, and no passion, were not, after all, the answer to a happy life.

Besides, we only have to read *La Petite Infante de Castille*, with its homage to the pursuit of sensuality to sense an ambivalence in Montherlant. Yet he does not write as convincingly about the pursuit of carnal pleasure as he does about maintaining a chaste life. There is always a sense of the great importance of the individual in the cerebral relationships described. There is a reverence, a sense of esteem, which is absent when desire enters a relationship. This is illustrated when the authorial voice, speaking through the narrator, describes the women he lusts after:

> Toutes elles m'apparaissaient par trop semblables entre elles, au physique et au moral; tristement interchangeables. L'une ou l'autre, qu'importait![8]

Chapter 3 Sensuality; Desire

There is also the idea of destruction in a sensual relationship. (This is a prevalent Montherlantian theme that runs through much of his prose work.) On contemplating a sexual relationship with la petite infante, he considers

> Je l'adorerai jusqu'à ce que je la possède et détruirai tout en la possédant.[9]

This conception of destruction enters into Dominique's and Alban's relationship as soon as desire raises its head.

The confrontation between Alban and Dominique following the admission of her love, is, for me, one of the high points of *Le Songe*. The dramatic content, of course, lends a sharpness to this pivotal scene. Each takes an opposing stance and neither of them is diminished by the ideas each projects. Rather, it is like two sides of an argument that are presented for the reader to resolve.

Dominique claims that Alban has made of her an ideal, and that she has had to fit into a role designated by him:

> Quel rôle j'ai joué, mon Dieu![10]

Alban retaliates by maintaining that what they had was 'le meilleur de vous et de nous'[11] and she is spoiling it, but Dominique calls this 'best' a

> ... fantôme, cette caricature de la perfection et du bonheur![12]

So we see that they each have different and conflicting values about their Platonic relationship.

Dominique continues to hurl accusations at Alban that ring true, that their friendship has been a 'liaison stérile',[13] that he martyred their friendship so that it did not become love, that he never noticed, and she did not warn him, but something was dead between them. There is a well chosen metaphor for this which emphasises the loss of affinity between them:

> C'était comme si j'avais eu de vous un enfant mort, et vous, pour vous tromper vous-même, vous le caressiez en disant: "Qu'il est beau!"[14]

She continues with more charges – that he has constructed their relationship on a principle which went against nature, that she was only 'le terrain de

l'expérience de vos recherches et de votre monstruosité'.[15] All these are valid points, but the narrator does not intervene, so, as often happens in Montherlant's work, we are left to form our own judgements.

Alban's response is to justify the purity of their Platonic friendship, and he is equally persuasive in his reasoning. He contends that she has had a virtuous influence on him. He admits to keeping them both on the straight and narrow but claims that what he has done has been because of love.

It is interesting to note here that Alban's conception of love does not include a physical relationship. Time and again in Montherlant's work, we see this. Desire is seen to be totally separate from love in the male concept, whereas for a woman – here Dominique – it is an essential ingredient.

A woman's tears have varying effects on the Montherlantian hero, depending on their cause. On one occasion, when Alban was confronted with tears of despair that Dominique shed after being eliminated in a high jump contest, he had responded with 'un extraordinaire élan d'amitié et d'estime'.[16] Similarly, in *Les Olympiques*, Mlle de Plémeur's tears of defeat move the narrator to feelings of love. However, in this showdown, Dominique's tears, *because Alban is the cause of them*, 'ne lui donnaient que le sentiment du ridicule'.[17] Again, the narrator would have felt differently towards Mlle de Plémeur if her tears had been for him rather than for herself:

> Pour la première fois, il me semblait l'aimer d'amour, et comme jamais je ne l'eusse aimée si elle avait sangloté à cause de moi.[18]

Once again we see Montherlant's hero reacting against anyone who loves him. It is a theme which is repeated throughout his prose work.

Alban's disdain mounts as Dominique continues to cry and, significantly she does not just weep, but we are told she weeps 'vainement',[19] which hints at the outcome of their dispute.

Two incidents heighten the dramatic tension of this episode. One is Alban's silence with which he now regards Dominique. This silence is underlined by the

description of a group of shadows which 'commença de passer en silence'.[20] It is the soldiers:

> Ils apparaissaient, s'évanouissaient, il en arrivait d'autres; tout cela en silence.[21]

The other is a deliberate action on his part to aid, indeed to enforce, his silence – an act that could, by a lesser writer, have been made to appear ridiculous, but in this context it has a profound effect. Alban takes from his pocket a piece of chewing gum which he carefully places in his mouth. As Dominique asks him what he thinks he is doing, he ignores her questions and more power is given to the image which the narrator presents of persecutor and prey, by metaphors such as,

> Parfois, les yeux mi-clos, comme les grands lions sûrs, il avait le goût de lui dévorer le visage; il avait le goût de la serrer comme un tube de pâte dentifrice, de lui faire dégorger l'âme, l'esprit vital, de se faire venir dans la bouche une partie d'elle absolument intacte, jamais sortie au jour, le fin fond de la vie.[22]

and

> ... elle le vit semblable à un serpent dressé et immobile, si immobile qu'on le croirait empaillé.[23]

All the time, the tone and temper of the situation is matched by the deliberate mastication of his chewing gum. Such is the impact of this silent, oppressive, masticating figure on Dominique, that she becomes mesmerised, and wanting to say that she is leaving, 'elle se sentait incapable de faire un geste',[24] just like a bird which is hypnotised by its predator.

And all the time there is

> ... cette face distante qui la fixait, insensible et spectrale comme le halo lunaire, mais toujours *mâchonnant*, mordant sa gomme, agitée sans répit de mouvement *destructeurs*, comme si c'était sa chair à elle, Dominique, qu'il *déchiquetait*.[25]

There is something singularly sinister about an action which basically pertains to children, being used in this ominous way.

Alongside Alban's growing disdain for Dominique, there emerges a desire for her which is heightened by the months of their Platonic friendship, the essence of

which was the anaesthetising of passion. His desire is quite distinct from any feelings of love which are born out of respect. The separation of desire and love in the hero is a Montherlantian concept which I have already mentioned. Before,

> Lorsqu'il lui avait cru une raison, il l'avait traitée en homme, il avait eu le désir de sa raison.[26]

Now,

> ... qu'elle n'était plus que chair, il la traitait en femme, il avait le désir de sa chair ...[27]

Note the equating of man with reason and woman with *just* flesh – an overt comment on the female position relative to the male – that is, Alban now sees her as a woman rather than an asexual equal, and in his eyes, that means she is for sexual use.

These thoughts are accompanied by the continuation of the allegorical chomping of the chewing gum:

> Et tout ce qu'il contenait de frénésie en ce moment se déchargeait dans l'agitation sauvage de ses mâchoires ... une impudeur triomphale rayonnait de cette bouche vorace sur le visage, une haute bestialité rendait à l'âme son entière bienfaisance.[28]

The deed and the choice of words underline Alban's mounting lust.

The more he disdains her, the greater his desire. His passion mounts in direct proportion to her suffering, and it is even increased in a perverse way by the ugliness of her face distorted by crying. This is a recurring idea in Montherlant's prose. In *Pitié pour les femmes*, Andrée's dark shadows under her eyes and her broken nail conspire to cause Costals to experience 'pour la première fois ... une sorte d'envie d'elle',[29] and he senses '... la bouffée de désir qui montait en lui'.[30]

Even Auligny's passion in *La Rose de sable* is inflamed by ugliness on the occasion of his sexual escapade with a young Bédouine.

> ... *parce qu*'elle lui paraissait un monstre, *parce qu*'elle était laide ... *parce qu*'elle avait un misérable corps de grenouille ... Auligny ... sentait en lui un désir tel qu'il n'en avait pas senti ...[31]

Thus, there is a certain sadism in desire which must be an implicit comment on carnal desire, which is seen on a far lower plane than the cerebral love that once existed between Alban and Dominique.

André Marissel says that Alban did not intend to inflict any suffering on Dominique[32], but there is evidence in the text that Alban felt more and more 'une volonté de punir élever en lui son niveau'.[33] The narrator underlines this 'cat and mouse' situation with the analogy to a farmyard in which,

> ... toute la basse-cour vient donner un coup de bec à la poule parce qu'elle saigne ...[34]

Desire is thus portrayed as degrading in *Le Songe*, whereas we shall see that the second part of *La Petite Infante de Castille* pays homage to carefree passion.

Alban maintains his silence in order to increase his power and Dominique's suffering:

> L'agrément de la faire souffrir montait de sa sensualité. A songer qu'il avait pouvoir sur elle par ce moyen si simple de garder le silence, il était réjoui dans son cœur.[35]

Dominique recognises that he is using his silence 'sans autre raison que celle de s'amuser à la faire souffrir',[36] and, significantly, she accepts this humiliation as natural. There is the implication that women accept the imbalance between powerful male and subservient female in the exchange of desire, in contrast to the equality between the sexes in the cerebral relationship – or at least, the narrator believes in this imbalance.

Dominique's humiliation is complete when, suddenly pulling her head back, Alban thrusts his lips onto hers, and, just as abruptly, releases her, and the whole episode is undermined when she notices,

> ... au remuement de sa mâchoire, qu'il avait gardé sa gomme dans la joue,[37]

which further emphasises the belittling of desire in this novel.

Dominique's desire for Alban has totally changed the honourable relationship

they had before, and she is left in no doubt of the level at which he rates such sentiments:

> ... il avait communiqué à sa bouche ce qui distingue l'impureté de la tendresse, il était parti tranquillement, comme un coq qui scelle une poule et s'en va, il la laissait plus avilie que s'il avait maintenue et couverte sur le gravier. Tout était fini.[38]

The pursuit of desire is linked with deceit in Montherlant's prose work, and deceit is seen to be reflected in the abuse of the female form, be it through disguise by excessive make-up (as we shall see in Alban's attitude to women in Chapter 4), or be it from disfigurement through excessive constraints due to the fashion of the time. The narrator deems this abuse of the body to be a reflection of the moral standards of the female concerned. Guiscart reflects this narrative viewpoint when he expresses a particular aversion to the malformation of breasts and feet due to women following the mode of the day. This is contrasted starkly with the reverence he feels for Ram's perfectly formed breasts and feet. However, the one flaw on this otherwise perfect form is the henna which she paints on her toe-nails. Guiscart sees this as 'un mensonge'[39] and as such it can be seen as a symbol of the deceit which we have already seen that Ram practises in her relationship with Auligny. As we have seen, this takes the form of concealing her true feelings in the face of her submission to his sexual advances. Auligny also notices that from the moment she becomes his mistress, and not before, she begins a spree of petty stealing against him, which is therefore related to her new-found sensuality.

Similarly, in *Le Songe*, Dominique's promiscuity with the soldiers is seen to be the cause of her practising deceit.

So that the other nurses do not suspect her personal feelings, she adopts a clinical approach to her work, exaggerating 'la froideur, en public, avec ceux qu'elle préférait'.[40] She enjoys her life of duplicity, making assignations with the patients whilst all the time appearing to do her job well. This is the girl who

used to despise the 'misérables singesses ... de la vie parisienne',[41] who believed that

> ... ces dames bien parisiennes n'étaient pas des femmes mais des monstres nés d'un contact sans nom, dignes seulement d'être tués à coups de pierres ... comme une insulte à la nature,[42]

whereas

> (elle) regardait ses compagnes du stade comme le véritable sexe féminin, tel qu'il exista à l'origine.[43]

Here is that same Dominique plunged into that 'vie parisienne' and,

> ... elle y manœuvre d'instinct avec la souplesse et la ruse de ces vieux renards qui l'emerveillaient.[44]

In her former life, 'hors de la vie',[45] (that is, before she became a nurse for the war effort) she disdained connections with important people, but in her new life, 'intoxiquée pour la vie',[46] she recognises the importance and usefulness of such connections: 1) to allay suspicions, thus averting scandal and 2) if scandal arose, perhaps one of these important acquaintances could snuff it out. Thus we see a changed Dominique. Desire is being undermined, for when it takes hold of her, she is full of deceit and selfishness.

One might wonder why the author has created a character with such contradictions within her. There is a three-fold answer to this:

1) It is evidence of Montherlant's theory of 'syncrétisme et alternance'[47] (to be explored in chapter 5) which pervades all his work. We are told that Dominique's life has become an alternation between 'se relâcher et se prendre'.[48]

2) The contrast between her deceitful life of the pursuit of the satisfaction of the flesh and her former life of pride in her body and her athletic prowess, along with her cerebral, Platonic relationship with Alban, is such that her former life is seen to be morally far superior to her current one.

3) Her pursuit of desire is really a search for happiness, which eludes her. This is another recurring theme in Montherlant's works. Alban is searching for

happiness in his pursuit of camaraderie. This quest for happiness will take on a different form in *La Petite Infante de Castille* and indeed later in *Les Jeunes Filles*, where happiness is seen to equate with pleasures of the flesh.

This search for happiness is an all-consuming passion of the narrator (who is Montherlant himself) in the second part of *La Petite Infante de Castille*. Indeed, he states,

> Il n'y a qu'un but, qui est d'être heureux. Noblement ou pas noblement.[49]

Whereas in the first part the narrator eventually rejects sexual satisfaction in favour of personal freedom, in the second part he pursues a life of hedonism.

So we see that there is an ambivalence in the narrator's stance towards desire in Montherlant's works. When not being pursued, desire is forbidden, and when forbidden, it is sublimated in the participation of sport or the camaraderie of Platonic friendships.

Chapter 3 Sensuality; Desire

Notes

1. Henry de Montherlant, *La Rose de sable*, p. 232.
2. Montherlant, *Le Songe*, p. 179.
3. *Ibid.*, p. 21.
4. Montherlant, *Le Songe*, p. 206.
5. *Ibid.*, p. 205.
6. Montherlant, *Les Olympiques*, p. 284.
7. *Ibid.*, p. 288.
8. Montherlant, *La Petite Infante de Castille*, p. 621.
9. Montherlant, *La Petite Infante de Castille*, p. 612.
10. Montherlant, *Le Songe*, p. 177.
11. *Ibid.*, p. 177.
12. *Ibid.*, p. 177.
13. *Ibid.*, p. 178.
14. *Ibid.*, p. 178.
15. Montherlant, *Le Songe*, p. 178.
16. *Ibid.*, p. 180.
17. *Ibid.*, p. 180.
18. Montherlant, *Les Olympiques*, p. 288.
19. Montherlant, *Le Songe*, p. 181.
20. Montherlant, *Le Songe*, p. 180.
21. *Ibid.*, p. 181.
22. *Ibid.*, p. 183.
23. *Ibid.*, p. 183.
24. *Ibid.*, p. 183.
25. *Ibid.*, p. 184, (my italics).
26. Montherlant, *Le Songe*, p. 186.
27. *Ibid.*, p. 186.

Chapter 3 Sensuality; Desire

Notes

28. *Ibid.*, p. 186.

29. Montherlant, *Pitié pour les femmes*, p. 1146.

30. *Ibid.*, p. 1153.

31. Montherlant, *La Rose de sable*, p. 212.

32. See André Marissel, *Montherlant (Classiques du XX^e siècle)*, p. 17.

33. Montherlant, *Le Songe*, p. 181.

34. *Ibid.*, p. 281.

35. Montherlant, *Le Songe*, p. 182.

36. *Ibid.*, p. 186.

37. *Ibid.*, p. 187.

38. Montherlant, *Le Songe*, p. 187.

39. Montherlant, *La Rose de sable*, p. 190.

40. Montherlant, *Le Songe*, p. 68.

41. Montherlant, *Le Songe*, p. 41.

42. *Ibid.*, p. 41.

43. *Ibid.*, p. 41.

44. *Ibid.*, p. 69.

45. *Ibid.*, p. 73.

46. *Ibid.*, p. 66.

47. See Montherlant, 'Syncrétisme et alternance', in *Aux Fontaines du désir*, in *Essais*.

48. Montherlant, *Le Songe*, p. 73.

49. Montherlant, *La Petite Infante de Castille*, p. 648.

CHAPTER 4 MALE ATTITUDE TO WOMEN 1) Priests

> *La colère des hommes s'échappe en violence. La colère des femmes s'échappe en bêtise.*[1]

In order to explore fully the treatment of women in Montherlant's prose work it is inevitable that we should look at how men view them. To do this I shall take a selection of male characters as well as the narrator and examine their attitudes.

1) Priests

Mme de Bricoule abhors priests and this is reciprocated by them. The superior sees women as inferior beings, and Mme de Bricoule is no exception.

> ... cette femme n'était malgré tout qu'une mère parmi d'autres: un *parent*, c'est-à-dire quelque chose de *pas très important*.[2]

M. de Pradts hates all parents. M. de Halle contents himself with disdaining them. For him,

> ... le peuple des femmes restait dans une zone secondaire, inférieure, des sortes de limbes.[3]

The narrator draws an example of the inferiority of women in the eyes of priests: At the Church of Auteuil, if five or six women were waiting to confess and a man or a young scamp arrived, they would be pushed through ahead of the women. The narrator offers no comment on this, as though he were unbiased.

In the confrontation between the abbé de Pradts and Mme de Bricoule there is a physical contrast which points to the eventual outcome of the interview – He looks her straight in the eye; she evades his eyes. He is sitting upright; she is lying stretched out.

> ... déja sur le dos comme une bête renversée qui commence à finir.[4]

She is sporting rings and trinkets, whereas he is dressed all in black.

The abbé de Pradts has an interesting attitude towards Mme de Bricoule. Normally he is ill-humoured towards the mothers of his pupils.

> Cette fois, il en voulait à celle-ci de voir clair.[5]

Perhaps this is testimony to the fact that she elicits some respect from him.

Chapter 4 Male Attitude to Women 1) Priests

We are left in no doubt that his attitude towards Mme de Bricoule is not a generalisation for all priests on all women. Mme de Bricoule's nose is shining. She powders it, smoothes out two wrinkes near her nose, and then dusts off the powder that has spilt on her ruffle. M. de Pradts is full of contempt. His detestation of her is not the hatred of priests for women,

> ... elle était la haine de la sorte d'homme qu'il était, contre la Femme et contre la Mère.[6]

Because he is a priest,

> Il était conscient de la supériorité de sa propre personne sur sa personne à elle.[7]

Puffed up with his own importance as a priest, even though he is an atheist, he believes he knows more about boys than do parents:

> Les mères étaient plus puériles que les enfants qu'elles élevaient.[8]

This indictment is not against mothers alone. It encompasses father and doctors, too.

He looks at Mme de Bricoule and thinks,

> Il avait les clefs d'un royaume où cette femme n'entrerait jamais.[9]

After M. de Pradts abruptly terminates their interview, Mme de Bricoule, conscious of his disdain, is distressed. She comes to see him as he sees himself,

> ... un personnage d'une essence supérieure,[10]

The outcome of their meeting, as foreshadowed at the beginning is that

> Elle était dominée, le savait, et s'inclinait en frémissant ... Sa force était tombée comme le vent tombe.[11]

The superior's attitude to Mme de Bricoule is no less condescending than that of his priest. He maintains that mothers have a negative attitude towards their children, always preventing them from doing what they want:

> Ne cours pas! Ne touche pas au sable![12]

He demonstrates his opposition to mothers when he tells the abbé de Pradts,

> Nous devons être le contraire de ces mères. Ne pas être tout le temps sur leur dos: leur faire confiance, les respecter.[13]

Chapter 4 Male Attitude to Women 1) Priests

He muses over the 'romantisme' of the boys, which he likens to that of Lacordaire, but he does not voice this,

> ... pensant que Mme de Bricoule ne savait pas qui était Lacordaire,[14]

thus undermining her intelligence.

2) Alban

Like the priests, Alban is equally dismissive of women's knowledge. At his first bullfight in Bayonne he is dismayed to be seated between two women.

> ... ce qu'elles y connaissaient, pensait-il, devait être encore bien pire que rien.[15]

This is the first hint in *Les Bestiaires* of Alban's denigratory attitude to women.

When he first arrives in Spain and is invited to the Duke's house, he joins the guests in a meal out of doors. All the men remove their hats out of politeness to the women present. This causes Alban great discomfort because of the intense heat, and he thinks:

> Misérables femmes. Toujours à faire du mal aux hommes qui, eux, ont une valeur![16]

But his views are changeable. He is on the threshhold of falling in love and this colours his outlook. Although Alban detests the mentality which places strong and sensible men

> ... sous la suprématie de la déficience féminine,[17]

he realises that he finds the extra strength needed to master the frisky horse, Cantaor, because Soledad is watching him. He is discovering

> ... le rôle civilisateur et héroïque de la femme.[18]

When he brings down a bull he attributes his success to Soledad:

> ... il n'est plus rien d'impossible à qui a mis une femme derrière soi,[19]

but as soon as things go wrong for him, this noble view of woman disappears. He is thrown from the horse and he feels cheated by Soledad, as if she had

misled him with her powers. His attitude towards her is coloured by his success or failure – rather like, in *Les Garçons*, his mother's interest in his affair with Serge fluctuates with the success or failure of her love affair. When he has a triumph in the bullring he no longer blames Soledad for her supposed loss of powers. He realises he is responsible for his own success.

If Alban's own views of women are confused, he is further perplexed by the conflicting attitudes of other men. He remembers a remark that Moreira made to him about a famous matador:

> Toutes les fois que son amie est dans la plaza, il torée mal,[20]

and yet Bunuelo had said of the same man,

> Quand il a eu sa grande blessure, c'est son amie qui l'a soigné et sauvé. Il est hors de doute que c'est à elle qu'il doit la vie.[21]

With the shock of Soledad's outrageous demand that he should fight le Mauvais Ange, Alban's views on women become less confused and the idea of them as sex objects comes to the fore. Now that he is no longer governed by his heart, he is able to follow his instincts which are sensual. He thinks of Soledad

> ... aux creux entre ses seins, fait pour le front des hommes.[22]

His desire is sometimes linked with the brutalising of the female:

> Les sévices font leur fleur en amour.[23]

In future years Alban is to beat a mistress soundly for being insolent. He is sick of her and bored with her body, but he discovers that the act of beating her revives their lost passion. The comparison is drawn between this abuse of the female and Alban's tenderness for bulls combined with his desire to kill them:

> Ne combinait–il pas la tendresse pour les taureaux et l'extermination des taureaux? Mithra et le Soleil, n'était–ce pas de s'être d'abord battus qu'était née leur amitié merveilleuse?[24]

The analogy has the effect of debasing woman to the level of animals.

A thought occurs to Alban, that in the legend of Mithra and the Sun, Mithra had never had relations with a woman :

> Les femmes étaient exclues de la participation à ses mystères.[25]

The underlying implication here is that women are not worthy enough to participate in such mysteries.

Woman as a sex object is seen to be a bait to encourage bravery in man. Alban does not recognise that Soledad is just such an incentive. Her sexual promise is a spur for him to succeed. Ten years later, before another bullfight, Alban has a woman sleeping in the next room. His abstinence from sex heightens his desire and dispells his fears in the ring.

There is a similarity drawn between bull-fighting and love-making:

> C'est une succession de plongées et de soulèvements simultanés de l'homme et de la bête; et le couple, aussi, tantôt ralentit son rhythme et tantôt le précipite, tantôt se serre et tantôt se détend.[26]

Thus, once again, woman is equated with an animal, which is on a lower echelon than the male.

Towards the end of *Les Bestiaires*, Alban's conception of women as sex-symbols is confirmed when he looks around the arena and sees a group of tarts in the front row guzzling lobsters and champagne.

> Elles s'interrompaient pour se dessiner une fausse bouche, de faux sourcils, tout faux, afin de pouvoir plaire; puis regardaient Alban avec un petit air satisfait.[27]

The repetition of 'faux' serves to underline the shallowness of these women, and 'Il se détourna avec dégoût'[28] emphasises their worthlessness.

After the termination of his liaison with Serge and his introduction to the social round, Alban comes into contact with women again and he observes that they have an inferior place in the society in which he moves. He perceives that all women, mature, old or dying, are all kept women:

> ... la femme vivait sur le travail de l'homme, et ne dépensait pas un sou pour lui, même quand elle était en sa compagnie.[29]

There is a hint of condemnation in 'ne dépensait pas un sou pour lui.'

No woman commands the fidelity from him that Serge did. He falls in love with Sabine, but every day he sees other girls that he likes as much. He would

be quite happy to marry Sabine and

> ... en avoir une quantité d'autres pour maîtresses dans le même temps.[30]

Again this puts women into a subordinate position to the male. Alban finds

> L'amour des femmes, c'est l'amour tumultueux,[31]

whereas

> ... l'amour des garçons, c'est l'amour paisible, qui vous laisse l'esprit libre.[32]

He quotes a line of Propertius to his ex-schoolfriend, Finsbourg, which sums up his attitude to women.

> 'À mon ennemi je souhaite une femme. À mon ami un jeune garçon.'[33]

3) Costals

Costals' treatment of women elicits a certain sympathy for them from the reader. He requires women for sex rather than love and certainly not for marriage. He tells Andrée that once love enters into a relationship, 'la plaie gagne, tout se prend'.[34] Andrée, on the other hand, protests that the heart purifies everything.

Since he dismisses a union of two minds, he demands in his women physical beauty. As he tells his friend, Armand Pailhès,

> Pensez que jamais – jamais – je n'ai trouvé les deux ensemble chez une femme: intelligence et beauté.[35]

In the context of the tetralogy, Costals' point is demonstrated by Solange, who has beauty, but who is intellectually without depth.

Despite some critics' assertion that Solange is unsuccessfully drawn because she is shallow and boring, Montherlant claims in *Les Lépreuses* that in fact she is true to life:

> Si elle ennuie la lecteur, c'est donc que l'auteur l'a reproduite avec fidélité, puisqu'elle était ennuyeuse naturellement.[36]

Chapter 4 Male Attitude to Women 3) Costals

It was the author's habit to use characteristics of people he knew to formulate his characters, but by blending several together he produced personalities who were unique to his work. He confirms his methods in a letter to Mme Elisabeth Zehrfuss in which he asks her,

> 'Lisez ce brouillon (ci-joint) et causons-en. Vous dénicherez bien dans vos souvenirs quelques traits que je pourrais prêter à cette puce de mer, si différente que vous soyez d'elle.'[37]

Montherlant's reference to 'puce de mer' stems from Mme Zehrfuss calling herself this in a letter to him on 23rd August, 1934. It was a nick-name he adopted for her and later used for Solange in *Les Lépreuses*.[38]

Costals' attitude to women is determined by his resolution to preserve his intellectual and spiritual freedom. To achieve this he finds it necessary to compartmentalise his life, not allowing his love-life to encroach on his mental and spiritual privacy. To this end, the women in the tetralogy of *Les Jeunes Filles* are all seen in a particular context. They each have a role to play which is defined by the intentions of the author. Thus they serve to elucidate Costals' psyche and in this way they typify many of Montherlant's women in his prose work.

Costals treats Solange differently from Andrée and Thérèse because 1) she does not fall in love with him straight away, therefore, in the beginning, he does not feel his freedom is threatened, 2) she does not talk incessantly about love and all its convolutions as does Andrée, and 3) she is from a bourgeois background and so, socially, he treats her accordingly. He takes her to expensive restaurants, whereas he meets Andrée in drab back streets which mirror her boring, provincial background.

Costals is kind to Solange at first because he desires something of her – a sexual relationship, whereas he displays cruelty towards Andrée which is in part provoked by her letters which are continually demanding his love. For all he

rejects this unsolicited love, he does need her admiration as it is a necessary crutch to his ego. Without the Andrées of his world he would be nothing. Their esteem is a yardstick by which he measures his success.

Andrée's sentimentality revolts Costals. Her attempts to involve herself in his literature, far from earning her his respect, simply make him value her less.

His sadism towards her is coldly planned and is evident both in his letters to her and his treatment of her when he meets her. He deliberately writes to her with descriptions of his favourite types of women, none of whom are like her. With equal cruelty, in another letter, he details the type of woman he dislikes, all of which categories Andrée falls into. He tells her that when she sends him presents,

> Chère Mademoiselle, je ne vous retournerai plus vos petits cadeaux. Chacun d'eux automatiquement, je le donnerai à une de mes maîtresses.[39]

When he shows Andrée round an apartment he is interested in renting, he deliberately torments her when he calls one of the bedrooms 'le tombeau de la femme inconnue'[40] – with a pun on the word 'tombeau' to infer the place where women will fall in two senses:

> La pièce où les femmes tombent. Et la pièce où tombent leurs illusions.[41]

He continually raises her up to seventh heaven, only to plunge her back into an abyss.

Yet his sadism is tempered with kindness. He typifies Montherlant's idea of man's 'alternance'. Costals calls himself in a letter to Thérèse, '*celui–qui–prend–toutes–les formes.*'[42] This may, in part, explain his reason for helping Andrée to obtain a job in Paris, even though he realises she will never be off his back. The narrator deems this a 'crise d'altruisme'[43], but it is also linked with his craving for admiration. He needs her to feed his egoism. Also, he advises her that, in finding a position in Paris, she will have more opportunity to

marry – a state he recommends to her, no doubt as an insurance against her continued pursuit of him.

Costals' attitude to Thérèse is one of sympathy and understanding, despite the assertion of her cousin, Mme Blancmesnil that his correspondence with Thérèse is motivated 'par fatuité, par sadisme'.[44] He often uses Andrée as a source of amusing himself, but never Thérèse. He tries to promote in her self–esteem by writing her encouraging letters. Where he despises Andrée for her self–delusion, he holds for Thérèse 'compréhension et respect'.[45] This is because he feels an affinity with her that he never experiences with Andrée or Solange, and it is for several reasons: 1) She was outside society – Costals could relate to this as it was a state he preferred. 2) Contrary to other people's belief that she was a lunatic even before her hysterical crisis, Costals believes her to be 'en rapports avec les hautes régions de l'âme'.[46] 3) Like him, she was a prisoner of others' lack of understanding. Whereas Andrée was free to direct her life, but did not exploit it to the full, for which she earned Costals' scorn, he believed that Thérèse possessed an inner freedom of spirit which he admired, but she was imprisoned by her family – first by their inability to understand her intellectuality, her cousin terming it 'un bestial orgueil',[47] and secondly by their determination to bring her back to the intellectually stifling atmosphere of her home every time she tried to escape to see Costals.

In the end, Thérèse is incarcerated in a lunatic asylum. Although this is the tragic outcome of Costals' encouragement for her to pursue a life of religion, it was not his intended purpose. Always, his intentions towards Thérèse are motivated by a belief in the interior freedom of the individual which he believes, for her, can only be attained by leaving the world and all it entails – that is, giving up those things which he thinks most women want – human love and marriage. Whereas he discouraged Andrée's attempts at friendship, he fostered the

communication with Thérèse because, through his letters, he was able to control and direct her life. He did this to such a degree that she became dependent on him for life itself:

> Prenez-moi sur vos genoux, afin que je ne meure pas.[48]

This is tantamount to identifying Costals with God. Despite his assertion to her, 'Vous déshonorez Dieu en le mêlant à moi',[49] he does play God with her life, directing her along a route which *he* believes is right for her.

In his determination to discourage Andrée's love, Costals keeps her at a distance, both physically (except for their rendez-vous in Paris, and the humiliating scene in the apartment, witnessed by Solange) and by the long intervals between his replies to her prolific correspondence. There is a parallel to be drawn here with his flights from Solange which become more necessary to him the more he feels trapped by her.

As with Thérèse, Costals has no fears for his freedom – intellectual or spiritual, with Rhadidja. She fulfills his ideal by not loving him despite their physical relationship, thus leaving 'son cœur, son esprit et son temps libres'.[50] She has her parallel in Ram, nicknamed by Auligny his 'rose de sable'. Costals feels it is as though

> ... il avait ramassé une pierre sur le sol, l'avait dorlotée, fleurie, recouverte quand il faisait froid, mise dans un courant d'air quand il faisait chaud, lavée, enduite de parfums.[51]

The resemblance does not stop there. Rhadidja is passive and apathetic, just like Ram. Despite her lack of tenderness and almost inhumanness Rhadidja gives Costals a sense of security. She also serves an important function in the tetralogy. She is the vehicle through which Costals can express his desire to be apart from the world. The leprosy which threatens him is a metaphor for this separateness which he feels within him. His desire to contract her leprosy portrays his wish to keep himself apart from others. He believes that it is only by being apart that his spiritual and creative powers have a chance of developing fully.

It is this obsession with his inner self that finally leads to his separation from Solange. She is a threat to his internal security so he has to leave her. In his eyes, once she threatens him with the constraints of marriage, '*Solange se métamorphosait en Andrée Hacquebaut*'[52]. Costals defines for us Solange's purpose in the tetralogy:

> Elle n'a été qu'un prétexte pour moi à développer mon angoisse devant le mariage.[53]

Despite the main title of the tetralogy, Costals is the central figure, but it may be argued that the women are more important, since, because of them, Costals' character is more clearly defined. The women serve as a sounding-board for many of his ideas, allowing him to project his theories and philosophies (and at the same time we see a glimpse of the author behind them). His treatment of women can be seen to be a direct result of his deliberate choice of a certain way of life and his rejection of most of the women is a metaphor for the rejection of life itself.

4. Auligny and Guiscart

Although Costals has more in common with Guiscart in his Don Juan approach to women, yet there are many similarities between Costals and Auligny, too. All their analogous views can be seen in their attitude to Arab women.

The leprosy that Costals was desirous of contracting is a condition which Auligny, in *La Rose de sable*, wishes he could catch from Ram, if she were leprous. Whereas Costals wanted the disease as an assertion of his separateness from society, Auligny wants it to test his love for Ram.

Just as Costals senses in Rhadidja the child within and consequently loves her as a father as well as a lover, so Auligny has the same sentiment for Ram. He realises that he is just like the Arabs for whom 'l'enfance est ... un troisième sexe' and who 'n'aiment la femme que tant qu'ils sentent en elle l'enfance'.[54]

Ram gives him the same sense of *'sécurité'*[55] that is epitomised by Rhadidja for Costals – her 'calme et sécurité'.[56]

Like Costals, Auligny finds that European women are very demanding of time and attention, whereas with Arab women 'tout était aérien et facile'.[57] Guiscart, on the other hand, believes that all lovers are interchangeable and he does not make any distinction between race when he declares that

> ... l'idéal de l'amour n'est pas l'amour partagé, mais d'aimer sans qu'on vous le rende.[58]

This is identical to Costals' sentiments. Like Costals, Guiscart maintains that it is essential that women

> ... nous laisse notre liberté d'esprit et notre liberté de mouvement, bref, qui nous fiche la paix.[59]

In contrast, Auligny is not bound up with this pursuit of 'maîtrise de soi'.

Auligny exhibits an esteem for Ram which contrasts greatly with his sordid adventure with the young Bedouin whore in the desert. Despite the fact that he is paying for Ram's sexual services, he respects her virginity, contenting himself with caresses until she shows she is ready for a deeper sexual involvement. Guiscart, too, honours Ram's virginal state, although his abstention from seducing her is misinterpreted by Auligny as a slur on Ram's beauty and sexuality. Whereas, in fact, he had abstained partly out of deference to Auligny's feeling, should Auligny later fall in love with Ram, and partly, because having wanted her, desire fled when she was so easily available, just like

> Le chien qui pleurait après sa pâtée, mais n'en a plus envie quand on la lui donne.[60]

The belief that Guiscart disdains Ram promotes in Auligny a feeling of great tenderness for her, which leads to him identifying with her,

> ... tous deux à l'écart, rejetés par la société dans leur bled aride.[61]

Whereas Costals deliberately strives to remain outside society, Auligny simply accepts that he is different from many of his fellow–men. It is his feelings for Ram that show him just how far his army life is at variance with his inner

sympathy for the Arab position. His love for her in part causes his feelings for the indigenous population to be made known to himself. This is further evidence of the female in the Montherlantian novel being positioned in a masculine world in order to allow the hero's psyche to be elucidated. Auligny tells himself, 'Seul de mon espèce, j'y suis venu pour *l'âme*'.[62]

Although at the beginning of *La Rose de sable* it is Guiscart who expresses his anti-colonial feelings, and Auligny comes to Morocco indoctrinated by his upbringing with colonialist views, once he sees evidence of the ill-treatment of the native population, Auligny's pro-Arab sentiments are awakened. There is the off-hand treatment by his predecessor of the caïd and the command from his colonel that he should recruit one hundred locals for a ridiculously low salary, coupled with the fact that he should engage them under false pretences in order to obtain the number required. The final straw for Auligny is the proposed military clash against some Arabs in a particularly rebellious area. All his compassion for the indigenous population which has been moving in him since his arrival at Birbatine, has increased since the blossoming of his love for Ram. Just as he prefers Arab women to European females, he has now come to favour the Arabs over his compatriots:

> Maintenant il voit avec ses yeux à lui, et il oblique, prend une autre direction.[63]

However, as the novel progresses, we see a shifting of Auligny's position. As the heat and poor food take their toll on his body and his health deteriorates, so, in direct proportion, he becomes less enchanted with Ram. This is a mirror-image of the changing of his attitude towards the indigenous population. The lassitude which pervades his body causes him to become indifferent towards them. His conscience demands that he should compensate Ram for loving her less than before, so he offers to take her with him when he leaves for another part of Morocco. His failure to persuade her to accompany him is a parallel of his

failure with the Arabs. He had decided he could not take up arms against them because of his moral scruples. The irony is that they in fact kill him in the end, thus bringing about, in a macabre way, the destiny which Auligny felt was his:

> Auligny était venu en Afrique pour se donner, tandis que Guiscart n'y venait que pour prendre.[64]

Although he had not thought then that what he would give would be the ultimate – life itself.

Guiscart is the antithesis of Auligny and this is demonstrated in his attitude towards women. Whereas falling in love with Ram has a direct effect on Auligny's life, Guiscart, like Costals, keeps his love–life totally separate from other areas of his life. He has several mistresses and currently he has four of them installed with their offspring in various houses. Their individuality, feelings and lives are so unimportant to him that he leaves them to name the children without consultation with him,

> ... comme on s'en remet de ce soin à la cuisinière en ce qui concerne les petits chats ...[65]

This poses a view on women which is decidely chauvinistic. He is a man who has consecrated his life to 'la chasse aux dames'[66] and he subscribes to 'le *principe* de la multiplicité des femmes'.[67] His opinion of women as individuals with minds of their own is very low. He believes 'qu'il n'y avait rien à y comprendre',[68] and he likes 'l'absence de son âme'.[69]

There is an indisputable denigration of women in the fact that he keeps a list (his 'Tableau de Chasse') of women he has seduced, with a table of marks out of twenty for performance!

Auligny has beliefs which, although they alter as he falls in love with Ram, nonetheless whichever principles he has at the time, he adheres to and stands up for them. Guiscart, on the other hand, although he has strong anti– colonialist feelings, suppresses these for expediency. In the end, his opportunism saves his

life, whereas Auligny loses his. Guiscart has no inner conflict. He sees clearly what he wants out of life and lets nothing get in the way of his 'chasse aux dames'. Auligny, however, can not suppress his profound feelings of pity and empathy for the Arab race. This conflicts with everything he has been taught to believe in a family environment which has a strong military tradition. This inner conflict – inspired and awakened in him by his attachment to Ram – is a favourite theme of Montherlant's which he explores further in his theatre.

5. Narrator

The narrator's views on women are sometimes tempered by the excuses he makes for them – when Soledad and her mother arrive late for the bullfight in *Les Bestiaires*, we are told it is 'parce que femmes' but also 'parce qu'en auto'.[70]

Like the priests and Alban, it would appear that the narrator believes women to be unintelligent. We are told that Mme de Bricoule pretends to know the meaning of popular schoolboy words such as 'lapin' and 'faisan'. She

> ... voulait avoir l'air très au courant, comme sont les femmes quand elles cherchent à se faire prendre au sérieux par les hommes.[71]

She tries to bluff, but Alban catches her out.

> Une fois de plus, Maman–je–sais–tout ne savait rien,[72]

underlines the narrator's earlier opinion.

He believes that a mother is not capable of successfully raising a boy on her own. Bonbon, who is very popular with the older boys, has been raised by his mother alone,

> ... avec toute la corruption précoce et la facilité veule des garçons élevés par une femme seule, plein et comme pétillant de cette corruption alerte et mutine ... il était froid de cœur et de chair.[73]

Alban's reflections on his mother's influence on his life lead him to the conclusion that she has had a bad impact. We have seen that she has put ideas into his head which were never there, such as committing a homosexual act. It

was she who began the series of break-ins. It is she who displayed intense hatred for priests. The narrator endorses Alban's opinion:

> C'était une terrible chose que cette mère, avec tout son amour maternel, toute son honnêteté, toute sa vivacité d'esprit, toute son "éducation", n'entrât presque jamais dans la vie de son fils que pour la fausser, ou pour l'abaisser ou pour la mettre en désarroi.[74]

He questions her culpability, nevertheless he is still disparaging when he asks, in an ironic tone,

> Mais quoi! était-ce sa faute, ou était-ce seulement que les adultes, quoi qu'ils fassent, ne font jamais que gâcher l'adolescence et l'enfance?[75]

After his mother tells Alban not to see too much of Sabine, he spaces out his meetings with her, but maintains contact, thus disregarding her advice, just as he had when she encouraged him to disobey the priest and renew his relationship with Serge. Thus:

> Avec Serge et l'abbé de Pradts, l'ordre mâle triomphait des deux côtés.[76]

The narrator is not necessarily condoning the concept at this point. In fact he goes on to say,

> Restait que l'attitude d'Alban était atroce: il était dit qu'il y aurait toujours quelque chose d'atroce entre lui et sa mère, tantôt de lui à elle, tantôt d'elle à lui. Il y avait eu aussi quelque chose d'atroce de l'abbé de Pradts à Alban. Mais il n'y avait jamais rien eu d'atroce de Serge à Alban, ni d'Alban à Serge.[77]

Alban's faithfulness to 'l'ordre mâle' is a reflection of the author's own belief. Indeed, Montherlant's early works very much mirror his youthful ideals. Consequently, narrative voice and authorial voice are sometimes merged. For example, in *Les Olympiques*, the narrator refers back to the intrigue between Dominique and Alban in *Le Songe*[78], and in *La Petite Infante de Castille* the narrator muses on the different ideas of the perfect woman he has, compared with the author of *Les Olympiques*[79]. We can therefore assume that, with such knowledge, narrator and author are one and the same at these points.

The narrative voice is at times used as an explanation, and at others as confirmation of the female point of view:– Dominique's passion to kiss Bouchard, she sees not so much as a pleasure in accomplishment, but more 'une sorte de devoir'.[80] In her eyes, her actions are not motivated by desire, but by

> ...l'idée de ne rien laisser perdre et de n'avoir rien à regretter.[81]

The narrator comments on this and confirms her aims:

> Exactement, il y avait obsession, non tentation.[82]

There is often an indulgent tone to the narrative voice, such as when he explains that Dominique's decision to visit Alban at the Front completely hangs on

> ...le hasard (qui) la poussa à une démarche qu'elle n'eût jamais envisagée sans lui.[83]

This has an important bearing on the responsibility which should or should not be laid at Dominique's door for her confrontation with Alban. There is the underlying suggestion that the narrator's sympathies lie with Dominique.

Again, there is the idea that the narrator's compassion is for Dominique, together with an implicit criticism of Alban, when he intervenes, addressing the hero with,

> Ecoute–la, perfide garçon, écoute–la de toutes tes oreilles! Elle supplie... Va, tu n'as plus de mal maintenant à la secouer.[84]

Similarly, in *Les Jeunes Filles*, although the narrator's views often coincide with those of Costals, there are times when they differ. The key to Costal's attitude to women can be summed up quite simply:

> Costals les aimait, et n'avait jamais cherché à les comprendre, ne s'était même jamais demandé s'il y avait en elles quelque chose à comprendre.[85]

Costals' stance is unequivocal, but the narrator's attitude is sometimes more sympathetic towards women. He asks,

> Qui a dit, cruellement (Vauvenargues ou Chamfort?), qu'il faut choisir, d'aimer les femmes ou de les comprendre?[86]

The very choice of the word 'cruellement' suggests a certain compassion towards them.

Similarly, there is an element of pity implicit in the narrator's metaphor for the women advertising in the matrimonial gazette, whom he sees as prey to the archers (the men), whom he calls

> Les tarés, les brutaux et les mufles, les escrocs et les maîtres chanteurs...[87]

He sees women as victims, 'à demi innocentes et désarmées'[88]. Nevertheless he calls these same women 'malfaisantes'[89]. This paradox is explained by the author's belief in syncretic man, whereby there is a reconciliation of incompatible principles or beliefs embodied in one person.

The commiseration the narrator expresses towards some women is totally lacking in his attitude towards others, notably Mme Peyrony, in *Les Olympiques*, where his description of her chaotic household is a metaphor for her disorderly personality. With his emphasis on,

> Rien n'est comme cela devrait être... tout est faux.[90]

and his assertion that,

> Cette cellule sociale ou tout est à rebours est un défi aux lois de la vie,[91]

we are left in no doubt of his opinion of her as a representative of all that he despises. She symbolises the chaos which her son seeks to escape in his sport with its environment of discipline and order. In his judgement of the chaos of the Peyrony household the narrator is reflecting the author's own view that we live in a chaotic world in which we must create our own order through exercise and other disciplines. Self-discipline is seen to be indicative of cleanliness of both body and mind, whereas the disorder of Mme Peyrony is equated with unhealthiness and dirt. The narrator states his position when Mme Peyrony sees something distasteful in the exposure of the athlete's bare arms:

> Une telle inquiétude, qui n'effleurerait pas une personne normale, est l'indice qu'il y a dans cette âme, en apparence si claire, un petit recoin où l'on dorlotte l'immonde.[92]

It would be easy to take this out of context and deduce that the narrator's

scorn is directed at Mme Peyrony as a woman, if it were not for the fact that he shows equal contempt for her husband, whom he describes as 'mort dans la vie'.[93] He endorses Jacques' hatred for his feeble father, who 'une fois tiré de ses bureaux, est une femme':[94]

> Et quand Jacques, tremblant de jeune force, voit son père courber le dos devant un rien (mettons Madame) et qu'il a pour lui une bouffée de haine, je ne trouve pas en moi de quoi le blâmer.[95]

So, we have a narrator who demonstrates that his sympathies are not consistently with one sex or the other.

In the tetralogy of *Les Jeunes Filles* the women are seen as creatures who are constantly searching for happiness. Whereas for men, 'A leurs yeux, le bonheur est un état négatif,[96] he believes that 'La femme, au contraire, se fait une idée positive du bonheur.[97]

He speaks of a book, written by a woman, about happiness, and the cynicism in his remark,

> ...jamais un homme n'aurait l'idée que le bonheur puisse être découpé en tranches nettes comme un gâteau,[98]

betrays his feelings of derision.

He ridicules the narrow confines of women's ambitions, and by implication there is a devaluing of women's ideals, when he asserts,

> Une femme heureux et aimée (et qui aime) ne demande rien de plus. Un homme qui aime et qui est aimé a encore besoin d'autre chose.[99]

Women, according to the narrator, marry because it is their only means of achieving happiness, whereas, in contrast, he says men marry simply because everyone else does. He blames many of the world's ills on this union:

> Ce n'est pas l'union libre qui semble maudite, c'est le couple, sous quelque forme qu'il prenne, et dans le mariage peut-être plus encore qu'autrement.[100]

Since he believes it is women who pursue this status, it is implicit in his statement that they are also to blame for the

> Drames de la jalousie, drames de l'adultère, drames du divorce, drames de l'avortement, crimes passionnels.[101]

Thus the women are seen as accomplices in their own fate. Yet there is a paradox in that he sees them as victims, too. Although he rails against the marriage state itself and holds women responsible for it, he can see that women's lot in life is limited – let us remember that he is writing in the thirties.

> Le seul destin acceptable pour une femme est le mariage heureux. Donc elle dépend de l'homme...[102]

This is not an indictment against women. He is stating a fact of life and it underlines the position of women, not just in Montherlant's world, but in the times during which he was writing.

The narrator often adopts a mocking tone towards women, such as when he equates Mme Auligny's display of remembrance cards with those invitations to balls exhibited by ladies of society.

His ridicule is tempered with humour towards Mme Dandillot, when he addresses the reader directly, advising him,

> Non, non, cher public! rassurez–vous vite: Mme Dandillot ne va pas devenir amoureuse de Costals,[103]

remarking that she is simply so pleased to be entertaining a famous young man in her drawing room, where normally she only sees her husband and son, both of whom despise her.

There is often an irony in the narrative tone in Montherlant's prose work, which typifies the relationship of the narrator towards Mme Auligny. After she 'fit des pieds et des mains, tricota comme écureuil en cage',[104] and, finally, after six months of this plotting and manipulating, she achieves her goal of a posting for Lucien, the narrator observes,

> Cela faisait d'assez sérieuses difficultés, mais la bonne mère les vainquit toutes.[105]

There are other times when such sarcasm is completely absent from the narrative tone. In fact the narrator sometimes pays tribute to women in a way which upholds female integrity. Such is the episode between Mlle de Plémeur and

the narrator, when, in timing her over the 300 metres, he realises she has failed to beat the record. He toys with the idea of pretending that she had succeeded but rejects this in favour of the truth. Contrary to Krémer's assertions that in abandoning her running she 'perd ainsi l'amitié du narrateur',[106] he does in fact prove his esteem of her by his actions:

> ...par mon double refus de la leurrer et de la plaindre, je lui eusse prouvé que je ne la méprisais pas.[107]

One can see that Montherlant has created in his narrator a person of differing viewpoints which, although diverse, are nevertheless compatible with the author's theory of 'syncrétisme et alternance'.

The narrative voice often digresses from the main tale to philosophise and this is when the authorial voice is loudest. Montherlant adored Spain and, in *La Petite Infante de Castille*, he breaks off from his narrative to philosophise on the women of Spain compared to French women. The latter have been affected by the war to the extent that they adopt masculine hairstyles and, with the fashion for slim hips, look quite boyish, whereas,

> ...l'Espagne reste fidèle à l'idéal du XIX^{e} siècle ... le culte de la femme ... dans ce qu'elle a de plus féminin ...[108]

Although I have shown that the narrative voice is sometimes seen to reflect an authorial viewpoint, readers must be careful not to confuse the characteristics and attitudes projected by any one character with those of the author. Costals, in *Les Jeunes Filles*, is no nearer Montherlant's true self than, say, Lieutenant Lucien Auligny of *La Rose de sable*, a man who, Montherlant himself points out, is

> ...doué des plus hautes qualités morales: patriotisme, charité, horreur de la violence, passion de la justice...[109]

Montherlant was only too well aware that his reading public delighted in quoting from his novels and ascribing the hero's words to the author. This mistake by the readers can be equated with Andrée Hacquebaut's similar error in confusing author, in this case Costals, with narrator. She does this by setting

about disproving Costals' words to her (e.g. he said he was only able to love girls under twenty-two years old who were tall and slim) by quoting from his novels to the contrary. She cites Maurice in *Fragilité*, who tells Christine:

> Vous n'avez plus vos yeux de jeune fille. Des yeux de femme. Maintenant il y a quelque chose derrière.[110]

The narrator's response is to show us that he finds her opinions so boring and insignificant that

> On a supprimé ici de nombreuses citations de l'oeuvre de Costals, toutes dans le même sens: le mettre en contradiction avec lui-même.[111]

Because most of the women in Montherlant's prose work are only seen through the eyes of men, it is inevitable that the male viewpoint colours the portrayals and produces one-sided portraits (Andrée Hacquebaut is the exception to this since she is revealed through her own letters). The narrator tries to take a neutral stand much of the time but he can not resist stating his opinion, and it as often comes down on the side of women as of men.

Chapter 4 Male Attitude to Women

Notes

1. Henry de Montherlant, *Pitié pour les femmes*, p. 1190.
2. Montherlant, *Les Garçons*, p. 707.
3. *Ibid.*, p. 708.
4. *Ibid.*, p. 714.
5. *Ibid.*, p. 715.
6. Montherlant, *Les Garçons*, p. 717.
7. *Ibid.*, p. 717.
8. *Ibid.*, p. 718.
9. *Ibid.*, p. 718.
10. *Ibid.*, p. 719.
11. *Ibid.*, p. 719.
12. *Ibid.*, p. 465.
13. *Ibid.*, p. 465.
14. Montherlant, *Les Garçons*, p. 636.
15. Montherlant, *Les Bestiaires*, p. 386.
16. *Ibid.*, p. 411.
17. *Ibid.*, p. 417.
18. *Ibid.*, p. 417.
19. *Ibid.*, p. 421.
20. Montherlant, *Les Bestiaires*, p. 451.
21. *Ibid.*, p. 451.
22. *Ibid.*, p. 507.
23. *Ibid.*, p. 508.
24. *Ibid.*, p. 508.
25. *Ibid.*, p. 508.
26. Montherlant, *Les Bestiaires*, p. 559.
27. *Ibid.*, p. 547.
28. *Ibid.*, p. 547.

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29. Montherlant, *Les Garçons*, p. 763.

30. Montherlant, *Les Garçons*, p. 770.

31. *Ibid.*, p. 797.

32. *Ibid.*, p. 797.

33. *Ibid.*, p. 797.

34. Montherlant, *Les Jeunes Filles*, p. 969.

35. *Ibid.*, p. 1022.

36. Montherlant, *Les Lépreuses*, p. 1375.

37. Montherlant, letter to Elisabeth Zehrfuss, undated, written between 27 June 1936 and 6 July 1936.

38. Montherlant, *Les Lépreuses*, p. 1465.

39. Montherlant, *Les Jeunes Filles*, p. 953.

40. *Ibid.*, p. 965.

41. *Ibid.*, p. 966.

42. *Ibid.*, p. 949.

43. *Ibid.*, p. 955.

44. Montherlant, *Pitié pour les femmes*, p. 1199.

45. *Ibid.*, p. 1200.

46 *Ibid.*, p. 1200.

47. *Ibid.*, p. 1198.

48. Montherlant, *Les Jeunes Filles*, p. 1046.

49. *Ibid.*, p. 946.

50. Montherlant, *Les Lépreuses*, p. 1438.

51. *Ibid.*, p. 1438.

52. Montherlant, *Les Lépreuses*, p. 1517.

53. *Ibid.*, p. 1518.

54. Montherlant, *La Rose de sable*, p. 257.

55. Montherlant, *La Rose de sable*, p. 105.

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56. Montherlant, *Les Lépreuses*, p. 1437.

57. Montherlant, *La Rose de sable*, p. 248.

58. *Ibid.*, p. 121.

59. *Ibid.*, p. 121.

60 *Ibid.*, p. 198, note 5.

61. *Ibid.*, p. 222.

62. Montherlant, *La Rose de sable*, p. 230.

63. *Ibid.*, p. 228.

64. Montherlant, *La Rose de sable*, p. 25.

65. *Ibid.*, p. 152.

66. *Ibid.*, p. 132.

67. *Ibid.*, p. 133.

68. *Ibid.*, p. 135.

69. *Ibid.*, p. 171.

70. Montherlant, *Les Bestiaires*, p. 403.

71. Montherlant, *Les Garçons*, p. 662.

72. *Ibid.*, p. 662.

73. *Ibid.*, p. 518.

74. Montherlant, *Les Garçons*, p. 712.

75. *Ibid.*, p. 712.

76. *Ibid.*, p. 771.

77. *Ibid.*, p. 771.

78. See Montherlant, *Les Olympiques*, p. 280.

79. See Montherlant, *La Petite Infante de Castille*, p. 605.

80. Montherlant, *Le Songe*, p. 74.

81. *Ibid.*, p. 74.

82. *Ibid.*, p. 74.

83. *Ibid.*, p. 74.

Chapter 4 Male Attitude to Women

Notes

84. *Ibid.*, p. 213.

85. Montherlant, *Les Jeunes Filles*, p. 992.

86. *Ibid.*, p. 992.

87. Montherlant, *Les Jeunes Filles*, p. 927.

88. *Ibid.*, p. 927.

89. *Ibid.*, p. 927.

90. Montherlant, *Les Olympiques*, p. 244.

91. *Ibid.*, p. 244.

92. *Ibid.*, p. 246.

93. Montherlant, *Les Olympiques*, p. 243.

94. *Ibid.*, p. 245.

95. *Ibid.*, p. 245, my underlines.

96. Montherlant, *Les Jeunes Filles*, p. 1003.

97. *Ibid.*, p. 1005.

98. *Ibid.*, p. 1006.

99. *Ibid.*, p. 1009.

100. *Ibid.*, p. 1011.

101. *Ibid.*, p. 1011.

102. Montherlant, *Les Jeunes Filles*, p. 1006.

103. Montherlant, *Le Démon du bien*, p. 1264.

104. Montherlant, *La Rose de sable*, p. 45.

105. *Ibid.*, p. 45.

106. Jean-Pierre Krémer, *Le Désir dans l'oeuvre de Montherlant*, p. 33.

107. Montherlant, *Les Olympiques*, p. 288.

108. Montherlant, *La Petite Infante de Castille,* p. 604.

109. Montherlant, *Les Jeunes Filles*, p. 917.

110. Montherlant, *Les Jeunes Filles*, p. 1025.

111. *Ibid.*, Footnote to p. 1025.

CHAPTER 5. 'SYNCRETISME ET ALTERNANCE'

> *Etre à la fois, ou plutôt faire alterner en soi, la Bête et l'Ange, la vie corporelle et charnelle et la vie intellectuelle et morale, que l'homme le veuille ou non, la nature l'y forcera, qui est toute alternances, qui est toute contractions et détentes.*[1]

At the heart of Montherlant's writing is his belief that man is made up of many alternating facets, which, though opposing, are all equally valid. In his essay *Aux Fontaines du désir*, he wrote a section headed 'Syncrétisme et alternance', which expounds his theory that man is both syncretic and alternating – that is, there exist within him, at one and the same time, emotions, characteristics and beliefs which, although at odds, are logical because they emanate from a 'rythme essentiel'[2] inherent in man. These multi-faceted characteristics, although seemingly incompatible with each other, are manifested in his characters in successively interchanging moral attitudes and this is central to Montherlant's philosophy.

Within the framework of his prose Montherlant sometimes draws one character in counterbalance with another, such as Dominique with Douce and the two combine in their antithesis, to make up syncretic man. Other characters, such as Costals, embody 'syncrétisme et alternance' within that one person.

The contrasting qualities of 'Fine et forte', 'Douce et dure'[3] within one female are extolled in the poem, *A Une Jeune Fille victorieuse dans la course de mille mètres*. There is the admiration of the muscular strength of the female athletes as well as the appreciation of the contrasting traits of the dancers, with their weak backs and soft muscles:

> ...un type de féminínité qui, lui aussi, avec toutes ses défaillances, peut atteindre dans son genre à une perfection.[4]

Platonic relationships are advocated in *Le Songe*, whereas the pursuit of desire is of paramount importance in the second half of *La Petite Infante de Castille*.

Female values are undermined as many times as they are upheld.

Chapter 5 'Syncrétisme et alternance'

'L'ordre mâle' pursued by Alban is in direct contrast to 'le désordre' perpetrated by Mme Peyrony.

All these opposing factors are evidence of Montherlant's philosophy of 'syncrétisme et alternance'. He believes that

> ...tout est à la fois vérité et erreur, respectable et risible. Et notre affaire est de voir tout ce qui est, c'est à dire le respectable et le risible sans sacrifier l'un à l'autre et, si nous écrivons, de les montrer tour à tour.[5]

Sometimes these opposing traits are personified by different characters, as we have seen in Mme Peyrony in contrast to the young athletes. Just as she embodies characteristics and moral attitudes which are completely at odds with those of the athletes, so, in his portrayal of Auligny and Guiscart, Montherlant presents us with two characters who oppose each other in every way. Guiscart, the artist, flouts success in order to devote himself to the pursuit of pleasure, which for him means a continuous succession of lovers. His 'raison de vivre est la possession amoureuse'.[6] He is a forerunner of Don Juan in Montherlant's play of that name, each of whom

> ... risquant son état, son honneur et quelquefois sa vie pour obtenir des dames, il les abandonnait aussitôt obtenues.[7]

He is without moral scruples, a fact which saves his life in the end, whereas Auligny, faithful to his principles, loses his life ignominiously.

Costals is the perfect example of the embodiment of Montherlant's theory of 'syncrétisme et alternance'. At the same time as despising Andrée for her self-delusion with regard to his feelings towards her, he declares to his friend, Armand Pailhès

> ...j'ai pour elle de la sympathie, de l'estime, et une certain admiration.[8]

When he learns of Solange's name he is delighted at the connotations it suggests and he acknowledges the opposition within himself:

> *Sol* et *ange*, les deux extrémités! Moi qui touche toujours aux deux à la fois![9]

Chapter 5 'Syncrétisme et alternance'

He has streaks of cruelty and sadism in his nature (witness his humiliation of Andrée in his apartment) which are contrasted with kindness manifested in his wish not to hurt Solange, despite his determination to be free of her. He is a man of opposing traits:

> Des ondes alternées d'honnêteté et de rouerie, de gravité et de rigolade passaient sur son visage, sans arrêt.[10]

Mme Dandillot finds his changes of mind, with regard to marrying Solange, very confusing, but he justifies these by asserting that,

> Cette attitude était rigoureusement solide. Mais d'autres attitudes, à l'égard de ce même objet, sont rigoureusement solides.[11]

Dominique, too, is the personification of Montherlant's philosophy of 'syncrétisme et alternance'. When she first becomes a nurse she maintains a complete detachment towards the injured soldiers. This alienation is a necessary link between her former chaste life of exercise, order and discipline and her current chaotic life of promiscuous behaviour.

She has the taste for submission as well as domination.

She vacillates about going to see Alban at the Front. One minute she resolves not to go, the next she determines she will:

> Soit, elle était incohérente, puisque l'objet et son contraire l'accueillaient tour à tour.[12]

In her contradictions, Dominique is the manifestation of Montherlant's own belief in

> ...la vieille doctrine de l'union des contraires, formulée par Héraclite, par Hippocrate...par tous les Pères de la pensée grecque.[13]

Chapter 5 'Syncrétisme et Alternance'

Notes

1. Henry de Montherlant, 'Syncrétisme et alternance', in *Aux Fontaines du désir*, in *Essais*, p. 240.

2. *Ibid.*, p. 240.

3. Montherlant, *Les Olympiques*, p. 347.

4. Montherlant, *La Petite Infante de Castille*, p. 605.

5. Montherlant, *La Petite Infante de Castille*, p. 623.

6. Montherlant, *La Rose de sable*, p. 16.

7. *Ibid.*, p. 137.

8. Montherlant, *Les Jeunes Filles*, p. 1013.

9. *Ibid.*, p. 1023.

10. Montherlant, *Les Jeunes Filles*, p. 981.

11. Montherlant, *Les Lépreuses*, p. 1388.

12. Montherlant, *Le Songe*, p. 71.

13. Montherlant, *Les Olympiques*, p. 308.

CONCLUSION TO PART I

There are certain conclusions which can be reached about the treatment of women in Montherlant's prose work. It can be seen that the novels are not so much *about* women, as a statement of women *in a man's world.* The woman's role is seen purely in relation to the male and she is there so that the hero can confirm his own ideas and ideals.

Women are constantly rejected by men in Montherlant's prose work – by husbands, by sons and by lovers. This serves to keep them outside the male order. The few who are allowed to be partakers of the masculine world of male order all conform to a type. They are athletic and do not indulge in sensual relationships. If they step outside this definition then they are no longer participators of the male order and they are relegated to an inferior position in the masculine world. Montherlant's heroes are treated differently. They can be part of this much revered 'ordre mâle' *and* pursue a sensual relationship. So there is a different set of values for men and for women in Montherlant's prose work.

Women are sacrificed to men's ideals in order to safeguard man's liberty to pursue his own life style – a 'maîtrise de soi' that ensures, as Costals believes, literary creativity, or, as in Guiscard's case, the freedom to pursue a life of hedonism. Women are also sacrificed so that the principle of 'l'ordre mâle' can be validated, as I have demonstrated in Alban's sacrifice of Dominique. However, whereas there is some nobility in the idealism behind that sacrifice, by the time the tetralogy of *Les Jeunes Filles* came to be written there is more selfishness in Montherlant's hero, Costals' concerns being, on the whole, egocentric.

Love, in its broadest terms, is a very important component of Montherlant's prose work. In exploring this theme I discovered it comes in many guises and that there is a well-developed hierarchy. Because of the integral part it plays in the all-important 'ordre mâle', comradeship is at the summit, closely followed by

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homosexual love. In my investigation of this relationship I found that contrasting homosexual love with heterosexual love inevitably implied a comparison, and, as a result, heterosexual love was found to be wanting. It is portrayed in the novels as a transient emotion and one which fails under adverse conditions, whereas homosexual love is seen to be enduring. This has the effect of belittling the importance of women's contribution to love.

Heterosexual love is not allowed to flourish because it is seen to be debilitating to the male and destroys his much revered liberty. So, Montherlant's writing, in these works, can be seen to be the affirmation of a masculine perspective. Not only is heterosexual love prevented from thriving, but, in the cycle of *Les Jeunes Filles*, it is held up to ridicule and indeed caricatured. In much of the work it is referred to in derisory terms, as 'l'Hamour'. However, the author takes pains to point out that he holds men – not women, responsible for this state of affairs:

> La femme joue son jeu, et il n'y a pas à le lui reprocher. Le reproche est à faire à l'homme, de jouer mal le sien.[1]

Man's desire is contrasted with woman's love and neither is shown to be praiseworthy. Desire is revealed to be an emotion which is distinct from love and the pursuit of sensuality to satisfy lust is kept apart from those areas of life which the hero deems more noble. When not being pursued by Montherlant's heroes, desire is sublimated in action or Platonic friendships. Thus the hero can be seen to dictate the format and pace of heterosexual relationships.

There is a certain glorification of the women who fulfill the sexual needs of the heroes. Ram, Rhadidja and Douce are all lauded by their lovers. Yet the very fact that sexual involvement for the Montherlantian hero is often accompanied by contempt has the effect of placing sensual women on a lower plane than those females who deny their sexuality. The narrator, on contemplating the sexual act with la petite infante, thinks of how he will feel afterwards:

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> Puis je me relevais d'elle avec la sensation d'être contaminé, comme si elle avait la grippe.[2]

The 'mésestime supérieure'[3] which replaced the respect that Alban felt for Dominique once desire entered their relationship is to be experienced by the narrator for la petite infante:

> Ah, désirer ce qu'on dédaigne, quelle tragédie![4]

Maternal love, like heterosexual love in Montherlant's prose, is found to be flawed. Despite the narrator's assertion in *Les Lépreuses* that this love is next below paternal love at the summit of the hierarchy of love, the character portrayals do not bear this out. Comradeship and its associated Platonic relationships, followed by homosexual love are placed in a much higher position than maternal love. Mother love only rarely reaches great heights in Montherlant's prose work and we shall have to wait for his theatre to see how this concept is developed and found to be elevated to a higher plane than in his prose.

Contrary to Simone de Beauvoir's assertion that 'Pour Montherlant c'est d'abord la mère qui est la grande ennemie'[5], (and she refers to Mesdames Peyrony and Dandillot as two mothers, the first of whom exhibits an 'égoïsme peureux' and the second she says is described 'en traits odieux') Montherlant's mothers are not wholly bad. Although I found no redeeming feature in Mme Peyrony, certainly Mme. Dandillot, as I have demonstrated, is motivated by profound love for her daughter in her dealings with Costals. Although she is misguided and foolish, she is hardly odious. Similarly, Mme de Bricoule, permissive, indulgent and possessive though she is, yet her maternal love is constant and reliable. On her death-bed she pays tribute to maternal love, upholding it as the one love which has endured for her:

> ...il n'y avait que sa mère qui l'eût aimée.[6]

The portrayals of women in Montherlant's prose work are specific rather than generalised characterisations. No one example is representative of the whole and the general perception is built on individual examples.

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Most of the women are only seen through the eyes of men and this inevitably leads to one-sided, unbalanced portrayals, whereas the men are more fully rounded. Costals, for example, is a creature of counterbalancing characteristics, illustrating 'alternance'. An exception to the unequal portrayal is Mme de Bricoule, who stands up in her own right as a more complete character portrayal, as important to the main themes of *Les Garçons* i.e. camaraderie and homosexuality, as she is to the theme of maternal/filial love.

The individual women tend to balance each other. There is the sensual Douce as the counterpart to Dominique. Mme Peyrony's disorder is contrasted with Dominique's world of strict, regimental training. The portrayal of Mme Rugot as an ideal wife successfully counterbalances Mme Auligny and the Arab lovers are in direct opposition to the European women. In the tetralogy of *Les Jeunes Filles*, Solange, Andrée, Thérèse and Mme Dandillot together make up a whole. This is the author balancing things up and in the reconciliation of incompatibilities he is demonstrating his adherence to his theory of 'syncrétisme et alternance'.

Montherlant has been condemned by some critics[7] for his misogynistic views, but I conclude that, because Montherlant's characters are not necessarily a reflection of his own beliefs and, further, because he has paid homage to certain types of women or to some parts of their personality, and heaped scorn on others, that feminism and misogyny are not necessarily incompatible. Indeed, the fact that some of the men do not escape criticism, must refute any claim that the novels are an indictment against women in particular.

Montherlant is not just a novelist, but he is also a moralist and this is manifested in his early works. *Le Songe* is a condemnation of sentimentalism and a glorification of camaraderie and holding fast to ideals of order and discipline. *Les Olympiques* proclaims the censure of disorder and the upholding of physical

strictness to strengthen moral fibre. The moral tone of the narrative voice can be heard in,

> J'ai vu des garçons et des jeunes filles comprendre la victoire de leur corps comme un moyen de se redonner confiance, de balancer quelque impuissance ou quelque échec de leur vie quotidienne: timidité, déboires, humiliation sociale.[8]

In contrast, the message of the second part of *La Petite Infante de Castille* is to take hold of life and live it to the full in the pursuit of hedonism, Montherlant's apparent contradictions being further evidence of his philosophy of 'syncrétisme et alternance'.

An important function of the women in Montherlant's prose is to be a means of manifesting the psychology of the hero. In the cycle of *Les Jeunes Filles* they act as a sounding-board for Costals' philosophical outpourings. With this tetralogy Montherlant has come nearer to his theatre than with any of his other prose work. The obsession with the male psyche, which pervades his theatre, can be seen in more than embryonic form in Costals. Chronologically, it was after completing *Les Lépreuses* (the fourth book of the tetralogy) that Montherlant began a new phase of work for the theatre. There are episodes in some of his novels which are pure theatre – the most notable being the scene in *Pitié pour les femmes* of the humiliation of Andrée by Costals, witnessed by Solange, and the intensely dramatic scene between Alban and Dominique in *Le Songe* where the revelation of her desire causes Alban's cruelty, rejection and disdain.

Finally, there is, in Montherlant's prose work an independence of spirit, a lucidity, a rejection of convention, all of which are reflected in his treatment of women. In a letter to Elisabeth Zehrfuss in November, 1936, he refers in agreement to something she wrote in her 'étude', which she gave him to read. He writes,

> Tout le début est parfaitement juste et met au point (p.20) une des choses les plus essentielles de mon oeuvre, qu'on ne répétera jamais assez.[9]

She had written,

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> Où en est Montherlant: Nous pouvons en déduire...les trois préoccupations constantes de Montherlant: idée de valeur, idée de pureté, idée de vérité.[10]

Conclusion to Part 1

Notes

1. Henry de Montherlant, *Les Lépreuses*, p. 1543.

2. Montherlant, *La Petite Infante de Castille*, p. 616.

3. Montherlant, *Le Songe*, p. 181.

4. Montherlant, *La Petite Infante de Castille*, p. 617.

5. Simone de Beauvoir, *Le Deuxième Sexe*, extract from 'Montherlant ou le pain du dégoût' in André Blanc, *Les Critiques de notre temps et Montherlant*, p. 58.

6. Montherlant, *Les Garçons*, p. 805.

7. Simone de Beauvoir leads the field in critics who accuse Montherlant of misogyny – see her chapter 'Montherlant ou le pain du dégoût' in *Le Deuxième Sexe*, extract in Blanc, *op. cit.*, pp. 57–70.

8. Montherlant, *Les Olympiques*, p. 282.

9. Montherlant, letter to Elisabeth Zehrfuss, 4 November 1936.

10. Elisabeth Zehrfuss, *'Etude'* – reference to this in her diary notes for 4–8 November 1936.

INTRODUCTION

In this section I shall investigate the distinction between the women in Montherlant's plays and those in his prose. There are certain characteristics which are developed more in Montherlant's theatrical heroines than in those in his novels, such as purity, self-sacrifice and moral courage. Love, which Montherlant explored fully in his prose work but which, in some of its forms, was found to be wanting, is developed in his theatre to include the highest form of love - mystical love.

On the whole, Montherlant is still drawing his females in exaggerated form. Each is representative of a type, be it mother, wife, lover or religious figure. Just as Montherlant presents his heroes as an exaggeration, as well as a personification, of an idea, so, in his theatre, his females are an enlargement of one of his concepts. Sometimes the character becomes the embodiment of an ideal, such as Mariana as a pinnacle of purity in *Le Maître de Santiago.*

The whole of Montherlant's theatre is concerned with the exploration of the 'vie intérieure', usually of the male characters, and the exterior action serves to elucidate this. Montherlant himself stated,

> Une pièce de théâtre ne m'intéresse que si l'action extérieure réduite à sa plus grande simplicité, n'y est qu'un prétexte à l'exploration de l'homme.[1]

This inward-looking attitude and self-analysis is particularly explored in characters such as Alvaro, in *Le Maître de Santiago* and Ferrante, in *La Reine morte* and also in the female character of Soeur Angélique in *Port-Royal.*

Many of the women serve to illuminate the 'vie intérieure' of the heroes and in the process they reveal their own psyches. The men constantly search for identity and understanding of self - and it is only through the women that they are able to come near to achieving this.

By its very nature, drama provides the medium which is ideal for the presentation of conflict, tension, opposition and paradox, all of which abound in Montherlant's theatre.

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The 'syncrétisme et alternance' which pervades all Montherlant's work, and indeed can be said to be the key to it, is present in his drama, not only within the male characters with their often conflicting characteristics, but in the presentation of females who so directly oppose the males, as well as, sometimes, each other. (Vide Inès and l'Infante in *La Reine morte* or Soeur Angélique and Soeur Françoise in *Port-Royal*). Even the diversity of Montherlant's plays serve as evidence of 'alternance' – for example, *Don Juan* and *Port-Royal* could not be further removed from each other in subject matter.

Montherlant did not confine his in-depth exploration of character to men. His investigation of the psychology of a pregnant woman in the personage of Inès is one of his greatest creations.

Background to the psychology of Inès.

Although no-one can take credit for influencing the style, plot or narrative of any of Montherlant's work, if he owes a debt to anyone it is to Mme. Elisabeth Zehrfuss, without whose notes[2] on her sentiments during her pregnancy the character of Inès as a mother would not have had such a ring of authenticity.

In the Introduction at the beginning of the whole thesis I stated that Montherlant denied that any one character was a direct copy of any living person. In general this is true. However there is one possible exception to this. In creating Inès in *La Reine morte*, that part of her character which is concerned with her maternal feelings is so faithfully copied from Elisabeth Zehrfuss that, whenever Inès expresses her emotions with regard to her child, the words she uses are *all* taken from Mme. Zehrfuss' notes to Montherlant – sometimes changed slightly, but often copied verbatim. He acknowledged Elisabeth Zehrfuss' influence on Inès' characterisation when he wrote,

> Cette sublime pièce qui, peut-être, ne vaut rien, vous sera montrée de droit, puisque je pense quelque fois à vous dans mon héroïne principale.[3]

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He felt an affinity with Mme. Zehrfuss in her role of creator at a time when the whole of nature was recreating, which he expressed as follows:

> Je suis dans une merveilleuse effervescence (printanière) créatrice, moi aussi, avec les immenses avantages qu'il y a à créer une oeuvre, plutôt qu'à créer un être, et ai passé la journée de Pâques chez moi à travailler.[4]

Montherlant's requests for Elisabeth Zehrfuss' help were numerous, beginning in a letter written on February 9th 1942:

> Envoyez-moi quelques cris, touchant votre situation à l'égard de Lardonnet[5], car mon héroïne est dans votre situation (elle aussi n'admettant que le garçon), dans le genre du mot que me dit un jour une femme dans cette situation, parlant du gosse futur: "Il est le rêve de mon sang."[6]

He continued to bombard her with his demands for information with regard to her psychological state during her pregnancy:

> Si vous voulez collaborer à *autre pièce*, où il y a une jeune femme enceinte, prière noter pour moi vos sentiments vis à vis de la Lardonette futur, car c'est un des rares états que je n'ai pu expérimenter par moi-même.[7]

Montherlant had already drafted *La Reine morte* before this latest request and, although he had incorporated some of her remarks from her letters to him, he was desperate for a more comprehensive account of her state of mind during her pregnancy. Already at Grasse, where he had gone to write *La Reine morte*, he acknowledged the importance of her contribution when writing to her,

> Vous vivrez éternellement pour lui avoir prêté quelques cris. De grâce, je vous demande encore quelques cris.[8]

His desperation mounts as the days go by and he must finish his play before the end of June so that it can be read to the committee of the Comédie-Française. He accuses her of witholding her feelings from him in order to incorporate them in some future work of her own!

> ...toujours pas de "cris". Vous les garder pour un roman à vous, cela est clair. *Inès* est de plus en plus une des cîmes de l'esprit humain, et je vous en veux très sérieusement de vous refuser à la faire bénéficier davantage de l'émotion de vos entrailles.[9]

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Mollified a little by her assurance that her 'cris' are being compiled and will soon be on their way, Montherlant writes,

> Quand vous lirez les cris sublimes que pousse cette femme infortunée, et si vous me croyez quand je vous jure sur le crucifix que vous êtes la seule femme à qui j'ai emprunté quelques phrases – pas une autre – vous serez émerveillée de mon protéisme, et vous comprendrez mieux que je sois Andrée Hacquebaut. Donc, envoyez–moi les cris *tout de suite*, sans quoi il sera trop tard.[10]

Montherlant's identification with Andrée is further evidence of his 'alternance', because, earlier, in the same letter, he writes,

> Le personnage que *je suis* là dedans, c'est Inès: je suis à la fois amante et mère: admirez![11]

He reaffirms his maternal feelings in yet another letter wherein he begs Elisabeth Zehrfuss to hurry with her notes, before it is too late:

> Je viens de lire *Andromaque* et je trouve que l'amour maternel n'y est pas fortement indiqué. Donc, décidément, l'amour maternel, *c'est moi*. Moi, aidé de vous. Je réitère un appel pressant pour les cris, en quelqu'état qu'ils se trouvent: avant Samedi midi.[12]

At long last, on June 15th, 1942, Elisabeth Zehrfuss posted her 'cris' to Montherlant. These he received with great delight and in less than two weeks he filled out the character of Inès. His gratitude was enormous. Having read them, he paid tribute to female superiority in respect of the deep and sensitive response to profound emotion:

> Merci pour les cris. J'admire combien la source émotionelle fournit aux femmes – lorsqu'elles ont un certain don d'expression – des pensées délicates, riches, et d'une résonance profonde, dont les hommes sont bien incapables. C'est pourquoi je les trouve supérieures aux hommes dans la poésie, – opinion qui me fait profondément mépriser par mes contemporains, pour qui la poésie est un simple jeu de l'intelligence.[13]

Montherlant's appreciation of her contribution is shown in the dedication he wrote on the copy of *La Reine morte*, which he gave her, beginning

> 'A Elisabeth Renard' (her then married name), 'Chère amie, voici l'Infante tirée de mes entrailles presque en même temps que vous tiriez de vous la vôtre...[14]

Yet, as far as I can ascertain, he never made any public recognition of her help.

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The only indication that anyone gave him any assistance comes in a general acknowledgement in his background to the creation of *La Reine morte* (*Comment Fut Ecrite La Reine morte*) in which he discloses that he changed the character of Inès from the historical mother to a pregnant woman,

> ...parce qu'il y avait là une matière humaine que des dames amies m'avaient rendue familière...[15]

The hypothesis I put forward for this, is that Montherlant was a very private person, who jealously guarded his personal relationships. His reticence, as well as his gently teasing and loving nature are characteristics which are divulged when studying the letters exchanged between him and Elisabeth Zehrfuss, but this subject is outside the scope of this thesis. I can only point the reader towards the letters if he wishes to discover a side to Montherlant's character which I have never seen revealed in any published work about him.

Introduction

Notes

1. Henry de Montherlant, *Notes de théâtre*, in *Montherlant Théâtre*, p. 1376.

2. See Appendix for unpublished, unedited copy of these notes.

3. Henry de Montherlant, letter to Elisabeth Zehrfuss, 6 April 1942.

4. Montherlant, letter to Elisabeth Zehrfuss, 6 April 1942.

5. Montherlant's nick-name for Elisabeth Zehrfuss' unborn child.

6. Montherlant, letter to Elisabeth Zehrfuss, 9 February 1942.

7. Montherlant, letter to Elisabeth Zehrfuss, 3 March 1942.

8. Montherlant, letter to Elisabeth Zehrfuss, 22 May 1942.

9. Montherlant, letter to Elisabeth Zehrfuss, 11 June 1942.

10. Montherlant, letter to Elisabeth Zehrfuss, 15 June 1942.

11. Montherlant, letter to Elisabeth Zehrfuss, 15 June 1942.

12. Montherlant, letter to Elisabeth Zehrfuss, 16 June 1942.

13. Montherlant, letter to Elisabeth Zehrufss, 17 June 1942.

14. Montherlant, dedication to Elisabeth Zehrfuss, 22 December 1942.

15. Montherlant, *Comment Fut Ecrite La Reine morte*, in *Montherlant Théâtre*, p. 180.

CHAPTER 1 LOVE

> *Notre amour est un autre amour...même pour la créature. Quand il atteint un certain degré dans l'absolu, par l'intensité, la pérennité et l'oubli de soi, il est si proche de l'amour de Dieu qu'on dirait alors que la créature n'a été conçue qu'en vue de nous faire déboucher sur le Créateur.*[1]

> *Cette vocation au sacrifice, de la part de la femme, est peut-être ce qui caractérise l'amour du couple dans le théâtre de Montherlant.*[2]

Love is very important in Montherlant's theatre, just as it had been in his prose work. In his drama there are two distinct types of love explored – human love and mystical love. Although different, they are closely linked and it is often through human love that the divine is revealed.

1) Mystical Love

The love of God is at the heart of the Sisters' inner struggle in *Port-Royal*. The nuns feel that their communion with God is more important than complying with the demands and conventions of the world which is represented for them in the person of Archevêque Péréfixe.

Like Alvaro in *Le Maître de Santiago*, their withdrawal from the world is based on a personal relationship with God, without which they would be nothing. Soeur Françoise expresses this in the lyrical language which love often inspires in Montherlant's plays:

> "Allons droit à la source, qui est Dieu". Moi, je suis une petite goutte qui sèche si elle est détachée de la source.[3]

Their inner conflict is caused by the Pope's condemnation of the Jansenist faith. The nuns cannot accept that those whose teaching they followed were fallible. Therefore, they have to face the possibility that the Pope is not infallible and therein lies their dilemma. Obedience to the Pope and his representatives conflicts with the freedom to practise their faith in the way that they wish.

The Archbishop wants conformity at the expense of their devotion to what they believe is the true faith. There is a similarity between the Archbishop's

confrontation of the nuns and Don Bernal's meeting with Alvaro in the accusations of withdrawal from the world. Just as Bernal suggests it might be far more commendable to live in the world with all its sinners and imperfections, so the Archbishop accuses the Sisters of isolating themselves from reality:

> L'art de vivre avec son prochain ne s'apprend pas dans les nuages, ni dans les prières.[4]

Yet, despite the mystical union that the nuns seek, they are earthly beings with human weaknesses – such as Soeur Angélique's doubts, Soeur Françoise's pride and Soeur Flavie's treason. Only Mère Agnès escapes these human frailties within the confines of the play. By endowing his characters with imperfections Montherlant provides them with obstacles to overcome. The test to their faith which this provides is surmounted by Soeur Françoise, but proves too arduous for Soeur Angélique.

Soeur Françoise's love of God is very simple:

> Je ne suis faite que pour l'adoration. Quand je ne suis pas devant Dieu, je suis toujours dans une sorte d'étonnement...[5]

In contrast, Soeur Angélique's relationship with God becomes more complex as the play develops and her doubts become stronger. In the very long scene with Mère Agnès, the quiet assertion of the uncomplicated, firm faith of the Mother Superior serves to emphasise the depth of Soeur Angélique's contrasting despair. This counterbalancing of emotions is a device which Montherlant uses time and again in his theatre. It serves the purpose of allowing the exposition of the mental state of one character – more usually the hero – such as Ferrante in *La Reine Morte.*

The love which exists between Soeur Angélique and Soeur Françoise – to be explored in the sections entitled 'Maternal Love' and 'Platonic Love' – is in part responsible for the revelation to Soeur Françoise of the mystical love of God. At the beginning of the drama she experiences some self-doubt, but she is inspired by the firm example of Soeur Angélique, who, in front of the other Sisters, is

always stalwart in the affirmation of her faith. Soeur Françoise's desire to please and to emulate Soeur Angélique is not unlike Mariana's determination to follow her father's example. However, whereas Mariana is at one with her father in their experience of mystical union at the end of *Le Maître de Santiago*, the pattern of development of the two Sisters' relationship with God can be seen as two ends of a see-saw. As Soeur Françoise's faith deepens, and she moves towards 'la lumière', simultaneously and contrarily, Soeur Angélique becomes consumed by doubts and she sinks deeper and deeper towards 'Les Portes des Ténèbres'.

In Montherlant's theatre the concept of love entails suffering on the part of his heroines. Soeur Françoise sees suffering as a necessary and desirable means of drawing nearer to God. But whereas she embraces suffering with joy, and even wonders if they should encourage the persecution by the Pope's envoys in order to experience more of it, suffering leads Soeur Angélique further towards doubt and despair. Her reply to Mère Agnès' assertion that suffering is fertile shows the extent of her desolation and sense of isolation:

> Il y a une souffrance qui n'est pas féconde, une souffrance morte, et qui entraîne dans sa mort tout ce qu'elle trouve en l'âme autour d'elle.[6]

The link between suffering and fertility leads me to consider Inès, in *La Reine Morte*, who is so consumed with love for her unborn child that she feels an overwhelming need to prove her love in the pain of childbirth:

> ... le mettre au monde dans la facilité serait un amoindrissement...le fait qu'il se forme parmi l'épreuve est quelque chose d'heureux.[7]

The desire to embrace suffering so willingly brings to mind Jesus' suffering on the cross for the redemption of mankind and such connotations elevate Inès' love to the highest plane.

The germ of this idea comes from the inspiration Montherlant had from the letter written to him by Mme Elisabeth Zehrfuss (mentioned in the 'Introduction' and quoted in full in the 'Appendix'). He develops the concept further, using

Chapter 1 Love 1) Mystical Love

Mme Zehrfuss' ideas and expressions as can be seen from the comparative quotations which follow. (Mme Zehrfuss' name is indicated by 'E.Z.' for all her quotations).

> INES: Le jour, il ne me préoccupe pas trop. C'est la nuit... Parfois il bouge, à peine, comme une barque sur une eau calme, puis soudain un mouvement plus vif me fait un peu mal. Dans le grand silence, j'attends de nouveau son petit signe: nous sommes complices. Il frappe timidement; alors je me sens fondre de tendresse, parce que tout à coup je l'avais cru mort, lui si fragile. Je souhaite qu'il ne cesse pas de bouger, pour m'épargner ces minutes d'angoisse où je m'imagine qu'il ne bougera jamais plus.[8]

> E.Z.: Le jour, il ne m'occupe pas... La nuit, l'idée de sa présence la responsabilité où je m'engage, grandissent.[9]

> E.Z.: Parfois, il remue doucement en moi, tendrement, puis tout à coup un mouvement plus violent m'éveille. Et puis tout se tait. Dans le grand silence de la nuit, je l'écoute. Je l'attends. J'attends son petit signe, nous sommes complices. Il frappe timidement. Alors je me sens fondre de tendresse et une larme de joie me vient, parce que je l'avais cru mort, tout à coup, ce petit si fragile! Je voudrais qu'il me fasse plus male encore, qu'il ne s'arrête pas de bouger pour que cessent ces minutes d'angoisse où j'imagine qu'il ne bougera plus jamais.[10]

Inès turns these moments of extreme anxiety, when she fears her baby may be dead, into a positive experience, as they serve to intensify her joy when she feels him moving within her again. This joy is described as 'divin', thus linking maternal love with divine love. Again it is necessary to quote from the text to see how closely it is aligned with the words of Mme. Zehrfuss.

> INES: Et pourtant ce sont ces minutes-là qui rendent possible la joie divine de sa vie retrouvée.[11]

> E.Z.: Pourtant ce sont ces minutes qui préparent la divine minute de sa vie retrouvée.[12]

The link between suffering and the experience of mystical love is affirmed by Alvaro in *Le Maître de Santiago*, when he advises Mariana,

> Lutte, souffre davantage. Où il n'y a pas de combat il n'y a pas de rédemption.[13]

Self-sacrifice is another component in the make-up of love which is noticeable in Montherlant's heroines, but is absent in his heroes. Until the final

scene of *Le Maître de Santiago*, Alvaro has spared little time for his daughter. His thoughts have been all directed towards his own striving for purity. Now, finally, he recognises that she is making a sacrifice in renouncing the world:

> Car tu te sacrifies, n'est-ce pas? La générosité, c'est toujours le sacrifice de soi; il en est l'essence.[14]

It is solely because Mariana's sentiments have become one with her father's that he is inspired to mystical heights with his religious vision. This is reflected in Alvaro's language, which carries images that illustrate the intensity of his feelings:

> Les flocons de neige descendent comme les langues de feu sur les apôtres.[15]

Mariana's love for her father is all-consuming – to the extent that the author feels that it is for love of him rather than for love of God that she agrees to enter the convent[16]. Certainly there seems to be some confusion in Mariana's mind between her father and God. She saw her father as a Christ-figure when she was praying,

> ...à la place du Crucifié, la tête inclinée sur l'épaule...[17]

in the manner of Christ upon the Cross. Also, there is an ambiguity about her words when she says:

> "Mon père, je remets mon âme entre vos mains."[18]

They are identical to part of the Communion service, and the fact that the author encloses them in inverted commas would seem to give some foundation to my hypothesis. Nevertheless, this view on the confusion of her love does not diminish it. The love in itself, is ennobling.

Mariana's transportation to the realms of mystical love is so complete that she appears to be in a hypnotic trance which Montherlant demonstrates to the audience by her repetition of her father's words:

> Tout est sauvé et tout est accompli.[19]

There is a further intimation that it is for love of her father rather than for love of God that Mariana obediently follows Alvaro's will. The way in which her

penultimate words fade away again bears the faintest hint of a hypnotic state. It is open to question whether this is due to her father's powerful influence, her communion with God, or a mixture of both, but her words certainly convey that she believes that he is a perfect example for her to follow:

> Je sais qu'une seule chose est nécessaire, et qu'elle est celle que tu disais...[20]

This last scene of *Le Maître de Santiago* contains more than a glimpse of mystical love.[21] Alvaro wraps them both in the white mantle of the Chivalric Order, as a symbol of purity. I also interpret this envelopment of the two bodies as one as a symbol of sexual unity. There is a certain eroticism in Alvaro's words when he cries out,

> ...monte plus haut! monte plus vite! Bois et sois bue! Monte encore![22]

The language that led up to this has become more and more poetic and there is a parallel echoing of lines emphasising their oneness:

> ALVARO: Eternité! Ô Eternité!
> MARIANA: Infinité! Ô Infinité![23]

Alvaro has been seeking this spirituality all his life and now Mariana is the one possessed. He says:

> ...tu vois avant moi ce que j'ai tant rêvé.[24]

Finally they both arrive at the same point of an ecstatic mystical state with the words spoken in unison:

> *Unum, Domine*![25]

Whereas Mariana's spirituality is inspired by the love she bears her father, Inès' communion with God derives, in part, from the intensity of her passion for Pedro:

> Regarder le ciel me ramène toujours vers la terre, car, les choses divines que je connais, c'est sur la terre que je les ai vécues,[26]

she tells the Infanta, implying that the physical love that she and Pedro share is an expression of divine love. Her perception of God's love is not only generated by

her love for Pedro, but she (and we, through her) glimpse divine love in everyday occurrences. Ferrante looks out on the spring day with boredom that it should be the same year in, year out, whereas Inès sees it through different and more perceptive eyes:

> C'est toujours la même chose, et pourtant il me semble que c'est toujours la première fois. Et il y a aussi des actes qui sont toujours les mêmes, et pourtant, chaque fois qu'on les fait, c'est comme si Dieu descendait sur la terre.[27]

The sense of the divine is so highly developed in Inès, because of the depth of her love for her unborn baby, that she feels she is permanently in the presence of a miracle:

> Lui, cette fabrication de chaque instant, matérielle et immatérielle, qui vous fait vivre dans la sensation d'un miracle permanent, cela fait de lui mon bien...[28]

The essence of the above words can be found in the following quotation from Mme Elisabeth Zehrfuss' letter to Montherlant:

> J'ai le sentiment que je suis au coeur d'un miracle.[29]

Inès' attachment to her unborn child is so intense that her mood becomes expansive as she envisages her love as an example to all mankind. There is an insight into the love of God as she hopes that through her men will forget to hate:

> Alors qu'il me semblait parfois que, si les hommes savaient combien j'aime mon enfant, peut-être cela suffirait-il pour que la haine se tarît à jamais dans leur coeur.[30]

Again, we can see Montherlant's inspiration for these words emanating from those of Mme Elisabeth Zehrfuss:

> Pourtant, je voudrais offrir au monde l'amour que j'ai pour mon enfant et préserver les hommes de la haine. S'ils savaient combien j'aime mon enfant, peut-être leur méchanceté s'arrêterait-elle au bord de leur coeur.[31]

Inès' love spreads to encompass all mankind. There is sound argument from the text that Batchelor is wrong when he says that Inès' passion for Pedro 'obscures her intelligence and limits her apprehension of life *in its entirety*'[32].

Chapter 1 Love 1) Mystical Love

He maintains:

> There is no question of Inès passing from one plane – love of another individual – to that other plane which is an intelligent sympathy and affection for humanity.[33]

In fact, her 'puissance merveilleuse de tendresse pour les hommes'[34] not only disputes Batchelor's claim but supplies us with another glimpse of mystical love since such an all-encompassing love must be seen as a reflection of the love of God.

In *Malatesta* it is the Pope who enables us to see the element of divine love in Isotta's love for her husband. He tells Isotta:

> Plût au ciel que les prêtres aimassent Jésus-Christ autant qu'une femme peut aimer son époux![35]

By making this analogy the Pope is elevating Isotta's love to the realms of mysticism and on this plane it becomes equal to the love of Inès, Mariana and the nuns of Port-Royal.

There is the suggestion that the Pope finds in Isotta a medium through which God's love is revealed to him:

> J'ai eu par votre moyen un petit instant de lumière.[36]

2. Maternal Love

Human love, by its very definition, is more down-to-earth than mystical love. This is perhaps best seen in the expression of parental love, which, by its nature, is at its best protective and at its worst suffocating.

In *La Reine morte* Montherlant explores to the full the psychology of the pregnant woman. He was able to do this with such authenticity because of the revelation of the intimate thoughts and feelings conveyed to him by Mme. Elisabeth Zehrfuss. It is in Inès' confrontation with Ferrante, in Act 3, Scene 6, that Montherlant has been able to put to full use the knowledge he derived from Mme. Zehrfuss' notes.

The suffering that was seen to be such an intrinsic part of mystical love is inherent in the maternal love that Montherlant portrays. Inès suffers through the anxiety she feels for her child, who will have to suffer the trials and tribulations of the world:

> INES: Est-il possible qu'on puisse dire du mal de mon enfant!
> FERRANTE: On le détestera...
> INES: On le détestera, lui qui n'a pas voulu être!
> FERRANTE: Il souffrira, il pleurera...[37]

The reader's attention is drawn to the similarity between the above quotation and the one below taken from Mme. Zehrfuss' notes to Montherlant:

> Mais comment pourra-t-on dire du mal de mon enfant? Et comment pourrait-il faire le mal?...Il a été crée sans qu'il le veuille. Et peut-être un jour on détestera, on maltraitera celui qui n'a pas voulu être! Peut-être souffrira-t-il, pleurera-t-il?[38]

In his prose work Montherlant portrayed his mothers in exaggerated form and it is no less so in his theatre – but then, maternal love *is* a magnified emotion. Inès, like Mme. Zehrfuss, earnestly desires to take on board her child's suffering:

> INES: Comment retenir ses larmes, les prendre pour moi, les faire couler en moi? Moi, je puis tout supporter: je puis souffrir à sa place, pleurer à sa place.[39]

> E.Z.: Comment retenir ses larmes, les recueillir pour moi, les faire couler en moi? Moi, je puis tout supporter, je puis souffrir, pleurer pour lui.[40]

In her pregnancy, Inès finds the outlet for all the love she was born with. Again Montherlant draws this love in extravagant terms. Not only did Inès show her obsession with love from a very early age, by naming her dolls Amant and Bien-Aimée, but she believes that at a pre-pubescent age,

> ...si l'on m'avait ouvert la poitrine, il en aurait coulé de l'amour, comme cette sorte de lait qui coule de certaines plantes, quand on en brise la tige.[41]

Her desire that her love should pervade her baby's life is again taken by Montherlant from Mme. Zehrfuss' expression of her feelings:

> INES: Oh! que je voudrais que mon amour eût le pouvoir de mettre dans sa vie un sourire éternel![42]

> E.Z.: Comment inscrire dans le coeur et dans la vie de mon enfant un sourire éternel?[43]

Inès' feeling that her maternal love is under threat from interfering advisers conveys a sense of fear which is a reminder to the audience of the nagging forebodings which have dogged her throughout the play:

> INES: Déjà, cependant, on l'attaque, cet amour. On me désapprouve, on me conseille...[44]

> E.Z.: Il sera attaqué, cet amour. ...On me désapprouve, on me conseille.[45]

The baby now developing within her elicits from Inès a totally unselfish love, unlike her love for Pedro, which demands reciprocation. Rather, she takes all the responsibility on herself of ensuring that her love will be returned:

> Moi qui aime tant d'être aimée, j'aurai fait moi-même un être dont il dépendra entièrement de moi que je me fasse aimer![46]

The author copied this verbatim from Mme. Zehrfuss' letter:

> Moi qui aime tant d'être aimée, j'aurai fait moi-même un être dont il dépend entièrement de moi que je me fasse aimer.[47]

Inès' protective instincts, like all other aspects of her maternal love, are highly developed. Again Montherlant owes Mme. Zehrfuss a debt for an almost exact copy of her words:

> INES: Que je voudrais lui donner de sa mère une idée qui le préserve de tout toute sa vie![48]

> E.Z.: Que je voudrais lui donner de moi une idée qui le préserve de tout toute sa vie.[49]

In endowing Ferrante with negative attitudes towards life, Montherlant provides the audience with the opportunity of evaluating Inès' positive outlook, and it benefits from the appraisal. In the face of the king's sarcasm, rather than becoming subdued, Inès grows more enthusiastic, and the simplicity of her language, with its underlying majestic ideas, serves to emphasise the depth of her feelings as she even seems to see herself as mother incarnate:

> Je crois que toute femme qui enfante pour la première fois est en effet la première femme qui met au monde.[50]

The inspiration for these words chosen by the author for his character can be seen in the following extract:

> E.Z.: Je ne suis plus une femme, mais la Femme. Je ne suis plus une mère, mais la Mère qui, à travers les siècles, a été conçue pour mettre au monde, pour donner la Vie.... je confonds avec moi toutes les femmes; elles sont toutes en moi, je suis l'éternelle féminité.[51]

Montherlant's mastery of language can be seen in his use of the simple device of repetition such as the duplication of the two verbs in,

> ...je le fais ensemble et je me refais. Je le porte et il me porte.[52]

The repetition affirms the tight interrelation between mother and child.

The profundity of mother love is expressed in terms of exaggeration. So strong is Inès' love that, should her child not be the exquisite being that she desires, she will love him even more to atone for creating him other than perfect:

> Et, s'il n'est pas beau, je l'aimerai davantage encore pour le consoler et lui demander pardon de l'avoir souhaité autre qu'il n'est.[53]

Again, the origin for these words is to be found in the words of Mme. Elisabeth Zehrfuss:

> Je le veux beau, mais s'il n'est pas beau, je l'aimerai davantage pour le consoler et lui demander pardon de l'avoir souhaité autre qu'il n'est.[54]

It is interesting to note that Jeanne Sandelion[55] finds the above quotation from the text more credible than a later one where Inès discloses that she would be capable of killing her child should he fail to meet her expectations. It can be seen from my quotation from the Appendix[56] that Montherlant copied Mme. Zehrfuss' words almost verbatim, whereas his thoughts on infanticide were his own! In fact he had written to her, with regard to her unborn child,

> Si vous devez le tuer s'il n'est pas semblable à ce que vous attendez de lui, tuez-le donc tout de suite.[57]

In *La Reine morte* he tranfers his murderous thoughts to his heroine, but they strike a false note in contrast to Inès' highly developed protective instinct for her child:

> Je crois que je serais capable de le tuer, s'il ne répondait pas à ce que j'attends de lui.[58]

This apart, there is a distinct glorification of motherhood in Montherlant's portrayal of Inès. Nicole Debrie-Panel[59] upholds this viewpoint, giving as her evidence the symbolic placing of the crown on Inès' pregnant abdomen before she dies, whereas in fact Montherlant originally intended the crown to be placed on her neck. However, since he agreed to Jean Cocteau's suggestion (noted in his Carnets) of the repositioning of the crown, it can safely be assumed that the author was happy with the implication of such symbolism.

It is not important that Montherlant may not have initially planned this exaltation of the mother figure, despite John Batchelor's assertion to the contrary.[60] As often happens with Montherlant, his creations escape from the purpose of the creator and the spectator is left with a distinct idea of the glorification of motherhood at the end of this play.

Maternal love is not always confined to mothers for their children in Montherlant's theatre. In *Malatesta* Isotta treats her husband at times as if he were her child, and as such needs watchful care:

> Mon seul rôle sur la terre est de veiller sur vous.[61]

Indeed, the few references she makes to their children lead one to suppose that she is totally bound up with Malatesta to the exclusion of her children and all else. All aspects of her love, including maternal love, are directed towards her husband. Thus there is a questioning of her values.

In *Port-Royal*, by virtue of all the female characters being nuns, there are no mothers in the normally accepted sense of the term, but Mère Agnès reveals herself worthy of her title in the psychologically significant scene between her and Soeur Angélique, wherein the latter discloses her spiritual uncertainties. Mère Agnès provides spiritual guidance in the same way that a mother would direct a child who begged for help and reassurance.

Paradoxically, consumed though she is with doubts and fears and the inability to find peace, Soeur Angélique herself is able to provide Soeur Françoise with a

guidance born of a love which has distinct maternal leanings, which the young nun follows and from which she gains spiritual strength.

Soeur Françoise exposes her feelings for Soeur Angélique long before the latter discloses hers. The young nun admits to having tried to capture Soeur Angélique's attention by plucking at her garments in much the same way that a small child would do to its mother.

Only in their final scene together does Soeur Angélique respond with the revelation of her love in answer to Soeur Françoise's request:

Ma Mère... laissez-moi vous donner ce nom de Mère...[62]

Even then, at first Soeur Angélique can not break her life-time habit of suppressing her emotion for the purpose of moulding strong, spiritual characters. She denies the expression of her own love, cutting short her revelation of,

Je vous ai nourrie cinq ans, d'un lait que pas une mère...[63]

with,

Mais je ne sais à quoi je pense en vous disant cela...[64]

However, her admission to Soeur Françoise that she can not leave her as she does indeed love her, and the reassurance that this brings to the young novice, demonstrates that her maternal love has become more important, in direct proportion to her increasing doubts about the spiritual love of God.

In endowing Soeur Angélique with maternal qualities, Montherlant has created a character who is attached to earthly emotions, despite her attempts, earlier in the play, to distance herself from such sentiments. This compounds her inner turmoil, for not only does she have to contend with her spiritual crisis, but she has to suffer the deprivation of human love when she is banished. By creating a character who is outwardly strong but inwardly vulnerable, Montherlant effectively secures the audience's sympathy for Soeur Angélique.

It is a very different relationship which exists between Geneviève and her son, Philippe, in *L'Exil*. There is an element of selfishness in Geneviève's love,

initially, which is more akin to the mother-love in Montherlant's prose than in his theatre. This selfishness has the potentiality for destroying the relationship between mother and son.

Ce que sera ma vie quand tu seras mort?[65]

she cries.

In putting emotional pressure on him to prevent him from enlisting she fails to see that she is binding him to her, not with ties of love, but with chains of resentment.

In the early part of the play, she suffers from the 'aveuglement' of mothers which we have seen in Montherlant's prose, for she believes that Philippe has his freedom when, in fact, she is denying him that basic freedom which is central to Montherlant's thinking - the freedom of the individual to choose, to make his own decisions and to follow the dictates of his conscience.

In analysing Geneviève's love there are two crucial factors of which we must be aware which have a pertinent bearing on her attitude. The first is the setting of the play during the First World War, and all the attendant patriotism that that entails. The second is that Geneviève has already lost her husband, mother and daughter before the play begins, so Philippe is all she has left to care for.

The fact that Geneviève is herself a heroine, working fearlessly in dangerous war zones for the ambulance brigade, and yet denies her son his heroic gesture, does appear to compound the sin of repression against him. However, apart from her concerns being selfish, there is also an unselfish element, which is part of the make-up of maternal love. By preventing Philippe from enlisting, she is ensuring that his life will be safe - saving it for *his* sake, as well as for her own. Even in her war-time occupation, Geneviève is concerned with saving life, rather than taking it away, as would a fighting soldier. This is an extension of the maternal instinct to preserve life. Montherlant thus reconciles her war-time activities with her attempt to prevent Philippe from enlisting.

Chapter 1 Love 2) Maternal Love

L'Exil is an exploration of the psychological development of Geneviève as a mother, from selfishness and over-protection to self-sacrifice and abnegation. After her initial outburst of despair, Geneviève counteracts her egoism by a desire to sacrifice herself for Philippe:

> Ah, quelle torture de t'aimer comme je t'aime et de ne pas pouvoir te le prouver en donnant ma vie pour toi![66]

This overwhelming need on the part of mothers to prove their love by an act of self-sacrifice, we have already seen in Montherlant's prose in the person of Mme Dandillot. The fact that Montherlant arranges Geneviève's avowal of self-sacrifice immediately after imploring Philippe not to go to war demonstrates the close proximity of the conflicting emotions and confirms the contrasting elements of selfishness and unselfishness in the make-up of Geneviève's maternal love.

The motivation for Geneviève's actions changes. From an initial and natural self-interested reaction, everything she does from now on can be seen to be for love of her son. This does not prevent her love from being flawed. Her maternal love is seen to be suffocating, just as we have seen in Montherlant's mothers in his prose.

There is an alienation between mother and son reminiscent of that between Alban de Bricoule and his mother. It arises out of a mutual lack of understanding - Geneviève believing that one day Philippe will thank her, but he informing his mother that she will pay dearly for *his* sacrifice. As the estrangement grows between them, exacerbated as Philippe enviously watches the soldiers returning from the Front, Geneviève grows to realise that her protection of Philippe is stifling all that was good in him.

Her powers of self-sacrifice are put to the ultimate test when she realises that to regain his self-esteem, Philippe must now be encouraged to enlist.

Simone de Beauvoir regards Montherlant's views on women to be totally biased against them:

> Pour Montherlant, c'est d'abord la mère qui est la grande ennemie...Son crime c'est de vouloir garder son fils jamais enfermé dans les ténèbres de son ventre.[67]

Her view on Montherlant is as biased as she regards his on the subject of mothers. Her mistake is to assume that what he writes about some mothers is a generalisation for all Montherlant's mothers. Certainly, we have seen examples in his prose of some abominable mothers, notably Mme Peyrony. Also Mesdames Dandillot and de Bricoule leave much to be desired. But, in his theatre, he does much to redeem this, as I have already demonstrated in the examination of Inès' maternal love. In fact, although Geneviève may have wished to keep Philippe tied to her apron strongs, her final gesture in releasing Philippe from 'les ténèbres de son ventre', is all the more noble for its abnegation.

However, there is a paradox, in that the sincerity of her self-sacrifice is questioned to the last as she admits to not being able to live without his love, and confesses that part of her motive in allowing him to enlist is in the hope of regaining that love.

Montherlant sees Geneviève's change of heart as self-indulgent:

> À la fin de *L'Exil*, Geneviève consent à sacrifier son fils, si cela doit lui rendre d'abord l'amour de ce fils.[68]

This limited view of his creation does not take into account the magnanimity of the gesture, for, if Philippe should be killed, Geneviève would not only lose him, but also any chance of his love that she so earnestly desires.

By being involved in the war effort, Geneviève can be seen to be partaking of that world of 'l'ordre mâle' which Montherlant promotes so fiercely in his prose work. Therefore, by at first preventing Philippe from playing his part in the war, she must incur the author's condemnation. Geneviève's psychological development in the play, which, we have seen, concludes with her relinquishing her ties on Philippe and thus giving him his freedom to make his own choice, allows him to participate in that male order. Surely, therefore, in Montherlantian terms she has

passed the test – she no longer belongs to that group of women – mothers or lovers – whom the author abhors – those who stifle men with their excess of possessive love.

It has to be borne in mind that this play was not only set in World War I, but it was actually first written in the early months of that Great War. Placing it thus, it can be seen to have far wider implications than simply the exploration of a mother/son relationship. It is, in fact, an early expression of the young author's belief, which he later affirmed in his *Textes sous une occupation*:

> ...l'amour de la famille devra être surveillé, parce que son excès peut devenir une menace contre la patrie...[69]

3) Filial Love

There is a reversal of roles between parent and child in *Le Maître de Santiago*. In *L'Exil* it is Geneviève who, through love for her son, sacrifices her own wishes. In *Le Maître de Santiago* it is Mariana who makes the double sacrifice of heterosexual love and of her life in the world, for her father. The fact that she has experienced the love of a young man increases her awareness of all she has to give up when she agrees to enter a convent:

> Grâce à lui je connais la pleine mesure du sacrifice.[70]

There is a distinct difference between Alvaro's and Mariana's viewpoint of giving up the world. What Alvaro sees as 'partons pour vivre', she sees as 'partons pour mourir'.[71] Therefore there is emphasis on Mariana's self–sacrifice in contrast to the ease with which Alvaro's all–consuming passion for relinquishing the world means that there is no self–sacrifice on his part.

Mariana's love for her father is of the purest form, for it consists of total abnegation. Despite his disinterest in her, she worships him. When Tia Campanita recounts the story of the stolen salt–cellar wherein Alvaro repays the thief by further generosity, Mariana accepts this aspect of his character as the norm:

> Madame, si je voulais conter les traits de cette nature que je sais de mon père une nuit y passerait.[72]

From the curtain first going up, through to the end of the play, she never ceases to praise him. Yet her adoration of him seeks no reciprocation or reward. Indeed, if she did so she would be sorely disappointed as he looks upon her as an irritation and an intrusion into his private world where he is totally self-absorbed in his striving for purity. He tells don Bernal:

> Tout être humain est un obstacle pour qui tend à Dieu...Tout ce qui y entrerait, et l'amitié même, et l'affection surtout, n'y entrerait que pour les troubler.[73]

And when Bernal insists that Mariana must be a source of pleasure to him, Alvaro retorts, 'Les enfants dégradent.'[74]

Alvaro may see Mariana's love as a degradation, as indeed he sees conjugal love as 'une singerie'[75], but love elevates Mariana. Having defended him against Tia Campanita's accusations of frugality, she continues to defend him against Bernal, who cannot forgive him for his condemnation of human love. She cannot bear anyone to say a word against him and because she cannot suffer to see her father belittled by the plot to tempt him to the New World, she reveals the deception to him:

> Je n'aurais pu supporter de vous voir cesser d'être ce que vous êtes. Vous m'avez reproché l'autre jour de vous perdre. J'ai voulu vous sauver.[76]

In renouncing the world Alvaro is giving up a life he has long wanted to leave, so it is no great hardship for him:

> Ce but, c'est de ne plus participer aux choses de la terre,[77]

but Mariana makes the ultimate sacrifice. She makes her father a gift of her dreams of earthly happiness, and of her whole self, and thus allows him to reach that state of purity to which he has long aspired. He has sacrificed Mariana for his own spiritual fulfillment.

It is perhaps in the exorcising of what Mariana sees as her sin in conniving with Bernal and Soria to delude her father that, in an excess of expiation she

commits the ultimate self-sacrifice. But it is a voluntary move. Alvaro has not done anything in his life to persuade Mariana to join him in his search for purity. On the contrary, he has discouraged any close association between them. However, by his example, however cold and austere it may seem to the spectator, he has inspired in Mariana such love that her love for him proves to be greater than her love for Jacinto and the world. She voluntarily makes her choice and it is this freedom of her choice that emphasises its profundity. In Mariana, as in Inès, Montherlant has created one of the most perfect examples of human love and sacrifice in his theatre.

4) Heterosexual Love

Mariana, then, makes the ultimate sacrifice by forsaking a life of warmth, love and gregariousness for one of austerity, segregation and prayer. Inès makes the ultimate sacrifice by her death. However, much though she was willing to die for Pedro, her death was not a voluntary act. It was no less than murder. This does not diminish the act of dying, but nor does it elevate it to a place other than what it is.

The grandeur of Inès' character is not in what is done to her, but in what she does herself. It is the sacrificial element in the nature of her love that elevates it to a plane above the ordinary.

Like Mariana, she understands the full extent of her sacrifice. In the very first Act she states several times over that she is fearful. Yet she does not indulge this fear, nor try to escape it by ignoble means. Even amidst Ferrante's concessions of lassitude she thinks not of herself, but has compassion for him, telling him:

> Je ne quitterai pas celui qui m'a dit: "Je suis un roi de douleur."[78]

All Inès energies are directed towards charity to others, and her own self-effacement.

Ferrante must not take all the blame for Inès' death for does she not have a certain culpability herself for remaining in danger rather than fleeing to safety with L'Infante? But would flight with L'Infante lead to safety? That is a debatable point and not one to which there is a plain answer. L'Infante accuses Inès of being 'molle' and Inès herself agrees with this, although she does qualify the admission with a beautiful allegory suggesting that to be soft is to be receptive to God:

> C'est quand le fruit est un peu mol, qu'il reçoit bien jusqu'à son coeur tous les rayons de la Création.[79]

Simone de Beauvoir sees Montherlant's portrayal of women who are 'molles et sans muscles'[80] as more evidence of his bias against women, but in *La Reine morte*, Inès is a contradiction of this ethos.

Is Inès 'soft' in the sense of unintelligent? I think not. For, by staying, she is not merely sacrificing herself and her unborn child for the love of Pedro, but she is also demonstrating a perceptive judgement of L'Infante. L'Infante professes not to be jealous of Inès, but she has suffered a rebuff at the hands of Pedro because of his love for Inès and her pride has taken a nasty knock. Would it not be natural that she should want to exact punishment? And what better way would there be than to lure Inès to her own land on the pretext of protection from Ferrante?

If Inès does believe these to be L'Infante's motives then she is a very brave person indeed, for she knows that the alternative is death at the hands of the king. Montherlant has created in Inès a creature who is symbolic of love in its various forms – sacrificial, maternal, conjugal. On her own admission:

> Aimer, je ne sais rien faire d'autre.[81]

The positioning of 'aimer' right at the beginning of the sentence emphasises its importance. Her love, like Isotta's is basically the kind that needs continual expression in human terms. They both feel the necessity to be near and to touch their loved ones. Inès throws herself on Pedro 'comme le loup sur l'agneau'[82],

and the very smell of his clothes fills her with passion. Isotta, too, needs this physical contact to express her love and rests her head on Malatesta's chest as she did when he returned from battles.

Whereas Inès' love is a source of strength to Pedro (it is she who encourages him

> Apprenez à gouverner...acceptez—en le péril et l'ennui, le faisant désormais pour l'amour de moi,)[83]

Isotta's love is debilitating to Malatesta at times. Pedro draws his strength from Inès:

> Je vais tout lui dire, comme tu me l'as conseillé. Tu avais raison.[84]

whereas Malatesta is weakened by Issota's love. She communicates her anxiety to her husband by her superstitious interpretation of the stars. Although Malatesta dismisses her worries at first,

> Toutes les femmes qui m'ont aimé ont rêvé à mon sujet des rêves sinistres: rêver de ma mort est partie nécessaire de l'amour qu'on a pour moi,[85]

he accuses her of enfeebling him with her love:

> Votre tremblemant altère ma stabilité... Et votre fiévreuse tendresse m'a fatigué bien des fois.[86]

For all he so cruelly and egotistically condemns Isotta for giving him too much love, (it has a similar smothering effect on him as Geneviève's love has on Philippe), he does, in the next breath, pay tribute to the selflessness of that love. Having told her that all his life he has been surrounded by women who adore him, he says she alone among them has given without expecting anything in return:

> ...ce don qui ne demande rien en échange, cette alliance qui n'exige pas d'otages, ce conseil où toujours tu t'oublies, — ce couvert solide et sûr comme la mort.[87]

There is always someone[88] to argue that when a donor receives pleasure their gift is self—motivated. Yet there is always an element of selfishness in love. To take

it to its extreme form – that of the love of man for God – one could say that the promise of the attainment of the kingdom of heaven is a selfish motive for loving God. Isotta is no exception. She tells Malatesta:

> Les pauvres petites choses où parfois je vous sers me sont une joie si ardente qu'à chaque fois je voudrais vous remercier de me la donner.[89]

I do not see that the reciprocal pleasure that the giver of love receives is proof that that love is initially selfish.

Isotta's love inspires Malatesta to lyrical heights hardly expected of a belligerent warrior who had killed his sword–fencing instructor in the first scene. Having leaned her head on Malatesta's heart and conveying the depth of her love by her admission that she would rather the whole of Italy fell into the hands of the French or the Germans than that he should die, Malatesta responds with an exaltation of the

> Grande nuit étoilée de signes et de feux!...Et regarde les signes enflammés des cieux, ces étoiles insomnieuses comme moi. Quelle assemblée. Que d'âmes toutes vives de gloire! C'est l'heure où l'on entend chanter les constellations.[90]

It has to be admitted that there are many other times in the play when Isotta is not present that Malatesta's language is equally poetic, but it could still be argued that she is the inspiration for it.

There is an element of jealousy in Isotta's love which normally one would expect would diminish our appraisal of her. But instead of losing our respect, Isotta gains it, for it is not because of other women that she is brought low – and there are plenty of those in Malatesta's life to cause her distress. No – even when her husband flaunts the fact in front of her of all the women who have loved him, she does not display jealousy. It is when she discovers that the Pope has reduced him to tears that her envy shows:

> Quand je songe qu'il a eu les larmes aux yeux devant vous: il me l'a écrit! Moi qui de ma vie ne l'ai vu pleurer à cause de moi.[91]

The suffering that we have seen in maternal love plays no less a part in heterosexual love in Montherlant's theatre. It is the women who endure the pain

associated with love, because of the intensity of their passion. Isotta's premonitions and fears for Malatesta cause her great anxiety. Inès' suffering is heightened by the fear of death which has dogged her long before Ferrante's pronouncement of it. Because of 'La destinée qu'on sent qui s'accumule en silence', she feels that their love is 'douceur mêlée de tristesse'[92].

Mariana, too, suffers because of her love for Jacinto, but she nurses her pain privately and stoically, blaming the 'fumée du brasero' for her tears (which Bernal discerns as 'l'eau du coeur'[93]) just as, earlier, she had maintained that 'une autre pleure en moi.'[94]

If the concept of heterosexual love is seen to be idealised in Inès and, to a certain extent, admired in Isotta, Montherlant portrays a totally different aspect in Don Juan's relationships with women in *La Mort qui fait le trottoir (Don Juan)*. The farcical scene when the three chamberpots are emptied successively on Don Juan's head serves to demonstrate the absurdity of his passion. He is enduring this disgusting ignominy rather than move from the spot from where he can see Linda approaching – a girl whom he only desires 'à moitié'.[95] Very little importance is placed on this relationship, or indeed on most of the others, by Don Juan, who tells his son,

> Je n'ai pas envie d'elle, mais la pensée que je ne l'ai pas me picote.[96]

His general attitude to women is that they are there to serve one purpose:

> Les fruits et les femmes ne sont bons que lorsqu'ils tombent.[97]

Thus most women are debased in this play. Don Juan's belief that

> ... toutes les femmes se prostituent: il n'y a que la façon qui diffère.[98]

effectively degrades women and devalues heterosexual love.

Le Comte de Ulloa's belief that 'Les femmes sont...pareilles les unes aux autres...'[99] is an affirmation of Don Juan's viewpoint that '... toutes les femmes sont interchangeables.'[100]

Don Juan's allusion to a fictitious dead daughter – which he uses as a pretext to hold Linda close to him in the anticipation of persuading her into a sexual relationship – is base, as it has connotations with incest. Don Juan is without scruple when it comes to achieving his own ends with women. Yet the effect of this is paradoxical. On the one hand, women are seen to be debased by Don Juan. On the other hand, the very fact that he is such a pathetic and habitual lecher, undermines the validity of his treatment of women.

In contrast to Don Juan's self-gratification in his affairs with women, there is a magnanimity in Ana's love which is demonstrated when she forgives Don Juan for killing her father and implores him to flee to save himself:

> Partez; voyez d'autres femmes; aimez-moi en elles. Vivez fidèle et infidèle, mais vivez, mon ami très cher.[101]

Her perception of his needs and her lack of constraints on him place her in that category of idealised Montherlantian heroines seen in the author's prose work, such as Douce and the Arab lovers, Ram and Rhadidja.

The sincerity of her love impresses Don Juan so deeply that it moves him, for once, to doubt his life-style:

> Ana, suis-je digne de tes paroles? Pour une fois, un doute me vient. Pour une fois, je me demande: "Ai-je eu raison de vivre comme j'ai vécu?"[102]

However, his doubts are short-lived and he soon reverts to type. This, too, serves to emphasise the difference between them – he lacking all morals, and Ana embodying compassion, charitableness and generosity in her love. But here we come to the nub of the matter. The love that Ana feels is not part of Don Juan's make-up. Whereas for Montherlantian heroines sensuality is an expression of their love, for his heroes, sensuality and desire are completely separate from love. The association of destruction with sensuality, which was so prominent in the relationship between Alban and Dominique, explored in Chapter 3 of Part I, is endorsed in this play. For Don Juan, in seeking to avoid the inevitability of

death in his hedonistic pursuits, meets it head on when he dons his mask of death. The meaning of such symbolism is revealed when he tells his son,

> ...c'est mon masque de tous les jours.[103]

There is the implication that his daily life-style, far from preserving him from death, as he had hoped, has been a living death. Thus his way of life is undermined, which, in turn, suggests that it is not one to be upheld as an ideal.

5) Lesbian Love

The suffering experienced by women in heterosexual love is also seen to be part of the make-up of lesbian love. L'Infante's love for Inès is rejected and so her suffering turns to anger and irritation:

> Allez donc mourir, doña Inès. Allez vite mourir, le plus vite possible désormais.[104]

L'Infante's motives for wanting to save Inès' life are ambiguous. I have already suggested that by taking Inès back to Spain L'Infante could be desirous of exacting revenge for the ignominy of her rejection by Pedro, and the consequent blow to her pride - something which she values highly:

> Ce n'est pas la femme qui est insultée en moi, c'est L'Infante,[105]

She tells Ferrante.

An alternative reason for her actions is the element of lesbianism which at first is only hinted at:

> Je vous ai regardée longuement, doña Inès. Et j'ai vu que don Pedro avait raison de vous aimer.[106]

Innocent words perhaps, but surely not the following sentence which is much more explicit, being more suitable from a lover's lips than from a friend's?

> À la naissance de vos seins, dans le duvet entre vos seins, un de vos cils est tombé.[107]

She makes a further intimate observation of Inès' body:

> La déchirure s'ouvrait sur votre cou. Je vous ai suivi à cette petite blancheur qui bougeait dans la pénombre.[108]

Inès' refusal to escape with her leads L'Infante to confess that she can not rid her from her mind:

> J'aurais voulu que tout mon séjour au Portugal s'évanouît comme un mauvais rêve, mais cela n'est plus possible, à cause de vous. C'est vous seule qui empoisonnez le doux miel de mon oubli...[109]

Finally, Montherlant creates the episode of the broken bracelet as 'un symbole de ce qui ne s'est pas joint'[110] between Inès and l'Infante, which must surely be seen as confirmation of the lesbian love that l'Infante wishes Inès would share with her.

What could be the reasons for these lesbian traits that the author has imposed on l'Infante? Is it his rather oblique way of ennobling l'Infante by giving her the masculine role? This would be to accept the assumption that Montherlant believes in masculine superiority.[111] A more likely explanation is that l'Infante's lesbianism serves, by its contrast, to emphasise the purity of Inès' love. This is implicit in Inès' reply to the suggested symbolism of the bracelet:

> Si c'est un symbole, il y a des choses tellement plus pures que le diamant...[112]

The fact that l'Infante agrees with this statement, and, at the same time, symbolically crushes the bracelet by standing on it, suggests that virtuous love is being upheld against lesbian love.

Also despite l'Infante's previous strength and determination and Inès' supposed spinelessness ('Oh! comme vous êtes molle!')[113] and despite l'Infante's belief in her ability to determine her own future and her derision at Inès belief in predestination, she now echoes Inès fatalistic words:

> Il faut laisser tomber les eaux...[114]

L'Infante's love for Inès lacks that element of self-sacrifice that would ennoble it to stand alongside the more powerfully expressed heterosexual and maternal love in Montherlant's theatre. Nor does it compare favourably with the homosexual love we have seen in his prose (and in *La Ville dont le prince est un*

enfant – that great play which is not under study here). Nevertheless, l'Infante is a strong and noble character and it remains for me to explore those characteristics which elevate her to the realms of the great in Chapter 4.

6) Platonic Love

The exploration of lesbian love led me to search for a similar emotion – without success – in the relationship between Soeurs Angélique and Françoise. I have already mentioned the element of maternal love which is recognised by both of them. Running parallel with that there is a powerful and deep love which is all the stronger for its non-sensuality.

In Montherlant's prose work we saw the idealising of Platonic love in the friendship between Alban and Dominique and the sense of the divine which emanated from it. That feeling of the presence of God in such a relationship is intensified in *Port-Royal*. Soeur Angélique is the vessel through which God's grace is conveyed to the novices in general and to Soeur Françoise in particular.

There is a certain amount of admiration in the younger nun's love, which is natural in view of their positions of novice and Maîtresse des novices. Soeur Françoise's feelings are exposed in their first scene together. Anxious to read expressions of affection into the smallest act, she thinks that Soeur Angélique had kindly used her own voice in the choir to cover up her, Soeur Françoise's, mistakes. Soeur Angélique's quick denial of this and her assertion that not only is she not concerned with such charitable acts during choir, but that

> La religion n'a pas été établie pour bien chanter, mais pour bien mourir à soi-même,[115]

cause Soeur Françoise pain. It is some time later in the play before we see a softening of Soeur Angélique's attitude. Thus we see that the suffering, which was a component of other forms of love, is also part of Platonic love.

Montherlant provides Soeur Françoise with opportunities to demonstrate her love for Soeur Angélique in her keen responses to please, such as her eagerness to

have her shoes repaired after she is reprimanded for the noise they are making. The spectator feels the harshness of Soeur Angélique is unwarranted, but our attitude towards her changes when she reveals her insecurities and doubts in the scene with Mère Agnès.

Soeur Françoise's attempts to gain signs of affection are quite pitiful in view of the lack of response from the older nun, making this seem a one-sided love at the beginning. The younger nun's interjection of a frivolous question regarding her exact age is met by a further rebuff from Soeur Angélique, and she is devastated by Soeur Angélique's suggestion that she is unsuited for Port-Royal, interpreting the proposal as a rejection of love:

> Vous me rejetez ainsi, ma Soeur!
> ...Apprendre tout d'un coup que l'on compte si peu....[116]

It is not until the end of the play, when Soeur Françoise has travelled a road from uncertainty to strength and affirmation of her faith, and simultaneously, Soeur Angélique's firm belief in God has degenerated into doubt and despair, that the Maîtresse des novices throws off her cloak of unresponsiveness and indifference, previously worn with such determination, and admits her love for Soeur Françoise:

> Or, je ne vous quitte pas; on ne quitte que ce qu'on cesse d'aimer.[117]

This confession, coming so near the end of the play, and after so many denials of her feelings both in words and in deeds, has the effect of intensifying the strength of her love.

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Notes

1. Henry de Montherlant, *La Ville dont le prince est un enfant*, Act. 3. Sc. 7, p. 740.

2. Ferdinando Banchini, *Le Théâtre de Montherlant*, p. 129.

3. Montherlant, *Port-Royal*, p. 869.

4. Montherlant, *Port-Royal*, p. 900.

5. *Ibid.*, p. 871.

6. Montherlant, *Port-Royal*, p. 882.

7. Montherlant, *La Reine morte*, Act 1. Sc. 4, p. 120.

8. Montherlant, *La Reine morte*, Act 2. Sc. 4, p. 144.

9. See Appendix, lines 1, 4-5.

10. See Ibid., lines 63-70.

11. Montherlant, *La Reine morte*, Act 2. Sc. 4, p. 145.

12. See Appendix, lines 70-71.

13. Montherlant, *Le Maître de Santiago*, Act 3. Sc. 5, p. 518.

14. Montherlant, *Le Maître de Santiago*, Act 3. Sc. 5, p. 518.

15. *Ibid.*, Act 3. Sc. 5, p. 519.

16. See Montherlant, *Le Maître de Santiago est-il chrétien?* in *Montherlant Théâtre*, p. 535.

17. Montherlant, *Le Maître de Santiago*, Act 3. Sc. 5, p. 516.

18. *Ibid.*, Act 3. Sc. 5, p. 518.

19. *Ibid.*, Act 3. Sc. 5, p. 520.

20. Montherlant, *Le Maître de Santiago*, Act 3. Sc. 5, p. 520.

21. Montherlant asserts in *Le Maître de Santiago est-il chrétien?*, p. 535, that the transcendence in the last scene is brief. True though this is in terms of time, the depth and passion transmitted to the spectator or reader is lasting far beyond the end of the play.

22. Montherlant, *Le Maître de Santiago*, Act 3. Sc. 5, p. 520.

23. *Ibid.*, Act 3. Sc. 5, p. 519.

24. *Ibid.*, Act 3. Sc. 5, p. 520.

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25. *Ibid.*, Act 3. Sc. 5, p. 520.

26. Montherlant, *La Reine morte*, Act 2. Sc. 5, p. 153.

27. Montherlant, *La Reine morte*, Act 2. Sc. 3, p. 139.

28. *Ibid.*, Act 1. Sc. 4, p. 120.

29. See Appendix, line 56.

30. Montherlant, *La Reine morte*, Act 3. Sc. 6, p. 170.

31. See Appendix, lines 35–38.

32. John Batchelor, *Existence and Imagination*, p. 103.

33. John Batchelor, *Existence and Imagination*, p. 103.

34. Montherlant, *La Reine morte*, Act 3. Sc. 6, p. 170.

35. Montherlant, *Malatesta*, p. 390.

36. *Ibid.*, Act 3. Sc. 5, p. 391.

37. Montherlant, *La Reine morte*, Act 3. Sc. 6, p. 170.

38. See Appendix, lines 16–20.

39. Montherlant, *La Reine morte*, Act 3. Sc. 6, p. 170.

40. See Appendix, lines 20–22.

41. Montherlant, *La Reine morte*, Act 2. Sc. 5, p. 151.

42. *Ibid.*, Act 3. Sc. 6, p. 170.

43. See Appendix, lines 30–31.

44. Montherlant, *La Reine morte*, Act 3. Sc. 6, p. 170.

45. See Appendix, lines 33–34, 35.

46. Montherlant, *La Reine morte*, Act 3. Sc. 6, p. 168.

47. See Appendix, lines 56–58.

48. Montherlant, *La Reine morte*, Act 3. Sc. 6, p. 168.

49. See Appendix, lines 58–59.

50. Montherlant, *La Reine morte*, Act 3. Sc. 6, p. 168.

51. See Appendix, lines 7–10, 11–12.

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52. Montherlant, *La Reine morte*, Act 3. Sc. 6, p. 168.

53. *Ibid*, Act 3. Sc. 6, p. 169.

54. See Appendix, lines 41–43.

55. See Jeanne Sandelion, *Montherlant et les femmes*, p. 153.

56. See reference 54 (Appendix, lines 38–40) to compare with reference 53.

57. Montherlant, letter to Elisabeth Zehrfuss, 28 February 1942.

58. Montherlant, *La Reine morte*, Act 3. Sc. 6, p. 169.

59. See Nicole Debrie–Panel, *Montherlant, L'Art et l'amour*, p. 152.

60. See Batchelor, *op. cit.*, p. 93.

61. Montherlant, *Malatesta*, Act 4. Sc. 8, p. 403.

62. Montherlant, *Port–Royal*, p. 914.

63. *Ibid.*, p. 914.

64. *Ibid.*, p. 914.

65. Montherlant, *L'Exil*, Act 1. Sc. 4, p. 34.

66. Montherlant, *L'Exil*, Act 1. Sc. 4, p. 34.

67. Simone de Beauvoir, chapter entitled 'Montherlant ou le pain du dégoût', in *Le Deuxième Sexe*, extract in André Blanc, *Les Critiques de notre temps et Montherlant*, p. 58.

68. Montherlant, Postface to *Le Maître de Santiago*, p. 523, note 1.

69. Montherlant, *Textes sous une occupation*, in *Essais*, p. 1430.

70. Montherlant, *Le Maître de Santiago*, Act 3. Sc. 5, p. 518.

71. *Ibid.*, Act 3. Sc. 5, p. 519.

72. Montherlant, *Le Maître de Santiago*, Act 1. Sc. 1, p. 483.

73. *Ibid.*, Act 2. Sc. 1, p. 497.

74. *Ibid.*, Act 2. Sc. 1, p. 498.

75. *Ibid.*, Act 2. Sc. 2, p. 505.

76. *Ibid.*, Act 3. Sc. 5, p. 517.

77. *Ibid.*, Act 3. Sc. 5, p. 517.

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Notes

78. Montherlant, *La Reine morte*, Act 3. Sc. 6, p. 167.

79. Montherlant, *La Reine morte*, Act 2. Sc. 5, p. 151.

80. Simone de Beauvoir, *op. cit.*, in Blanc, *op. cit.*, p. 59.

81. Montherlant, *La Reine morte*, Act 2. Sc. 5, p. 151.

82. *Ibid.*, Act 2. Sc. 4, p. 143.

83. Montherlant, *La Reine morte*, Act 1. Sc. 4, p. 117.

84. *Ibid*, Act 1. Sc. 4, p. 120.

85. Montherlant, *Malatesta*, Act 4. Sc. 8, p. 403.

86. *Ibid.*, Act 4. Sc. 8, p. 403.

87. *Ibid.*, Act 4. Sc. 8, p. 404.

88. See Batchelor, *op. cit.*, p. 117.

89. Montherlant, *Malatesta*, Act 4. Sc. 8, p. 404.

90. *Ibid.*, Act 4. Sc. 8, p. 404.

91. *Ibid.*, Act 3. Sc. 5, p. 385.

92. Montherlant, *La Reine morte*, Act 1. Sc. 4, p. 118.

93. Montherlant, *Le Maître de Santiago*, Act 2. Sc. 3, p. 510.

94. *Ibid.*, Act 2. Sc. 3, p. 506.

95. Montherlant, *Don Juan*, Act 1. Sc. 4, p. 1031.

96. *Ibid.*, Act 1. Sc. 4, p. 1032.

97. *Ibid.*, Act 1. Sc. 4, p. 1030.

98. *Ibid.*, Act 1. Sc. 4, p. 1031.

99. *Ibid.*, Act 2. Sc. 4, p. 1044.

100. *Ibid.*, Act 2. Sc. 3, p. 1037.

101. Montherlant, *Don Juan*, Act 3. Sc. 5, p. 1071.

102. *Ibid.*, Act 3. Sc. 5, p. 1072.

103. Montherlant, *Don Juan*, Act 3. Sc. 7, p. 1078.

104. Montherlant, *La Reine morte*, Act 2. Sc. 5, p. 153.

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105. *Ibid.*, Act 1. Sc. 1, p. 109.

106. *Ibid.*, Act 2. Sc. 5, p. 150.

107. *Ibid.*, Act 2. Sc. 5, p. 152.

108. *Ibid.*, Act 2. Sc. 5, p. 150.

109. Montherlant, *La Reine morte*, Act 2. Sc. 5, p. 153.

110. *Ibid.*, Act 2. Sc. 5, p. 154.

111. This is an assumption that Simone de Beauvoir makes in 'Montherlant ou le pain du dégoût', in *Le Deuxième Sexe*, extract in André Blanc, *op. cit.*, pp. 57–70.

112. Montherlant, *La Reine morte*, Act 2. Sc. 5, p. 154.

113. *Ibid.*, Act 2. Sc. 5, p. 151.

114. *Ibid.*, Act 2. Sc. 5, p. 154.

115. Montherlant, *Port-Royal*, p. 865.

116. Montherlant, *Port-Royal*, p. 873.

117. *Ibid.*, p. 914.

CHAPTER 2 PURITY 1) Religious Figures

> *... la pureté, à la fin, est toujours blessée, toujours tuée, ...elle reçoit toujours le coup de lance que reçut le coeur de Jésus sur la croix.*[1]

1) Religious Figures

Striving for purity is an important theme in much of Montherlant's theatre. It is an integral part of the religion practised by Alvaro and the nuns of Port-Royal. There is a similarity between the Sisters in *Port-Royal* and Inès in *La Reine morte* in that they all risk death (for so ex-communication would seem to the nuns) for their beliefs. Inès' belief is in a moral code founded on her faith; that of the Sisters is the belief in a Religious Order which directs their faith.

In *Le Maître de Santiago* the quest for purity is at the heart of Alvaro's weariness of the world and his immense desire to withdraw from it. For the nuns of Port-Royal, already separated from the secular world, the purity of their faith is tested by the attempted imposition of a different way of practising their religion.

There are further parallels to be drawn between *Port-Royal* and *Le Maître de Santiago.* The purity of Jansenism combined with the rigours of its practice by the nuns mirrors the way Alvaro practises his religion, rigidly adhering to a strict moral code at odds with the habits of his fellow knights and the contemporary world. The refusal of some of the nuns to compromise their faith in the face of the Pope's demands is reminiscent of Alvaro's refusal to lower his religious and moral standards to fit in with the world he was living in.

The suffering which is an essential part of Alvaro's search for purity:

> Que deviendrais-je, ô Dieu! si je ne souffrais pas?[2]

is also seen to be part of the make-up of the purity sought by the nuns. Soeur Angélique tells Soeur Françoise,

> ,,,j'ajoute que nos oppositions et notre désir de souffrir se concilient fort bien, puisque ces oppositions n'ont jamais servi qu'à nous faire traiter plus mal et souffrir davantage.[3]

There is an undermining of Alvaro's suffering when Bernal suggests that the knight has self-interest at heart:

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> Oui, seulement vous choisissez toujours, en définitive, la voie qui vous plaît.[4]

Similarly, Soeur Angélique's self-pity gets in the way of her quest for purity, revealed when she cries out,

> Qu'ai-je fait pour être à ce point abandonnée?[5]

This contrasts significantly with the strengthening faith of Soeur Françoise, who believes,

> On n'est jamais seule quand on a la foi.[6]

Soeur Angélique typifies the Montherlantian character who is full of contradictions. By creating her thus, the author creates a character worthy of the exploration of internal conflict – a favourite dramatic theme of his. It is more usually his heroes who are exponents of this idea – Ferrante, in *La Reine morte*, by his own admission, consists of a 'noeud épouvantable de contradictions'.[7]

The author lists Soeur Angélique's contradictions in his Préface, contrasting her 'force' and 'faiblesse nerveuse', her 'humilité' and 'orgueil', her 'tendresse' and 'sécheresse'[8]. These inconsistencies are set out for the spectator before the Sister even arrives on the scene, with the novices expressing diverse and contradictory opinions of her. When she does make her appearance, the first impression we have of Soeur Angélique is one of strength. Her very first speech is one of encouragement to the nuns under her care to stand firm against the adversity to be inflicted upon them. The power of her words is enforced by the analogy of the tree trunk standing firm when the branches are swayed by the wind. Yet, despite this veneer of tenacity, the signs of her inner crisis are exposed as soon as her spiritual mother enters the scene. This encounter with Mère Agnès is a crucial scene, designed to win the audience's sympathy for Soeur Angélique. Because we are made party to her doubts and fears, her façade of strength is all the more laudable. Her purity stems from her fortitude which inspires and encourages faith in others whilst losing her own. La Mère Agnès

pays tribute to her importance in the Convent, calling her 'le sel de cette Maison'.[9]

There is a theme of fear throughout Port-Royal which is conveyed mainly through Soeur Angélique. The agitation she expresses caused by 'des hommes qui rôdent et qui épient'[10], is a manifestation of her inner fears resulting from her increasing loss of faith:

> Notre-Seigneur a dit que la vérité délivre. Hélas! la vérité emprisonne. Et l'innocence emprisonne... Je me crains...j'ai peur de tout.[11]

La Mère Agnès believes that Soeur Angélique's doubts and despair stem from human weakness. (She accuses her, 'Vous avez trop pitié de vous-même', and 'Je vous accuse de la part de Dieu de préférer la nature à la grâce.')[12] Endowing her with such human failings gains the audience's sympathy as they can identify with her. But the reasons for her wretchedness go far deeper than this superficial appraisal. Her fears are not founded on self-pity, but rather on a loss of confidence in her ability to believe what she would have others do. Her search for purity through worship has led her to demand standards of herself more rigorous than any she could ever expect others to attain and therein lies the crux of her personal doubt.

Montherlant exploits the audience's sympathy in an unusual way in the scene which centres around the Archbishop and his henchmen followed by the one which amounts to a confrontation between Soeur Françoise and the Archbishop. Throughout these scenes the stage directions ensure that there is some focus on Soeur Angélique even when she is silent, which is for the most part. We see her face drenched with tears, which are the involuntary expression of her feelings. These she tries to mask by an impassive face. When she does speak, briefly, she once again dons her disguise of stoicism to express a belief in a faith which she feels less and less.

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In contrast to Soeur Angélique's increasing doubts Soeur Françoise's faith strengthens, partly in proportion to the forces ranged against her in the form of the Archbishop's pressure to conform. In the face of such opposition, Soeur Françoise, like Alvaro in front of the Knights of the Order, only becomes more firm in her belief. Alvaro had accused his fellow knights of mediocrity and indifference. Soeur Françoise makes a stand for purity, accusing the Archbishop:

Vous voulez le nombre; nous voulons la pureté.[13]

Her inclination to argue a point and to stand up for what she believes in is seen early in the play. She is outspoken on the fact that they would all do better to use their time to serve God instead of wasting it on 'nos frères les disputeurs'[14] and the police. The Archbishop soon recognises in her the spiritedness of 'une raisonneuse'.[15]

There is a suggestion that God's grace is visited upon Soeur Françoise, for her argument with the Archbishop occurs immediately after she has been praying in the oratory. The juxtaposition of these two episodes suggests that she derived strength for her points of view from her prayer. Indeed, she herself refers to 'ce renversement que mon âme vient d'avoir...'[16] I have to agree with Richard Griffiths[17] who places no truth on Soeur Angélique's denial that this could have been grace, since, he suggests, the older nun is no judge, having lost her own faith.

There is a questioning of Soeur Françoise's beliefs early in the play, for she admits to being indifferent to whether or not she signs the 'Formulaire' (the agreement to conform to the Pope's decree concerning methods of worship). In fact, she confesses to having made her replies, under questioning, 'plutôt par union avec la communauté que pour conviction'.[18] She is inclined to refuse to sign more out of antipathy towards those who would press her than out of any certainty of the rightness of the standpoint of Port-Royal. This is evidence of her

obstinacy and rebelliousness at this stage, rather than any purity of thought or strength of faith. It is Soeur Angélique's persuasive rhetoric which serves to show Soeur Françoise the light. Central to her argument against signing the Formulaire is that it is not actually a question of faith and methods of worship, but one of the individual's right to act by her own conscience. This is a declaration of Montherlant's own belief and a theme which is embryonic in *L'Exil*, and one which recurs throughout his theatre.

Soeur Angélique's influence is such that the younger nun's beliefs are strengthened but there is a paradox in that Soeur Angélique, herself, is succumbing to debilitating doubts and despair. This makes of her a tragic figure. In the final scene, her inability to communicate her fears and uncertainities to Soeur Françoise evokes a sympathetic response from the audience, because, as spectators, we have seen her lay bare her soul to Mère Agnès, whereas the young nun can only rely on what she hears from Soeur Angélique's lips to guide her reactions. This leads to an unconscious cruelty on her part as she vociferously condemns anyone who, having any doubts about their faith,

> ...n'arracherait pas son habit dans l'instant, devenu un leurre abominable.[19]

Soeur Françoise compounds her incognizant cruelty with further condemnation:

> Car Dieu punit quelquefois toute une communauté, pour le péché d'une seule.[20]

Soeur Angélique's hesitant repetition of these last words has the dramatic effect of conveying to the audience the depth of her despair and suffering and at the same time emphasising the contrasting confidence that Soeur Françoise now has in her faith.

2) Mother Figures

In Montherlant's theatre purity is not confined to those who are inspired by their religion to seek it. In his portrayal of some of his theatrical mothers there

is a purity which is conspicuous by its absence in the mothers of his prose.

Geneviève's maternal instincts lead her to try to preserve the life of her son by preventing him from enlisting. She is able to isolate her own heroism in the war effort from her family life. Yet Philippe suffers in part because she is voluntarily doing more than her share. She considers war is for others, not for her son, who is 'quelque chose d'unique'.[21] Geneviève does not differ from most mothers the world over in her over-protective feelings, but it is in suppressing her maternal instincts in order to allow Philippe to assert his own freedom of choice and to regain his self-esteem, thus allowing the development of his 'vie intérieure', that Geneviève's purity is manifested.

John Batchelor sees Inès' purity 'in the sense of chastity or freedom from moral defilement' as 'an ideal in the realm of the unrealizable',[22] but on this definition anyone living in the real world would be unable to attain purity, whereas the truly pure soul is one which conquers the corruption and temptations of the world to which it is exposed. In fact it is a classic Christian standpoint that sin can be used as a means of redemption.

Inès finds she cannot encourage corruption even though it would be beneficial to her welfare:

> Cette complicité avec cet enfant... Non, ce n'est pas possible! Je ne peux pas![23]

She therefore commands Dino Del Moro not to continue his eavesdropping on behalf of l'Infante, and she urges him to be as pure as the golden threads woven into his hair.

Some critics, including Michel Mohrt[24], see Inès as a 'simplette' or a 'midinette'. I see her not so much as frivolous, credulous and naïve, but more as a young woman whose simplicity is the basis for her strength. Her values are uncomplicated and in their directness lies her greatness.

At first she does not realise the danger she is in from Ferrante. Indeed, she was not in any danger at first, for had he not just refused Egas Coehlo's request

for her death? No matter that his refusal had been an attempt to assert his own strength amidst the weakness of which his courtiers were delicately accusing him – it was still a refusal:

> Je ne tuerai pas Inès de Castro (*Silence*) Vous avez entendu? Je ne tuerai pas doña Inès.[25]

No matter which of the many ideas put forward by critics, Montherlant or Ferrante himself ('acte inutile, acte funeste')[26], as reasons for the king changing his mind over her death, nevertheless, he eventually makes Inès well aware of his intentions. Her bravery in the face of this knowledge is of statuesque proportions. She does not lose her nerve, but continues to discourse with Ferrante. She does not retaliate by fear, or hatred, or have ideas of vengeance, but simply tells him that she has never believed that man repays kindness by misdeeds except in rare cases. Despite the fact that Ferrante is proving to be one of these exceptions, she declares she has no fear of him:

> Vous vous étonnez peut–être, Sire, que je n'aie pas plus peur de vous.[27]

These are not empty words. The purity and richness of Inès' soul is manifested through her faith:

> ...on est puni par les hommes, mais on ne l'est pas devant Dieu.[28]

Her bravery is all the stronger for it not being founded on ignorance. Not only has Ferrante made clear his intentions, but she has lived with 'une peur vague de *quelque chose*'[29] for some time. In the first act she confesses to Pedro that she feels that a menacing sensation of 'une pluie noire'[30] has hung over them for two years. And she makes several references to death – sometimes begging it to wait:

> Attends, ma mort, attends[31]

and to fear:

> ...j'en ai assez d'avoir tous les jours peur. De retrouver chaque matin cette peur, au réveil, comme un objet laissé la veille au soir sur la table.[32]

L'Infante, too, has warned Inès of the king's intentions:

> La chaîne de vos médailles a appuyé sur votre cou, et l'a marqué d'une raie rouge. C'est la place où vous serez décapitée.[33]

And when l'Infante returns in Act 3 as a shadow is she not in fact Inès' inner voice warning her again of her fate?

> Quitte cette salle immédiatement,

says the shadow.

> N'écoute plus le Roi. Il jette en toi ses secrets désespérés, comme dans une tombe. Ensuite il rabattra sur toi la pierre de la tombe, pour que tu ne parles jamais.[34]

Inès bravely repeats her assertion that she has no fear of the king:

> Je n'ai pas peur de lui.[35]

It must be born in mind that Inès is an expectant mother and this could colour her reponses to the king. Unlike Geneviève, whose protective maternal instincts made her fearful for her son, Inès is perhaps being carried along on a euphoric wave which prevents her from sinking into the depths of despair at her impending death and that of her unborn child.

A lesser character would have been intimidated by Ferrante's cries of horror when she tells him of his future grandson, but instead, Inès eulogises on the future of her unborn child, stressing the need for her to set a moral example in her own life:

> Il s'agit d'être encore plus stricte avec soi, de se sauver de toute bassesse, de vivre droit, sûr, net et pur, pour qu'un être puisse garder plus tard l'image la plus belle possible de vous, tendrement et sans reproche.[36]

Again, as we have seen before, whenever Inès speaks about her close relationship with her unborn baby – her hopes, her fears, her feelings – Montherlant uses the intimate thoughts that Mme. Zehrfuss wrote to him as a basis for her dialogue:

> Il s'agit d'être encore plus stricte avec soi, de se garder, de toute bassesse, de vivre droit, sûre, nette, pure pour qu'un être puisse garder plus tard l'image la plus belle possible, tendre et sans reproche.[37]

I can not agree with John Batchelor, who accuses Inès of 'child–like naïveté'[38] in revealing her pregnancy to the king. It is in fact her innate

honesty which prompts her to do this. Ferrante has revealed his innermost thoughts to her – it is an established fact that potential murderers often become intimate with their victims. At this stage Inès does not see herself as a victim. Her own integrity is such that she wishes to exchange truth for truth:

> Ô mon Roi, je ne vous abandonnerai pas parce que vous dites la vérité, mais au contraire, moi aussi, je vous dirai enfin la vérité totale...[39]

What Batchelor sees as naïveté I see as an illustration of her natural purity.

Like Geneviève, it is as a mother that Inès' purity is put to the test. It could be argued that she fails, since sacrificing her own life to Ferrante means denying her unborn child its right to live. However, there is the view which can be taken, which is that her life – and therefore that of her child – is doomed, no matter which course she takes, and she fears retribution and death at the hands of the apparently solicitous Infante.

3) Wife Figure

Isotta de Rimini adores her husband, despite his recurrent infidelity:

> Les nerfs de mon visage se détendent quand je le vois heureux,[40]

she tells the Pope. But how far her actions are pure and how far motivated by a fear of all she will lose if Malatesta dies is open to question. She does not have the innocence of Inès, whose first concern is for her husband, but after all, Isotta is about twenty years older than Inès and has more experience of life. She is not, therefore, in the first flush of passion and her love is more caring and maternal. But this alone does not make her motives for preserving Malatesta's life more selfish. Jean Datin feels that Isotta is motivated by fear in trying to avert Malatesta's death:

> La peur de perdre sa sécurité,[41]

but there is no evidence in the text for this. On the contrary, there have been

many occasions in the past when Isotta has actually encouraged her husband to fight honourable battles, where he could have lost his life. If she had been thinking only of herself and her security, she would have tried to prevent him from going – as Geneviève, at the beginning of *L'Exil*, prevented Philippe from enlisting. Isotta tells Malatesta:

> ...quand vous alliez à la bataille, je ne vous ai jamais arrêté, jamais gêné. Ni dans aucune des occasions innombrables où vous avez joué votre vie.[42]

Putting Malatesta's welfare before her own is pure and unselfish. Nor does she beg Malatesta not to die, but:

> ...ne mourez pas pour rien! Mourez s'il le faut pour quelque chose, mais pas pour rien, non, pas pour rien![43]

Would she be saying this if her motives were self–interested? This is hardly ensuring her own security.

No, it is not that Isotta is interested in her own future, but in Malatesta's for *his own sake.* She is protective of him without demanding anything in return. Indeed, Malatesta says to her:

> ...je n'ai jamais trouvé qu'en toi ce don qui ne demande rien en échange...[44]

Isotta's wisdom is of a more sophisticated nature than that of Inès. In her interview with Ferrante, Inès is moved to act by instinctive honesty and the innocence of her years.

In this she is not unlike Mariana whose every action is inspired by a purity that is untainted by the world. But Isotta, like Geneviève, is an older woman. They have acquired wisdom through experience. This experience helps Isotta when she seeks to prevent Malatesta from carrying out his impulsive desire to kill the Pope. She does not say do not do it – as she knows this would be just the incentive an egotistical man like him would need. Instead, she tries diplomacy. She plays for time. She guides Malatesta's thoughts to realise that to kill the Pope and then be killed himself would be inglorious:

> ...il s'agit de vivre, pour pouvoir tuer sans risque. Tué, vous serez aussi vaincu que le pape tué.[45]

In her interview with the Pope her wisdom takes another turn. The passion she had withheld from her arguments with Malatesta, knowing that such a tactic would have had an adverse effect – (when she cried he told her,

> Prends garde à tes larmes, Isotta. Quand je ne serais pas décidé à mon acte, tes larmes m'y décideraient, à seule fin que je ne pusse pas croire que ce sont elles qui m'ont arrêté,[46]

and she strategically and immediately stopped) – she now uses on the Pope. It is a wise move and gains the breathing space for Malatesta that she hopes will prevent a catastrophe.

Isotta's purity can be questioned on a different point. She is temporarily preventing Malatesta from making a false move, but the action of murder itself she would appear to condone. She does not discourage Malatesta from killing the Pope, but merely from killing him *now*, hastily and at great risk.

Therefore, Isotta's moral purity is in question. What is not in question is her undoubted grandeur as a selfless, caring person – which point leads me on to Mariana.

4) Unmarried Girls

Nowhere in any of Montherlant's plays is there a female so sublime as Mariana. Her purity is unquestionable. It simply remains for it to be illustrated.

The interior action of *Le Maître de Santiago* is the striving for purity and this is illustrated not only by Alvaro, but also by his daughter, Mariana. Her obsession with purity is seen from the very first scene of the play and it is tied up with her adoration of her father and the desire to emulate him.

Rather than interpret his preference for serving water to his guests as a frugality, she sees in it a pursuit, in exaggerated form, of purity:

> Mon père a voulu l'eau la plus pure, pour les messieurs,[47]

she tells Tia Campanita, and in drinking the water herself she is ecstatic, as though there were indeed something extraordinary and untainted about it:

> Encore! Encore! Oh! il y a là quelque chose que j'adore.[48]

Every time that Tia Campanita suggests that her father could pay more attention to her and to such worldly concerns as the dilapidation of the room, Mariana is quick to defend him, believing he has more important things to which to dedicate his life. In putting her father before herself, Mariana reveals a purity which is obvious to others, but hidden from herself. She tells Tia Campanita,

> Pour mon père, seul est important, ou plutôt seul est essentiel, ou plutôt seul est réel ce qui se passe à l'intérieur de l'âme.[49]

Thus it is as early as this that we observe the deep affinity that exists between Mariana and her father.

Mariana has an idealised vision of marriage, equating it with the practising of a religion in her desire to prove herself worthy through trials and tribulations:

> Je ne voudrais pas une vie facile. Je voudrais une vie où l'on aurait besoin de courage.[50]

Her desire to be as one with Jacinto to the exclusion of all else must be borne in mind if we are to evaluate the extent of the sacrifice she makes for her father and in her pursuit of purity. There are connotations of religious fervour in her feelings for Jacinto and this emphasises the importance to her of the relationship. She tells Jacinto's father,

> Je veux entrer dans le mariage, et refermer la porte comme on fait quand on est entré dans un oratoire, et ne plus regarder derrière moi, jamais.[51]

Mariana is almost a paragon of virtue, but not quite. The test she so desires to prove herself comes in the form of the temptation to connive with Don Bernal to persuade her father to go to the New World, thus ensuring that he would earn enough money for a dowry for her. The very fact that she at first succumbs to this temptation again emphasises the strength of her desire for earthly happiness by

marrying Jacinto, but she survives the test to her integrity. No sooner has she started on the slippery slope of deceit, than she examines her conscience, and in an impassioned prayer to God for guidance, we see that her love for her father is more powerful than that for Jacinto.

It is her love for Alvaro which inspires her to purity through truth. Her purity is all the stronger for it not being founded on a life of ease. She suffers the deprivation not only of worldly comforts but of kind and loving words from her father. It is significant that her prayer for guidance immediately follows a scene with Alvaro in which he expresses his impatience with her, accusing her of carelessness in her appearance. Rather than feeling distressed Mariana revels in surmounting such 'tests' and striving for the perfection that she believes her father attains.

Her desire to measure up to Alvaro is coupled with a feeling of inferiority compared to him, which is evident in the self-scorn she displays when Don Bernal tells her she is so like her father. Although this is praise to her ears, her humility is such that she replies,

> Je me méprise trop pour que ce que je suis soit semblable à mon père.[52]

Mariana does not recognise that her humility is part of an innate purity which she already possesses. This humility, coupled with her abnegation, contributes to the perfection of Mariana's purity.

There is a simplicity in Mariana's quest for purity, based as it is on a dedicated determination to follow her father's example. There can be no doubt that Montherlant intended to create a creature so sublime.

However, in his invention of l'Infante, in *La Reine morte*, the author has created a much more complex individual. She is an ambiguous character whose motives are suspect. By her own words she appears a young woman of integrity and honesty, but the love she expresses for her country is undermined by her Maids of Honour who say,

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> L'Infante n'aimait pas tant les Navarrais, lorsqu'elle était en Navarre!...Ni le froid, ni la brume de neige.[53]

There is decided ambiguity in her attitude towards Inès. L'Infante has been brought all the way from Spain to be rejected by her supposed suitor, and the reason for that rejection is that Pedro loves Inès, and in fact is already married to her.

Now either l'Infante is such a pure and noble young woman, that having first recovered from the insult to her pride, she wishes genuinely to save Inès from her fate of death at the king's hands. Or, she is a very cunning, clever creature who wishes to take Inès to Spain merely to exact her revenge on her for the shame that has been thrust upon her. Her Maids of Honour actually liken her to 'l'oiseau de proie'[54]. Could it be that Inès is the prey? It would certainly be a very natural reaction for a scorned woman to want revenge, but if this is her motive then she counted without an adversary so pure and even so intelligent, as Inès. We might ask, why did Inès not take the opportunity to flee to ensure the safety of her unborn child? Was she really selfish and so besotted by her husband that she preferred to stay near him? Or did she suspect l'Infante's motives and choose death near Pedro rather than possible humiliation and death far away at the hands of l'Infante?

L'Infante's purity, therefore, is in question. Either she is an evil creature with a mask of goodness, or she is indeed a character of grand moral stature. Let the last word be hers. She says she believes in two glories:

> ...la gloire divine, qui est que Dieu soit content de vous, et la gloire humaine, qui est d'être content de soi. En vous savant, je conquiers ces deux gloires.[55]

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Notes

1. Henry de Montherlant, *Le Maître de Santiago*, Act 1. Sc. 4, p. 493.
2. *Ibid.*, Act 2. Sc. 2, p. 505.
3. Montherlant, *Port-Royal*, p. 869.
4. Montherlant, *Le Maître de Santiago*, Act 2. Sc. 2, p. 505.
5. Montherlant, *Port-Royal*, p. 914.
6. *Ibid.*, p. 915.
7. Montherlant, *La Reine morte*, Act 3. Sc. 8, p. 176.
8. Montherlant, *Préface* to *Port-Royal*, in *Montherlant Théâtre*, p. 846.
9. Montherlant, *Port-Royal*, p. 875.
10. *Ibid.*, p. 877.
11. *Ibid.*, p. 877.
12. *Ibid.*, p. 885.
13. Montherlant, *Port-Royal*, p. 901.
14. *Ibid.*, p. 863.
15. *Ibid.*, p. 899.
16. *Ibid.*, p. 912.
17. See Richard Griffiths, Introduction to a critical edition of *Port-Royal*, p. xlviii.
18. Montherlant, *Port-Royal*, p. 867.
19. Montherlant, *Port-Royal*, p. 913.
20. *Ibid.*, p. 913.
21. Montherlant, *L'Exil*, Act 1. Sc. 4, p. 33.
22. John Batchelor, *Existence and Imagination*, p. 95.
23. Montherlant, *La Reine morte*, Act 3. Sc. 2, p. 158.
24. Quoted by Aurélieu Weiss, *Héroïnes du théâtre de Henry de Montherlant*, p. 15.
25. Montherlant, *La Reine morte*, Act 2. Sc. 2, p. 137.
26. *Ibid.*, Act 3. Sc. 7, p. 174.

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27. *Ibid.*, Act 3. Sc. 6, p. 172.

28. *Ibid.*, Act 3. Sc. 6, p. 172.

29. *Ibid.*, Act 3. Sc. 6, p. 172.

30. *Ibid.*, Act 1. Sc. 4, p. 118.

31. *Ibid.*, Act 2. Sc. 4, p. 146.

32. *Ibid.*, Act 1. Sc. 4, p. 119.

33. Montherlant, *La Reine morte*, Act 2. Sc. 5, p. 146.

34. *Ibid.*, Act 3. Sc. 6, p. 167.

35. *Ibid.*, Act 3. Sc. 6, p. 167.

36. *Ibid.*, Act 3. Sc. 6, p. 168.

37. See Appendix, lines 59–62.

38. Batchelor, *op. cit.*, p. 96.

39. Montherlant, *La Reine morte*, Act 3. Sc. 6, p. 167.

40. Montherlant, *Malatesta*, Act 3. Sc. 5, p. 389.

41. Jean Datin, *Montherlant et l'héritage de la Renaissance*, p. 123.

42. Montherlant, *Malatesta*, Act 1. Sc. 8, p. 357.

43. *Ibid.*, Act 1. Sc. 8, p. 358.

44. *Ibid.*, Act 4. Sc. 9, p. 404.

45. Montherlant, *Malatesta*, Act 1. Sc. 8, p. 359.

46. *Ibid.*, Act 1. Sc. 8, p. 358.

47. Montherlant, *Le Maître de Santiago*, Act 1. Sc. 1, p. 481.

48. Montherlant, *Le Maître de Santiago*, Act 1. Sc. 1, p. 481.

49. *Ibid.*, Act 1. Sc. 1, p. 482.

50. *Ibid.*, Act 2. Sc. 3, p. 508.

51. *Ibid.*, Act 2. Sc. 3, p. 508.

52. Montherlant, *Le Maître de Santiago*, Act 2. Sc. 3, p. 508.

53. Montherlant, *La Reine morte*, Act 1. Sc. 1, p. 109.

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54. *Ibid.*, Act 1. Sc. 1, p. 110.

55. *Ibid.*, Act 2. Sc. 5, p. 149.

CHAPTER 3 SYMBOLS

> *Le jour où j'ai mis le point final à la réédition des Olympiques, nous avons été à demi encerclés par un incendie de forêt, magnifique spectacle. Je suis jaloux des signes (signa) de Lacretelle!*[1]

Montherlant was a great lover of and even a believer in signs and portents as is revealed in his letters to Mme Elisabeth Zehrfuss.[2]

Although Montherlant's stage-settings are simple, as he believed the decor and exterior drama should be subordinate to the exploration of the interior action, this very simplicity is often put to good use as a symbol, or even a reflection, of the interior action. This is particularly so in *Port-Royal*, where the stage directions tell us,

> Le décor est d'une extrême simplicité.
> Murs jaune-gris, clairs.
> Par la fenêtre ouverte, le soleil entre violemment dans la pièce.[3]

The choice of 'violemment' to describe the sun is deliberate, as the sun is thus presented as a symbol of the menacing intrusion of the outside world on the quiet, orderly, religious world of the nuns. In Soeur Angélique's anguish the sun is unbearable to her, as if it is related to her inner torment. In closing the shutters she symbolically shuts out her fears because 'La menace monte avec le soleil'.[4] The link between the sun and menace is again made when the arrival of the Archbishop and his entourage is captured dramatically as they pause on the threshold of the chapel door, 'pris dans le rayon de soleil venant de la fenêtre comme dans le feu d'un projecteur'[5].

Similarly, in *Le Maître de Santiago*, the walls being 'entièrement nus, de teinte gris ocre, plutôt foncée'[6], provide an austere backcloth for the dramatic splash of the single, large cross, with, suspended next to it, the white cloak of the Ordre de Santiago, with its striking red sword embroidered on it. As a border on the wall there are three coats of arms topped by helmets. This setting is a symbolic representation of the main theme of the play - the striving for purity and moral values.

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As it was in Port-Royal, the symbolism is underlined in the deliberate choice of words in the stage directions:

> (The coats of arms) éclatent, richement, curieusement, et presque convulsivement ornementés, sur la nudité du mur, comme trois oasis luxuriantes dans un désert aride.[7]

'Eclatent' and 'comme trois oasis luxuriantes' suggest that the purity and moral values symbolised by the coats of arms are to be highly valued and there is the implication that the 'desert aride' signifies the loss of moral standards amongst which Alvaro strives to maintain the religious values of the old Order.

The fact that the coats of arms and helmets are 'posés de biais comme s'ils étaient fouettés et bousculés par une rafale'[8] is a portent of the buffeting that Alvaro will come up against in his arguments with his fellow knights.

We have seen that in Alvaro's pursuit of purity he serves water instead of wine. The water in its turn becomes 'le symbole de la pureté'[9].

In the intensity of feeling which Mariana experiences when drinking the cold water she becomes ecstatic about the burning effect it has on her:

> Oh!... elle est glacée, et elle me brûle. On dirait que je mange du feu.[10]

This sensation of heightened sensitivity in response to the perception of interchanging and opposing temperatures is a portent of Alvaro's mystical experience at the end of the play, when the falling snow seems to him like the tongues of fire descending on the apostles with all the connotations of purity and mysticism that this conjures up.

The importance of the word 'brûle' as a fervent emotion is an echo of Tia Campanita's words, when she was referring to another symbol of purity – the Order of Santiago.

> ...l'Ordre de Santiago déchoit: il ne brûle plus vraiment que dans le coeur de votre père,[11]

The third symbol of purity which Montherlant uses recurringly in this play is snow, coupled with whiteness. The first scene opens with snow falling outside the

window, and the cloak of the Order of Santiago is a stark splash of white, hanging on the inside wall, throughout the first Act. For all these symbols suggest a moral purity, the whiteness, coldness and stillness also suggest something cold and sterile which may be a reflection of don Alvaro's character.

Just as Mariana's and her father's striving for spiritual purity is symbolised by the snow and whiteness, so, when there is a possibility of Mariana finding earthly happiness, this is reflected in the fact that it stops snowing, and a pale sun breaks through as if to illuminate her future. This is a contradistinctive use of the symbol of the sun, which in *Port-Royal* Montherlant employs to suggest menace.

In Act 3 the snow falls non-stop and buries the countryside, leaving Alvaro and Mariana in front of God. Thus, from the beginning to the end of the play, the snow underlines the development of the interior action of the drama, which is a striving for purity.

In the final scene of the play Alvaro envelops himself and Mariana in the white mantle which is the cloak of the Order, to symbolise their purity and union. This is the highest accolade he can give his daughter, as the cloak represents the Chivalric Order which in its turn represents the highest standards of morality and purity.

Their transportation to the realms of mysticism is symbolised by the apparent disappearance of the whole world beneath the snow. There is euphoria in their exclamations:

> MARIANA: La neige engloutit toute l'Espagne. Il n'y a plus d'Espagne.
> ALVARO: Je le savais depuis longtemps: il n'y a plus d'Espagne.[12]

The snow, whiteness and purity are synonymous, but the whiteness also signifies spiritual frigidity, implying that there is a high price to be paid for the search for purity.

Water, which in *Le Maître de Santiago* is a symbol of purity, is an image that occurs in *La Reine morte* as a concept of love. Pedro and Inès are walking

in the garden of her home and Inès is trying to inject some of her courage into Pedro so that he will tell the king of their marriage. She may never make a man of Pedro, but her declaration of love certainly inspires him to wax lyrical, rather in the way that Isotta's love inspires Malatesta to lyrical heights. Not only would Pedro like to spend many hours in the restful garden with Inès, next to the fountain with its little drops of water intermittently alighting on them, but he would breathe in the droplets as they fell:

> Et un chant doux comme la tristesse venait par moments de la route, le chant des casseurs de pierres, qui venait et cessait lui aussi, comme la poussière d'eau selon le caprice du vent.[13]

The close relationship between water and love is drawn by Inès in her allegory of the fountain as a metaphor for love, both inevitably following the course that destiny has laid out for them. She tells l'Infante:

> Aimer, je ne sais rien faire d'autre. Voyez cette cascade: elle ne lutte pas, elle suit sa pente. Il faut laisser tomber les eaux.[14]

L'Infante continues the metaphor, contradicting Inès' idea of the water (or love) following its inevitable course. She tells Inès:

> L'eau est dirigée dans des canaux. La rame la bat, la proue la coupe. Partout je la vois violentée.[15]

L'Infante's association of water with violence is in direct contrast to Inès concept of it – she equates the scarcely perceptible movement of the baby within her with 'une barque sur une eau calme'[16]. Thus the two young women have contrary attitudes towards life. Montherlant portrays Inès as a more gentle creature, whose love for Pedro and her baby engenders a certain optimism, despite her hidden fears.

References to drinking have sexual overtones in both *La Reine morte* and *Le Maître de Santiago*. Inès says that to be queen would be an ordeal for her. The play on the word 'calice' with its association of 'boire le calice jusqu'à la lie', leads to a continuation of the metaphor of drinking and its associated sexual connotations:

> ...être reine m'est un calice, et...je n'ai voulu le boire que pour le boire bouche à bouche avec vous.[17]

Her feeling of sensuality is expressed more intensely after her first interview with Ferrante. The shadow of her impending doom heightens her passion for Pedro, and once again the image of drinking is linked with sensuality:

> Ah! laisse-moi boire encore. Que je te tienne dans ma bouche comme font les féroces oiseaux quand ils se possèdent en se roulant dans la poussière.[18]

This image recurs in *Le Maître de Santiago* when Mariana tells Tia Campanita she does not merely drink the water: 'je la mange!'[19]

At the end of the play water is used as a metaphor to express the intimacy there now exists between Alvaro and Mariana:

> ...tout d'un coup, nos eaux se sont confondues, et nous roulons vers la même mer.[20]

In contrast to these images of purity, love and sensuality, water is also used as a symbol of evil. Whereas the water from the fountain transmits to Inès a sensation of strength – 'cette eau si fraîche, mon seul soutien de toute la journée'[21], – in her bleaker moments of despair, she feels that there hangs over them 'cette menace, cette sensation d'une pluie noire sans cesse prête à tomber'[22].

The foreboding of menace experienced by Inès is a constant bedfellow of Soeur Angélique, in *Port-Royal*. She is 'fatiguée d'avoir peur'[23], and the continual brave front she puts on in front of the other nuns, and the constant reassurance she feels she must give them is taking its toll on her weakening spirit. She experiences fear and a sense of losing her way in a dream which parallels her growing doubts about her faith.

Another dream which plays a symbolic role in *Port-Royal* is that of Soeur Marie-Claire, which consists of 'une bête épouvantable, d'une noirceur extraordinaire'[24] roaring between their convent and the royal palace. It is interpreted by Soeur Gabrielle as an analogy of the perpetual struggle which

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Port-Royal has had to endure against the secular world. At this very early point in the play we see evidence of Soeur Angélique's determination to curb her own fears in order to reassure the other nuns - she could so easily have admitted to her own disturbing dream, but she refrains, and in fact adopts a light-hearted manner with them.

When she recounts Soeur Marie-Claire's dream to Mère Agnès her bravado has left her and her naked fear is revealed as she remembers Mère Angélique's comments on the dream:

"Nous tuerons la Bête, mais la Bête nous tuera."[25]

The significance of this remark is later made clear when she unequivocally equates the Beast with the Pope's decree:

Cette signature est la marque de la Bête.[26]

Yet there is a deeper significance to the symbolism. For here we see Montherlant using *Port-Royal*, as he did other work, as a vehicle for his theme of the individual's struggle to stand up for his/her rights. Often this means the freedom simply to be different.

Like many of his plays, *Port-Royal* is a psychological drama. Just as Ferrante needed Inès in order to expose to the audience a self-examination of his insecurities and fears, so Mère Agnès provides Soeur Angélique with the opportunity to reveal to us, what she would never show to the other nuns - the baring of her soul. This is a typical Montherlantian theme.

Colour has an important place in the symbolism of Montherlant's theatre. Traditionally, in literature, white is the symbol of purity and goodness and black represents evil. Montherlant adheres to this tradition as we have seen in *Le Maître de Santiago*. Similarly, in *Port-Royal*, the purity of the old Order is contrasted with the new, in the white robes of the nuns of Port-Royal and the 'Soeurs de la nuit', who come to replace them, 'entièrement vêtues de noir'[27].

Their black garments echo the darkness and despair experienced by Soeur Angélique and at the same time they represent the triumph of the Pope's changes over Port-Royal.

Montherlant has not chosen to adhere only to this concept of black symbolising evil for the Archbishop and his entourage, however, and this is for a very good reason. Although, as the Pope's representatives, they are in opposition to the nuns of Port-Royal, they also perform a more important function in the play. They, and in particular the Archbishop, serve as the catalyst for the interior action of the play to proceed - that is, the conflict between the nuns' belief that their religion is right and that the manner of worship imposed by the Pope is wrong, coupled with Soeur Angélique's crisis of faith and Soeur Françoise's fortified faith. To emphasise the dramatic conflict between those opposing factions Montherlant has chosen that, in contrast to the plain, white robes of the nuns of Port-Royal, the Archbishop and his attendants should be dressed colourfully in gold and red, not forgetting the symbolic black. He compares them to 'une assemblée de magnifiques et un peu monstrueux insectes'[28]. On stage the dramatic effect of this splash of colour is spectacular. The insect imagery is repeated when various officials and police are described as 'insectes coruscants et effrayants...qui hypnotise une troupe d'oiseaux apeurés'[29]. The analogy symbolises the destruction (of the old Order and of Soeur Angélique's faith) which follows their appearance. At the same time they can be seen as symbols of profanity in a place consecrated to the worship of God.

In the eyes of the nuns, the Archbishop, himself, becomes a symbol of a weakened Christianity which blows with the wind of current doctrine instead of adhering to the fundamental purity of a simple faith.

Montherlant also uses contrasts of silence and sound to dramatic effect in his theatre. The visits of the police are proceded by stormy weather, according to

Soeur Louise. The arrival of Archbishop Péréfixe is accompanied by the convent clock striking twelve – symbolic of the twelve nuns who will be made to leave.

There is further significance in the clock chiming twelve. Soeur Angélique is obsessed with the 'démons du milieu du jour'[30]. She sees in the date and time (26th August, middle of the year and mid-day) not only the hour of demons, but, in the silence, a foreboding of the abandonment of God:

> Il y a un silence et un abandon, en août, qui me figurent terriblement le silence et l'abandon de Dieu.[31]

The link between silence and desertion can be seen in the final scenes of both *Port-Royal* and *La Reine morte*. In both these scenes the language takes second place to the setting. After the appearance of Inès' body, carried on a stretcher to the accompaniment of bells ringing, the silence which follows has the dramatic effect of focussing the audience's mind on the cameos taking place in this final scene. These pockets of silent but significant action illustrate the ultimate betrayal, first of all by the courtiers, who abandon the king's litter to move near to Inès, and the final, if at first hesitant, betrayal of the young page, Dino del Moro, as he foresakes Ferrante's body to join the others in kneeling next to Inès. There are further cameos encapsulated in this silent scene – there is Pedro weeping over Inès' body and then the positioning of the crown on her abdomen, with its underlying implication[32], intensified by the lack of sound, which concentrates the audience's attention.

The absence of sound in the final scene of *Port-Royal* is also accompanied by complete emptiness of the stage on two occasions. This has the effect of accentuating the feeling of abandonment by God. The deserted stage immediately after Soeur Angélique's agonised expression of doubt about her faith underlines her spiritual void. The immobile figure of an anonymous nun, who appears alone at the chapel door, adds to the sense of isolation which pervades this scene. The silent horror expressed on her face at what she sees approaching from outside is

all the more dramatic for the lack of any accompanying scream. Her silence serves to concentrate the audience's mind.

The interruption of silence is all the more striking, when it occurs, because of its contrast. The noise of the carriages, offstage, signifying the arrival of the new nuns, brings with it a sense of menace. When the silence is broken by the sound of the None, symbolic of the hour of Jesus' crucifixion, there is the implication that it is also symbolising the hour of deepest despair for the nuns. However, in the analogy there is also the notion that the perpetrators of suffering do not reign supreme for ever. Just as Jesus was persecuted, crucified and then rose from the Cross to the Kingdom of Heaven, so there is hope for the nuns of Port-Royal:

Aujourd'hui est le jour de l'homme,

says an anonymous nun,

Demain viendra le jour de Dieu.[33]

Having seen this play performed, it confirms in my mind that Montherlant's drama is not intended just for reading, like a novel. Although some of his leading characters have lengthy speeches to execute which are reminiscent of those of his heroes in his prose work, and which would perhaps benefit from a more leisured study permitted by reading, the success of his use of colour, sound and silence can only be appreciated when seen live. In *La Reine morte*, *Le Maître de Santiago* and *Port-Royal* in particular, the impact of these, coupled with the symbolism they entail, are dramatic effects which serve to underline for the spectator the interior action of the plays.

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Notes

1. Henry de Montherlant, letter to Elisabeth Zehrfuss, 15 February 1938. Montherlant's reference to Lacretelle relates to incidents which preceded the said man's speech – someone dropped dead in a chair at the same time as a flash of lightening lit up the room, followed by a clap of thunder.

2. In the same letter of (1.) above Montherlant wrote: Quant aux présages, j'ai lu *tous* – ou presque tous – les auteurs de l'Antiquité gréco–romaine qui en sont farçis.

3. Montherlant, *Port–Royal*, stage directions, p. 852.

4. *Ibid.*, p. 878.

5. *Ibid.*, stage directions, p. 887.

6. Montherlant, *Le Maître de Santiago*, stage directions, p. 479.

7. Montherlant, *Le Maître de Santiago*, p. 479.

8. *Ibid.*, stage directions, p. 479.

9. *Ibid.*, Act 1. Sc. 1, p. 481.

10. *Ibid.*, Act 1. Sc. 1, p. 481.

11. *Ibid.*, Act 1. Sc. 1, p. 480.

12. Montherlant, *Le Maître de Santiago*, Act 3. Sc. 5, p. 519.

13. Montherlant, *La Reine morte*, Act 1. Sc. 4, p. 118.

14. *Ibid.*, Act 2. Sc. 5, p. 151.

15. *Ibid.*, Act 2. Sc. 5, p. 151.

16 *Ibid.*, Act 2. Sc. 4, p. 144.

17. Montherlant, *La Reine morte*, Act 1. Sc. 4, p. 118.

18. *Ibid.*, Act 2. Sc. 4, p. 144.

19. Montherlant, *Le Maître de Santiago*, Act 1. Sc. 1, p. 481.

20. *Ibid.*, Act 3. Sc. 5, p. 517.

21. Montherlant, *La Reine morte*, Act 2. Sc. 4, p. 144.

22. *Ibid.*, Act 1. Sc. 4, p. 118.

23. Montherlant, *Port–Royal*, p. 882.

24. *Ibid.*, p. 863.

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25. Montherlant, *Port-Royal*, p. 883.

26. *Ibid.*, p. 911.

27. *Ibid.*, stage directions, p. 916.

28. Montherlant, *Port-Royal*, p. 887.

29. *Ibid.*, p. 892.

30. Montherlant, *Port-Royal*, p. 878.

31. *Ibid.*, p. 878.

32. See this thesis, Part 2, Ch. 1. Love (2) Maternal.

33. Montherlant, *Port-Royal*, p. 891.

CHAPTER 4 POLARISATION OF THE SEXES

> *Il est vrai que la progression dramatique est fonction de la psychologie des personnages et, singulièrement, des incertitudes de Ferrante. Mais elle obéit aussi à un autre système, prémédité ou non, qui consiste à réunir les protagonistes deux par deux, de façon à confronter leurs caractères, leurs sentiments, leurs idées.*[1]
>
> *The opposition between the two worlds of man and woman is often seen in Montherlant's works.*[2]

In Montherlant's theatre there is the ever-present theme of opposition. The juxtaposition of characters, usually male and female, highlights the difference between them. The purpose of exploring the contrast is to see whether the position of women in Montherlant's theatre is seen to be superior, inferior or equal to that of men.

Alvaro, in *Le Maître de Santiago*, is a very powerful character. He is of the 'race des durs' who cannot compromise with the new way of life and the consequent lowering of moral standards in Spain. He is a misanthropist and he even includes his daughter in his dislike of mankind:

> ... la famille par le sang est maudite,[3]

he tells Don Bernal. Like Ferrante, who says

> ... élever un enfant pour qu'il vive, et se dégrade dans la vie,[4]

Alvaro too, believes 'les enfants dégradent.'[5]
This paternal reaction is in direct contrast to the maternal feelings of love and protection already explored in previous chapters. It is this distaste for his own flesh and blood that inclines us to have a more sympathetic response towards Mariana, and an antipathy towards her father.

The contrast between his scorn for her and her love for him is accentuated because both emotions are sustained in exaggerated proportions.

For all Alvaro professes to love Mariana 'le plus au monde'[6], his contempt for all that the world represents belittles that love. His love for her is further undermined when he expresses a similarity between his love for Mariana and his love for Spain – which is not unconditional, but in fact depends on how worthy it is:

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> ...j'aime l'Espagne en proportion de ses mérites, exactement comme je ferais pour un pays étranger. De même, que Mariana soit ma fille ne me rendra jamais exagéré en sa faveur.[7]

In stark contrast, Mariana loves and admires her father unreservedly. She accepts without question his total disregard of her:

> Ce qui serait anormal, ce serait qu'un homme de son âge, et ayant ses préoccupations, trouvât beaucoup d'agrément à la société d'une petite demoiselle comme moi.[8]

Her desire to emulate him leads her to follow a path which, like her father's, is strict, and allows for no deviation:

> Il va droit devant lui...à droite et à gauche, rien.[9]

Alvaro did not always reject the world. He was once a social person and a hero of Granada. Presumably he once experienced the carnal love that he now rejects so violently. It is not so much the rejection of mankind in general that the spectator finds insupportable. After all, this is a sound Christian attitude practised by many monks and nuns in their efforts to draw nearer to God. It is the unnatural rejection of a daughter by her father that is unacceptable. The first two commandments are, 'Thou shalt love the Lord thy God', and 'Thou shalt love they neighbour as thyself'. Alvaro makes a conscious choice of the former, and a deliberate rejection of the latter. Mariana, on the other hand, adores her father and loves God.

Montherlant has created in Alvaro a very austere and high-minded Christian - one whose adherence to the Christian concepts of purity and poverty are more than counterbalanced by his pride, intolerance and conceit, and who cannot see that these failings will surely prevent a true communion between him and God.

In all his characteristics and ideals, Don Alvaro is an extremist. His attitude to poverty is an extreme statement of the religious tradition. All the money he inherited on his father's death, he gave away to the Order. As a Christian concept this is highly commendable. However, don Bernal sees it as a sin against

Mariana, as it is depriving her of her inheritance, but Alvaro feels that he would be sinning against her soul if he gave her riches. Who is right? Our ambivalence towards Alvaro is no less than the author's own. He wrote long and detailed notes to explain away the many contradictory facets of Alvaro's character.[10] This is evidence of both the author's and his character's 'syncrétisme et alternance'.

In his dealings with youth, Alvaro is impatient and scornful. After listening to Alvaro's exhortation on the changing values in the world and the demand for no compromise between the old standards and those of the contemporary world, Letamendi approaches Alvaro. He has been troubled by the knight's words and he is rethinking his position about going to America. When he asks Alvaro for advice, the knight is disdainful and tells him to depart. When asked by Olmeda why he did so, Alvaro shows his contempt for youth:

> Parce que, lui, cela n'a aucune importance. Les jeunes gens n'ont l'audace de rien, ni le respect de rien, ni l'intelligence de rien.[11]

Soria makes a penetrating remark when he, too, is dismissed by Alvaro, and has been reproached by him for his youth:

> Je vous dirai ceci: que les jeunes ont des façons brusques, mais souvent le coeur modeste, tandis que les vieux, souvent, avec des apparences saintes, ont le coeur dur et orgueilleux.[12]

This pride that Soria accuses him of is displayed many times in the play. It is a sin which is totally absent in Mariana. His pride is coupled with an extreme egoism, both in his relations with his daughter and his associations with God. It is this egoism which prevents him from recognising in Mariana a pure soul, and from achieving his own complete union with God. Only with Mariana's help is he able to accomplish mystical union.

Mariana exhibits a humility which is totally lacking in her father. She is scarcely tolerated by him and he finds her very nearness an obstacle in his search for God. The irony of this is that it is only when Mariana joins him in the final scene that he is able, through her and with her, to reach his God. His ecstasy

becomes a form of oblivion to everything other than their mystical state:

> ...il n'y a plus d'Espagne. Eh bien! périsse l'Espagne, périsse l'univers! Si je fais mon salut et si tu fais le tien, tout est sauvé et tout est accompli.[13]

I have already emphasised the depth of Mariana's sacrifice in renouncing her lover and the whole world. Alvaro had expressed the need for 'un immense retirement'[14] so his was an easy sacrifice compared to Mariana's. His rejection of the world can perhaps be seen as an escapism and his refusal to compromise as a failure to sacrifice his own ideals to the modern way of life. One could consider it a greater sacrifice to live in a world of which one disapproves — as Bernal says to Alvaro:

> ...ce qui est humainement beau, ce n'est pas de se guinder, c'est de s'adapter; ce n'est pas de fuir pour être vertueux tout à son aise, c'est d'être vertueux dans le siècle, là où est la difficulté.[15]

On the other hand, not weakening in the face of moral decline seen all around him could be interpreted as moral strength on Alvaro's part. Yet again we find we have an ambivalent reaction to this man.

It is a much simpler response that Mariana elicits from us. As I have already demonstrated in the preceding chapters, she is a pure soul whose one desire is to sacrifice herself to others, and to her father in particular. Where he is cold and austere, she is warm and loving. Where he has a low opinion of her:

> Je ne lui parle pas de choses sérieuses parce qu'elle est incapable de les entendre. Pourriez-vous prier, si vous saviez de certitude que Dieu ne vous comprend pas?[16]

she will hear nothing said against him. In the first scene she starts many sentences with, 'mon père a voulu', or 'mon père trouve', or 'mon père veut',[17] showing her complete obsession with him.

Despite Alvaro's scorn for his daughter, I shall use his words to confirm her superiority. For, in the final scene, he comes to recognise her worth, and the

fact that he once scorned her, seems to be to make his praise of her more valuable. Having despised her for the fact that she

> ...n'existe que par un de mes instants de faiblesse,[18]

he finally tells Mariana

> Sang de mon sang, tu étais meilleure que moi.[19]

Whereas Mariana is contrasted with one man, Inès is compared with two, as well as with l'Infante. The coupling of Inès and Pedro is quite different from the juxtaposition of Inès and Ferrante. Yet the outcome is the same in each case – they serve to emphasise the grandeur of Inès.

Pedro is portrayed as a weak young man, with no interest in affairs of state. His father has long since despaired of his powers of leadership and that is why he has chosen for him a future wife who does have these qualities. The king would like l'Infante to be 'la tête de ce royaume'[20]. He rightly accuses Pedro of mediocrity and lack of backbone:

> Vous êtes vide de tout, et d'abord de vous-même. Vous êtes petit, et rapetissez tout à votre mesure.[21]

Pedro cannot stand up to his domineering father whose ideals and standards are totally alien to his own. Ferrante does not expect Pedro to be like him, but he does wish that he would at least strive for the same heights. He is contemptuous of his son's simple desire for happiness and is astounded that his desire for bliss seems to bear no relation to God and Christianity. Ferrante deems Pedro's yearning for happiness a feminine weakness:

> Et de votre bonheur! Votre bonheur! ...Êtes-vous une femme?[22]

The repetition of 'votre bonheur!' emphasises the scorn in his voice, and comparing Pedro to a woman is a mark of extreme disdain by Ferrante. However, the author, himself, does not necessarily share this contempt, although it was obviously his intention to bestow feminine feelings on Pedro. For Montherlant directly transfers some of Mme Zehrfuss' words to Pedro's mouth, as the young prince expresses his hopes for his child's happiness:

> PEDRO: Que le dur monde où il va aborder ne le traite pas en ennemi, lui qui n'est l'ennemi de personne. Que la profonde terre l'accueille avec douceur, lui qui ne sait rien encore de ses terribles secrets.[23]
>
> E.Z.: Que le vaste monde qui l'accueille ne le traite pas en ennemi, car il ne connait pas la haine. Que la profonde terre le juge avec douceur et compréhension, car il ne sait rien encore de ses terribles secrets.[24]

Thus Montherlant endows Pedro with a protective love for his baby similar to that which we have seen in Inès. His gentleness and caring attitude serve both to emphasise Inès' concern, by their addition to her words and, at the same time, to contrast with his father's attitude to life, which is one of treating the lives of others lightly.

It is Inès who always has control of any situation that arises for her and Pedro. It is he who obeys her. She it is who commands him, on the appearance of l'Infante:

> Ne lui parle pas. Rentre dans le château et refuse de la recevoir. D'ailleurs s'il le faut, c'est moi qui lui barrerai le passage.[25]

Brave Inès, whatever opposition she is confronted with, be it princess or king, she is not to be confounded. Montherlant contrasts Pedro's cowardice with Inès' bravery. In the face of his father's anger, he dare not admit to his marriage and Inès' pregnancy, but she urges him

> ...retournez le voir, Pedro, et dites-lui tout. ...Mieux vaut sa colère aujourd'hui que demain.[26]

The fact that Montherlant endows Inès with so-called masculine qualities of strength and leadership counteract any accusations of typifying her as a weak female. It is Pedro who is 'une eau peu profonde.'[27] Inès, by contrast, is strong for both of them. Gentle and passive by nature, she has the reserves of strength which are inherent in the female species and which rise to the surface in the defence and protection of those she loves – Pedro and their unborn child.

Pedro's philosophy is one of escapism, Inès' one of positiveness and practicality. He would prefer to live quietly, wrapped up in their love. Inès,

although she might prefer that, too, encourages him to do his duty and to face up to his obligations as a Prince of the Realm. Pedro recognises Inès' superior courage, and tells her:

> ...aujourd'hui je ne fais pas que vous aimer: je vous admire. Je vous trouve plus courageuse que moi.[28]

L'Infante, too, pays tribute to Inès' courage. The princess is not successful in her attempt to persuade Inès to come with her to Spain and safety. She accuses Inès:

> Vous êtes molle, et en même temps trop courageuse.[29]

It is easy to see Inès' superiority when comparing her to a weak character like Pedro, but how will she stand up to comparison with Ferrante? Montherlant collocates the two and contrast is inevitable. In her encounter with Ferrante there is a trial of strength, and Inès' courage is quiet and persistent in the face of Ferrante's arrogance and dominance. Montherlant writes that he is a king who, 'grandit à chaque acte'[30]. In fact, all his grandeur pertains to his action before the play began. His own ministers suspect him of weakness, and one of several possible reasons[31] why he has Inès killed is to prove his power is not waning. In reality, the fact that there is the need to prove himself is in itself a weakness.

Ferrante has been a strong ruler but now he is weary of life. Like Alvaro, he has an immense desire to withdraw from the world:

> Je suis las de mon royaume. Je suis las de mes justices, et las de mes bienfaits.[32]

He is at the end of his life whereas Inès is at the beginning of hers. She respects life and is creating new life. Ferrante takes life away.

The major scene of the play (Scene 6 of Act 3) sees Ferrante being so frank with Inès it is as though he has already condemned her to death in his mind. Equally, it is as if he, too, is about to depart the world. There is a certain detachment about him when he says,

> ...je suis crucifié sur moi-même, sur des devoirs qui pour moi n'ont plus de réalité. Je ne suis plus dans mon armure de fer. Mais où suis-je?[33]

This is in contrast to Inès, who knows exactly what she wants from life. In an earlier scene, she told the king:

> D'autres femmes rêvent de ce qu'elles n'ont pas; moi, je rêve de ce que j'ai.[34]

Ferrante's frankness in exposing his confused innermost feelings, inspires Inès to exchange truth for truth. The revelation of her pregnancy is another nail in her coffin.

Ferrante is cruel to the point of sadism, suggesting to a shocked Inès that it would be amusing to him to introduce her to the man who wants her assassinated. Montherlant says:

> Il joue avec Inès comme le chat avec la souris.[35]

Like all sadists he get pleasure from inflicting cruelty on his victim:

> Je crois que j'aime en elle le mal que je lui fais.[36]

In the face of his ruthlessness Inès is courageous. She knows she is condemned to death yet she does not break down. She has listened to his confidences and her sympathetic ear is another reason for her fate. Ferrante cannot allow her to live having laid bare his soul to her.

He mistakes Inès' reasons for her candour. He cannot believe that her concern is genuine. Because she herself can think no ill of anyone she continues to believe that,

> ...le père de l'homme que j'aime, et auquel je n'ai jamais voulu et fait que du bien, n'agira pas contre moi.[37]

In his cynicism and mistrust of everyone, and women in particular, Ferrante can only interpret her concern as a ruse to gain a reprieve. He regrets his intimacy with her and expects her to be triumphant over his moment of weakness:

> Quelle joie sans doute de pouvoir vous dire, comme font les femmes: "Tout roi qu'il est, il est un pauvre homme comme les autres!"[38]

Ferrante, 'roi de douleur', symbol of scepticism and negative values, kills Inès, symbol of life and hope – and there is a paradox in that he knows he has condemned to death a person of peace:

> Quand elle regardait les étoiles, ses yeux étaient comme des lacs tranquilles.[39]

He has respect for her and tells the guards that she is not to suffer. But the most telling statement is in Ferrante's reply to the Captain's enquiry as to whether he should send Inès a confessor. Ferrante tells him there is no need for that because,

> Son âme est lisse comme son visage.[40]

Like Alvaro's, Ferrante's struggle is internal. The real conflict in the play is in the heart of man. Inès is the sounding board off which Ferrante bounces his thoughts which he hopes will lead to self discovery. He recognises in Inès that self-knowledge that he himself is seeking. When he is dying he cries to God,

> Ô mon Dieu! dans ce répit qui me reste, avant que le sabre repasse et m'écrase, faites qu'il tranche ce noeud épouvantable de contradictions qui sont en moi, de sorte que, un instant au moins avant de cesser d'être, je sache enfin ce que je suis.[41]

At the moment of his dying, Inès' body is brought in. Apart from the very young page whom Ferrante has exhorted to stay near him, everyone leaves the king's body and surrounds that of Inès, followed, after a moment of hesitation, by the page. The isolation of the king could be Montherlant's comment on him, but, equally, it could simply show that the courtiers find it expedient to show the new king, Pedro, where their allegiance lies. Whichever it is, the setting of the finale has the effect of directing the audience's attention away from the king and towards Inès.

In his killing off of Inès, Montherlant could be said to be demonstrating his misogyny, but in portraying her as a victim of the king's bestiality he is in fact showing the audience the moral inferiority of Ferrante and therefore, by implication, the moral superiority of Inès.

Inès is one type of woman. L'Infante is another. Whereas Inès' philosophy is one of fatalism:

> Il consume ce qui de toute façon sera consumé,[42]

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L'Infante's is one of action:

> La cascade ne tombe pas: elle se précipite. Elle fait aussi marcher les moulins.[43]

The juxtaposition of these two complementary characters, whilst emphasising their differences, does nothing to diminish either of them.

Ferrante recognises their differences, but in his eyes the comparison is unfavourable to Inès because of the qualities *he* admires in another human being. He tells Inès:

> L'Infante est une fille inspirée et fiévreuse: elle a été bercée sur un bouclier d'airain; vous, on dirait que vous êtes née d'un sourire.[44]

Inès appears weak because of her gentle ways, but she has an inner strength that belies her tenderness. L'Infante's strength is more obvious and has been bred in her by her regal upbringing. She is a born ruler and she knows it. (To use modern imagery, she would wear the trousers in a marriage partnership.) She tells Inès,

> Si j'avais épousé don Pedro, c'est moi qui aurais été l'homme.[45]

She is not unlike Ferrante in the pride and haughtiness she displays. In the king's eyes she compares favourably with men, and particularly with Pedro:

> Elle est le fils que j'aurais dû avoir.[46]

He praises her 'esprit viril' and her 'énergie pleine d'innocence'[47] and he sees her as equal to ruling the kingdom as he once would have hoped that Pedro would do. Thus there is a comment on the qualities which are seen as masculine and commendable:

> C'est elle, oui, c'est elle qu'il faut à la tête de ce royaume.[48]

Because of l'Infante's masculine traits, the opposition between her and Inès is like the contrast between male and female rather than between two women. L'Infante, like Dominique, in *Le Songe*, portrays the qualities which admit her to the world of 'l'ordre mâle', whereas Inès, like the Douces of Montherlant's prose,

could never be part of the male order, but she can have her *place* in it. By her own admission she exists for love. Whereas l'Infante is independent, Inès' life revolves around Pedro and her unborn baby. In contrast to many other women, however, who fit into the 'Douce' category, who are passive creatures, Inès is a positive person.

Montherlant's attitude towards l'Infante is one of ambivalence. By giving her characteristics of strength and power and dominance, that are traditionally accepted as masculine traits, is he opposing the traditionally accepted feminine characteristics of gentleness, acquiescence and passivity, and upholding l'Infante as an ideal? Or, is he in fact demonstrating that there are two types of femininity, each equally valid? The reader, too, feels this ambivalence, for l'Infante's strength and forcefulness is as admirable as Inès' gentleness. I see them as simply two very different, but equally sound portrayals of femininity.

The comparison of l'Infante with Pedro is favourable to her just as Inès benefited from the juxtaposition with him.

There are contrasts made between l'Infante and men in general by her own implication that men are inferior beings:

> Lâcheté: c'est un mot qui m'évoque irrésistiblement les hommes.[49]

It may be her lesbian tendencies, or it may simply be her youth and inexperience (she is seventeen years old) which lead her to tell Inès:

> Je ne suis pas encore parvenue à comprendre comment on peut aimer un homme.[50]

Her opinion should not be interpreted as Montherlant's own point of view any more than that we should believe that he condones Ferrante's sadistic act of murder.[51] He is simply painting a picture of a particular type of woman – one who is an equal to most men and superior to some.

Another 'superior' female that Montherlant draws is Isotta. She is outstanding on her own merits, as I have shown in the previous chapters, but her character

seems even more noble by comparison with her husband. Isotta counterbalances his promiscuity with her virtue, his sadism with her kindness, his impetuosity with her caution and his egoism with her unselfishness.

Malatesta, like Ferrante and Alvaro, is only concerned with himself. He flies in the face of destiny when he boasts:

> C'est moi-même qui serai l'instrument de mon destin, non un autre.[52]

This egoism has an element of prophecy in it as, ironically, he is the instrument of his own death by showing his assassin, Porcellio, where he keeps the poison hidden in the binding of his volume of Plutarch.

Nothing is important to Malatesta outside his own pleasures and ambitions. Isotta abets him in this. His welfare is her sole concern. She turns a blind eye to his many extra-marital affairs and yet herself remains faithful only to him.

The Pope's condemnation of Malatesta, in the strongest possible language (he ends his tirade with 'vous êtes un monstre') confirms the spectators' increasing disdain for this egocentric man. By contrast, Isotta is recognised by the Pope as an intelligent, informed and well-respected person:

> Vous, madame Isotta, on vous publie pour une des femmes les plus doctes d'Italie; mais aussi pour prudente, avisée, virile. Votre renommée est grande, et vous êtes respectée de tous...[53]

Malatesta is a violent man, whereas Isotta is gentle. He has committed treason, murder and incest. He strangled his own fencing master without so much as a blink of the eyelid. He is flippant and unfeeling about the death:

> ...est-ce ma faute si cet imbécile avait un cou de poulet?[54]

He is equally unfeeling about Isotta when he is away from her influence, yet she never ceases to consider him first - hence her pleading to the Pope on his behalf. His passion for Vanella over-rides the tenderness and love he feels for Isotta when he is with her. Isotta's loyalty is something he accepts and expects, as of a servant:

> Elle apprendra et elle supportera. Il y a si longtemps qu'elle supporte![55]

In his arrogance he attributes to God the blessing of his illicit liaison with Vanella:

> Bénie soit la Providence, qui a permis ce péché![56]

He interweaves his religion and superstitions together to suit his own ends, praying to the ancient statue that has been dug up, as a pagan would to an idol – and his prayer? – to be allowed to kill the Pope – in exchange for which he promises a year without sin! And his reason for wanting to kill the Pope? – Merely revenge for the Pope's plan to send papal troops into Rimini. Malatesta's reaction is to become passionately angry. He wants the Pope dead and, sadistically, he wants him to die slowly and agonisingly:

> Je voudrais le mordre. Je voudrais avoir du poison dans ma bouche et le mordre. Je voudrais le voir agoniser pendant que je le tiens dans ma bouche.[57]

What manner of man is this? Montherlant explains that he is a fair representation of a Renaissance Italian* and indeed that he is an accurate dramatic portrayal of a real person. This may be a reason for creating such a creature of multitudinous vices, but it does not lessen the horror of such a travesty of man.

Like Ferrante and Alvaro he is not a mouth-piece for Montherlant's own beliefs – despite the mileage that critics obtain from such words as Malatesta's:

> Les femmes sont faites pour être aimées.[58]

What such an expression does is clarify Malatesta's beliefs and define his character. Also, Montherlant undermines Malatesta's heroism and grandeur by his irony. Malatesta is boastful throughout the play, and yet all the time he has less and less to be proud of as he heads towards his doom. The final irony is that it is Porcellio to whom he has given the task of writing his Vita and it is Porcellio who poisons him. Malatesta's illusions of eternal glory are ultimately shattered when Porcellio burns the Vita in front of his dying eyes.

Apart from his recognition of Isotta's worth, there is nothing to commend Malatesta as a man. The Pope sums him up succinctly:

* See Montherlant, Présentation de Malatesta, pages 418 to 420.

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> Vous avez outragé toutes les lois: les divines, les naturelles et les humaines. Vos crimes dépassent toute mesure.[59]

Despite the Pope's awareness of Malatesta as a trouble-maker and a danger, Isotta is successful in her plea for her husband. It is a tribute to Isotta and a recognition of her virtues triumphing over Malatesta's vices that the Pope gives Malatesta a reprieve.

The contrast with Malatesta, by which Isotta is able to shine, is not accorded Geneviève, in *L'Exil*. She does not have a virile, domineering, egocentric male set in opposition to her. On the contrary, she dominates her son.

She is courageous, like all the theatrical heroines under study. Her bravery is two-fold. There is the obvious heroism she displays in her actions for the war effort, and then there is a greater courage, because of the self-sacrifice involved, which is evinced when she finally encourages Philippe to enlist.

Whereas Geneviève's actions are prompted by maternal love, which directs her protective instincts to come to the fore, Philippe's actions are not so selflessly motivated. For his conduct varies to suit himself and no-one else. Montherlant claimed that *L'Exil* was not about abstracts such as the ethics of patriotism but

> L'Exil étudie seulement deux caractères pour qui 'tout vient des êtres'; rien de plus.[60]

Certainly, Philippe's initial desire to enlist is to follow his friend rather than for patriotic motives. When he no longer wishes to enlist, it is to please himself, not his mother. This is part of the perversity of growing up, but it is nevertheless very painful for Geneviève.

Philippe is not easily aligned with the other males in these plays. He does not have Ferrante's and Malatesta's egoism and brutality. Nor does he have Pedro's weakness of character, although it may seem so at first.

Although apparently dominated by his mother, he is 1) young and 2) well aware that his life is dear to Geneviève.

He does display a streak of cruelty, but it is not sadistic like Ferrante's. It arises more out of the frustration of being kept at home with the women and children during war-time:

> Vous m'avez rejeté avec ceux qui jouent.[61]

The difference between the depth of their love for each other is highlighted in Philippe's apparent rejection of his mother for his friend, Sénac, compared to Geneviève's sustained love for her son. I use the word 'apparent' advisedly, for, despite the fact that he lets Geneviève believe that he is enlisting for no other reason than to emulate Sénac:

> Je pars me faire une âme comme la sienne, pour le retrouver au retour,[62]

he urges his friend not to upset his mother because he is loyal to her:

> Si tu dis un mot qui puisse la blesser, tu le paieras. Sache que je suis avec elle, contre toi.[63]

The rejection of mother love and the simultaneous transference of the offspring's love to a peer mirrors the relationship between Alban and Mme de Bricoule in Montherlant's prose and at the same time it reflects the real-life pattern of many parental-adolescent relationships.

Allowing Geneviève to believe that the reason that he is leaving her is to follow his friend, is the final injury to Geneviève's already wounded self-sacrificing love. Philippe's cruelty and selfishness can be seen as the part of the make-up of youth and as such, these features serve as a foil for Geneviève's more commendable characteristics.

There is an implicit suggestion that Geneviève will forgive her son's cruelty:

> C'en est fini de ce mauvais génie sans cesse entre toi et moi. Quel poids tu m'enlèves![64]

Such generosity in the face of Philippe's opposition serves to underline Geneviève's moral superiority.

In *Port-Royal*, the polarisation of the sexes serves to illustrate the various conflicts which are raging. There is the opposition between the Archbishop, as the

Pope's representative, and the nuns, absorbed in the restricted world of their religion. This conflict is the external manifestation of the interior action of the play, which is the exploration of the psychological make-up of the main characters. The internal conflict is two-fold. On one level there is Soeur Angélique wrestling with her diminishing faith and despair, whilst continuing stoically to present a strong example of belief to the novices. At the same time we see a role-reversal between her and Soeur Françoise, who struggles with her early doubts to be inspired by Soeur Angélique to a position of unwavering faith. Yet there is a deeper level still to this play. If it has a message, it is one that Montherlant continually reiterates throughout his prose and his theatre. It was embryonic in *L'Exil* and it is more fully developed in *Port-Royal*. It concerns the importance of freedom of thought and of choice, and if that means not confirming to current thought, religious or otherwise, so be it. Soeur Angélique underlines this point to Soeur Françoise:

> Le point contesté, sujet de tant de tumulte, ne touche pas la foi et n'est de nulle importance en soi. Raison de plus pour que ce soit un horrible crime de mettre des âmes simples, mais qui veulent n'agir que par leur conscience...[65]

Although Soeur Angélique gradually loses her faith, she grows in moral stature with her adherence to the belief in freedom of conscience.

Her religious doubt is in contrast to the Archbishop's certainty of her belief and this serves to emphasise her weakening faith:

> L'ARCHEVEQUE: Du moins, il n'y a pas de tentation pour la Soeur Angélique de Saint-Jean.
> LA SOEUR ANGELIQUE: Ne lui demandez pas plus que ses forces ne peuvent porter.[66]

There is opposition to be seen between Soeur Françoise's affirmation of her faith and the Archbishop's demand for conformity, which undermines the importance of the faith itself. He tells the young novice:

> Ce n'est pas tout que d'avoir la conduite et les sentiments que veut l'Eglise; il faut aussi parler comme l'Eglise parle aujourd'hui.[67]

Soeur Françoise is quick to pick him up on his 'aujourd'hui', which signifies to her that he will blow with the wind of current religious thinking. This contrasts sharply with her determination to follow her conscience, even if it goes against the prevailing religious opinion. But the Archbishop questions the validity of individual thought and there almost seems some merit in his assertion,

> Dans tous les ordres, où irions-nous, si chacun se mettait à penser personnellement?[68]

especially when he points out that everyone is in agreement 'sauf une poignée de filles'[69], but he diminishes the worth of his argument when he provides no better reason for adhering to the Pope's demands other than,

> On vous demandait d'être comme les autres, vous entendez? simplement *comme les autres*![70]

Thus we have confirmation of the interior action of the play – a conflict between conformity and individual freedom of choice.

However, the Archbishop, in defending his position, points out that he has to live in the real world – 'pas dans les nuages, ni dans les prières'.[71] There is a parallel here with Bernal's speech to Alvaro wherein he suggested it is sometimes more difficult to live *in* the world than to opt out of it, and there is some truth in that. This is an example of Montherlant presenting two sides of an argument, each with valid points, for the reader or spectator to weigh up and decide for himself which is more valid.

From Montherlant's religious plays to one concerned with carnal pleasures may seem a large step – but this is no less a step than the author himself makes in creating such a diversity of plays. This variation is evidence of Montherlant's application of his theory of 'syncrétisme et alternance', which he applies not just to the make-up of a person's character but to a whole way of life.

There are similarities to be drawn between Guiscart and Costals of Montherlant's prose and Don Juan but there is an essential distinction. Whereas

the prose heroes change lovers frequently for self-gratification and to ensure that their personal internal liberty is not invaded, Don Juan is motivated in his pursuit of women by an immense fear of death, and this makes of him a tragic figure. His experience of life fills him with horror and

> ...c'est seulement dans la chasse et dans la possession amoureuses que cette horreur est oubliée.[72]

It is the physicality of his life of sensuality that gives him the sense of being alive and thus disguises for him his mortality. The women in this play, the un-named along with Linda and Ana, serve to reassure him that the evil day of death is distant.

Most of the women with whom Don Juan comes into contact have no influence on him whatsoever, but Ana is different. She illuminates in him a spark of something deeper than passion. Whereas, before meeting her, he had believed that men were made for abandoning women, now, at the risk of losing his life for the killing of Ana's father, he is determined to stay, because,

> Elle m'a gorgé d'espoir comme une éponge est gorgée d'eau.[73]

Yet he is consistent in his inconsistencies in that the love and the determination to be worthy of Ana, which he expresses in Act 3, Scene 6, is immediately followed in Scene 7 by a reversion to type when he cries to his son,

> Allons chasser la femme à Séville![74]

The author attributes Don Juan's changes in mood to an essential ingredient of his temperament, namely 'mobilité'[75]. They are also a manifestation the 'syncrétisme et alternance' which is intrinsic to Montherlant's philosophy.

Like Costals, Don Juan must remain true to himself. For Costals it was of paramount importance that the women in his life should be kept completely separate from his creative work. Don Juan is not such a complex character as Costals. His amorous adventures are a means of expressing a belief in his existence. He lives to pursue women, and he pursues women to prove to himself that he is alive.

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Ana inspires in Don Juan a transitory recourse to God. Although he is an atheist, it is in his relationship with Ana that he feels this sudden need of God, the implication being that she inspires the goodness in him. However, this is as short-lived as his loyalty to his love for her.

Anna is depicted in an idealised light in the generosity of her offer of money to Don Juan to help him to escape his fate, despite the fact that that means that he will leave her. This is in contrast to Alcasar, Don Juan's son, who merely ponders on what he will do with the money his father has just given him.

There is an honesty about Don Juan which is comparable to that of Costals. In not seeking to delude women, Don Juan shows respect for their integrity. He is honest to the point of never promising marriage as a means of seduction. There is a kindness in him which we have seen in Costals' treatment of many of the women much of the time, but whereas Costals inflicted suffering in a sadistic way at times, Don Juan never does so, unless his honesty can be deemed cruel. For instance, he tells Linda he can love her only for the duration of the morning. She would prefer him to lie. Indeed, she herself practises deceit, making an appointment with her uncle an excuse to leave Don Juan. Thus Linda's dishonesty is contrasted with Don Juan's adherence to truth.

It is this penchant for honesty which leads to the commander's death and Don Juan's flight. At first allowing the commander to believe that le duc Antonio is responsible for Ana's seducation, Don Juan then admits the truth:

J'ai été pendant quatre mois l'amant d'Ana.[76]

Although the commander is portrayed as a weak man, under the rule of his wife (*'Elle est monumentale'*).[77] She, by comparison, is not shown to be praiseworthy. In reality, it is she who, by her incitement, is the cause of her husband's death. Persuaded by Don Juan's rhetoric, he was more than happy to forgive Don Juan for seducing his daughter, but, telling Don Juan to defend himself he reveals just how much he is under his wife's thumb:

> Vous voyez bien qu'il nous faut nous battre. Ma femme l'ordonne, ma compagne de quarante-trois années.[78]

The whole episode of the fight is made ridiculous by the lack of enthusiasm on the part of the participants contrasted with the energy of the countess and culminating in the manner of the death. There is no final flourish. Instead the commander 'se jette sur l'épée de Don Juan, et tombe transpercé'.[79] The episode is further derided, and with it the countess, by her dramatic and contrived actions as she tears off some of her clothes accompanied by cries describing her actions:

> Je me l'arrache, mon peigne de Talavera! Je me l'arrache, ma mantille! Je me l'arrache, mon admirable châle du XV^e^ siècle, payé trois mille cinq cents douros plus mille douros pour la doublure![80]

Her absurdity is complete when, as if in parody of the scene of mystical union experienced by Mariana and Alvaro in *Le Maître de Santiago*, Montherlant has the countess cry out,

> *Unidos! siempre unidos! (Au public.)* Ça, naturellement, ça veut dire: "Unis! Unis à jamais!"[81]

The contrast we have seen in these plays serves a very important function. By the juxtaposition of characters so diametrically opposed as those in Montherlant's theatre, the strengths and weaknesses are shown up in sharp relief. Characters, who, by their physical presence or rumoured grandeur, dominate the play, do not always emerge as the strongest moral characters. In the plays studied one might have expected characters with the authority of Ferrante, Malatesta, Alvaro and Archbishop Péréfixe to dominate the scene. Although they may do so physically, the women, by their grand moral stature, leave an equally lasting impression on the spectator.

Simone de Beauvoir takes Montherlant to task for only confronting his heroes with females or children. Never, she says, does he confront man with man.[82] On the whole this is true, but contrary to de Beauvoir's perception of this as

evidence of Montherlant's misogyny, it does, in fact, place the women on an equal level with the men, since they are worthy of comparison. I will go further and assert that the women benefit from such confrontation, whereas the men are proved to be much inferior beings to their female counterparts. The qualities of cruelty, sadism, egoism and weakness in the personalities of some or all of the men are contrasted with the attributes of love, self-sacrifice, purity and strength that are an integral part of the idealised make-up of the women.

Montherlant's attitude towards masculinity is one of ambivalence. He accords traditionally accepted masculine traits to l'Infante, but he does not bestow them on Pedro. Notwithstanding this, he still thinks in terms of characteristically masculine and characteristically feminine traits.

His attitude to the women is much less complex than his attitude to the men and may even be seen as simplistic at times. The women move much more in the light than in the shadows, and, on the whole, they do not suffer from the 'ténèbres' as the men do, although we have seen that Soeur Angélique is an exception to this.

The conflict that lies at the heart of Montherlant's plays is the opposition between man's actions and the search for his 'vie intérieure', and broadly speaking, this does mean the men rather than the women. In most of the plays the female characters are subordinate to the exploration of the psychology of the male characters and the contrast of male and female is set up with this purpose in mind. We saw, in *Port-Royal*, however, that the polarisation of the Archbishop and the nuns served to reveal the 'vie intérieure' of Soeur Françoise and Soeur Angélique.

In *La Reine morte*, Ferrante uses Inès almost as a confessor. When she interprets literally his description of his heart stopping, mistaking it for a medical condition, Ferrante reveals that he is talking about something spiritual:

> Je ne parle de mon mal à personne...Il y avait sûrement une présence...[83]

It is to sympathetic women such as Inès and Mariana that the men are able to reveal the co-existence of contradictory traits within themselves, and in so doing their moral inferiority is exposed.

Chapter 4 Polarisation of the Sexes

Notes

1. Maurice Bruézière, *Lire aujourd'hui: La Reine morte d'Henry de Montherlant*, p. 21.

2. John Batchelor, *Existence and Imagination: The Theatre of Henry de Montherlant*, p. 73.

3. Henry de Montherlant, *Le Maître de Santiago*, Act 2. Sc. 1, p. 504.

4. Montherlant, *La Reine morte*, Act 3. Sc. 6, p. 170.

5. Montherlant, *Le Maître de Santiago*, Act 2. Sc. 1, p. 498.

6. *Ibid.*, Act 2. Sc. 1, p. 496.

7. Montherlant, *Le Maître de Santiago*, Act 2. Sc. 1, p. 499.

8. *Ibid.*, Act 2. Sc. 3, p. 507.

9. *Ibid.*, Act 2. Sc. 3, p. 507.

10. See Montherlant's *Postface* to *Le Maître de Santiago*, *Le Maître de Santiago est-il chrétien?* *Le Blanc est noir*, *Ferrante et Alvaro*, *Alvaro et l'honnêteté*, all in *Montherlant Théâtre*.

11. Montherlant, *Le Maître de Santiago*, Act 1. Sc. 6, p. 495.

12. *Ibid.*, Act 3. Sc. 4, p. 516.

13. Montherlant, *Le Maître de Santiago*, Act 3. Sc. 5, p. 519.

14. *Ibid.*, Act 1. Sc. 4, p. 492.

15. *Ibid.*, Act 1. Sc. 4, p. 492.

16. *Ibid.*, Act 2. Sc. 1, p. 498.

17. *Ibid.*, Act 1. Sc. 1, pp. 480 and 481.

18. Montherlant, *Le Maître de Santiago*, Act 2. Sc. 1, p. 500.

19. *Ibid.*, Act 3. Sc. 5, p. 520.

20. Montherlant, *La Reine morte*, Act 1. Sc. 3, p. 114.

21. *Ibid.*, Act 1. Sc. 3, p. 113.

22. *Ibid.*, Act 1. Sc. 3, p. 115.

23. Montherlant, *Le Maître de Santiago*, Act 2. Sc. 4, p. 145.

24. See Appendix, lines 53–55.

25. Montherlant, *La Reine morte*, Act 2 Sc. 4, p. 146.

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26. *Ibid.*, Act 1. Sc. 4, p. 117.

27. *Ibid.*, Act 1. Sc. 5, p. 123.

28. Montherlant, *La Reine morte*, Act 1. Sc. 4, p. 119.

29. *Ibid.*, Act 2. Sc. 5, p. 152.

30. Montherlant, *En Relisant La Reine morte*, in *Montherlant Théâtre*, p. 193.

31. See *Ibid* for 5 reasons that Montherlant puts forward for the killing of Inès.

32. Montherlant, *La Reine morte*, Act 2 Sc. 3, p. 139.

33. *Ibid.*, Act 3. Sc. 6, p. 166.

34. Montherlant, *La Reine morte*, Act 1. Sc. 5, p. 123.

35. Montherlant, *En Relisant La Reine morte*, in *Montherlant Théâtre*, p. 195.

36. Montherlant, *La Reine morte*, Act 3. Sc. 6, p. 171.

37. *Ibid.*, Act 3. Sc. 6, p. 172.

38. *Ibid.*, Act 3. Sc. 6, p. 172.

39. Montherlant, *La Reine morte*, Act 3. Sc. 7, p. 174.

40. *Ibid.*, Act 3. Sc. 7, p. 174.

41. *Ibid.*, Act 3. Sc. 8, p. 176.

42. *Ibid.*, Act 2. Sc. 5, p. 151.

43. Montherlant, *La Reine morte*, Act 2. Sc. 5, p. 151.

44. *Ibid.*, Act 2. Sc. 3, p. 140.

45. *Ibid.*, Act 2. Sc. 5, p. 151.

46. *Ibid.*, Act 1. Sc. 3, p. 114.

47. *Ibid.*, Act 1. Sc. 3, p. 114.

48. *Ibid.*, Act 1. Sc. 3, p. 114.

49. Montherlant, *La Reine morte*, Act 2. Sc. 5, p. 150.

50. *Ibid.*, Act 2. Sc. 5, p. 150.

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51. Simone de Beauvoir implies that Montherlant is exalting masculinity in Ferrante's action. See her chapter entitled 'Montherlant ou le pain du dégoût', in *Le Deuxième Sexe*, extract in André Blanc, *Les Critiques de notre temps et Montherlant*, pages 69 and 70.

52. Montherlant, *Malatesta*, Act 1. Sc. 9, p. 361.

53. *Ibid.*, Act 3. Sc. 5, p. 384.

54. *Ibid.*, Act 1. Sc. 9, p. 360.

55. Montherlant, *Malatesta*, Act 4. Sc. 1, p. 392.

56. *Ibid.*, Act 4. Sc. 1, p. 393.

57. *Ibid.*, Act 1. Sc. 7, p. 353.

58. *Ibid.*, Act 2. Sc. 5, p. 369.

59. Montherlant, *Malatesta*, Act 2. Sc. 5, p. 369.

60. Montherlant, *Note de 1967*, in *L'Avant-Scène du théâtre*, no 379, 1-15 May 1967.

61. Montherlant, *L'Exil*, Act 2. Sc. 8, p. 49.

62. *Ibid.*, Act 3. Sc. 5, p. 65.

63. *Ibid.*, Act 3. Sc. 4, p. 65.

64. *Ibid.*, Act 3. Sc. 5, p. 65.

65. Montherlant, *Port-Royal*, p. 868.

66. *Ibid.*, p. 907.

67. *Ibid.*, p. 902.

68. Montherlant, *Port-Royal*, p. 899.

69 *Ibid.*, p. 899.

70. *Ibid.*, p. 900.

71. *Ibid.*, p. 900.

72. Montherlant, *Don Juan*, Act 2. Sc. 4, p. 1048.

73. *Ibid.*, Act 3. Sc. 6, p. 1075.

74. *Ibid.*, Act 3. Sc. 7, p. 1077.

75. Montherlant, *Notes* to *Don Juan*, in *Montherlant Théâtre*, pp. 1079 and 1080.

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76. Montherlant, *Don Juan*, Act 2. Sc. 4, p. 1040.

77. *Ibid.*, stage directions, Act 2. Sc. 4, p. 1051.

78. Montherlant, *Don Juan*, Act 2. Sc. 5, p. 1052.

79. *Ibid.*, stage directions, Act 2. Sc. 5, p. 1052.

80. *Ibid.*, Act 2. Sc. 5, p. 1052.

81. *Ibid.*, Act 2. Sc. 5, p. 1053.

82. Simone de Beauvoir, *op. cit.*, in Blanc, *op. cit.*, p. 64.

83. Montherlant, *La Reine morte*, Act 3. Sc. 1, p. 155.

CONCLUSION

What, then, have we discovered about the treatment of female characters in Montherlant's work? In his prose work we saw the women defined in terms of a male order and they were always seen from a male perspective. The theatre provided Montherlant with a medium through which he could present his characters to be seen at first hand, rather than as reported by others.

The portrayal of love, which played a major part in Montherlant's prose work is equally prominent in his theatre. He explores all the possible permutations of love – maternal, filial, heterosexual, lesbian, Platonic and love for God. In his theatre we always come back to the sense of sacrifice that is intrinsically interwoven in love. This does not mean that Montherlant sees his theatrical heroines as sacrificial victims. On the contrary, it is because their sacrifice is voluntary that it is ennobling. Where there is sacrifice of one character by another – usually of women by men (although Ferrante sacrifices Pedro as well as Inès), the victimiser suffers a loss of grandeur by his actions and, by comparison, this serves to emphasise the moral superiority of the women. There is a paradox in the way that the women, who are usually very strong characters, often display an element of the victim in their love.

Love is also seen in terms of unselfishness and suffering. There are exceptions to this – Geneviève's love is at first bound up with selfishness and thoughtlessness and l'Infante shows no signs of sacrifice. Heroines such as Inès and Isotta are not blinded by their love. In fact, it is because of their lucidity that they are so aware of the dangers that surround them and their loved ones. Mariana, too, does not follow her father blindly, but is well aware of what she is sacrificing when she leaves the world.

The rejection of women which we saw in Montherlant's prose is less in evidence in his theatre. This has the effect of validating the women's position.

In his plays, Montherlant portrays love in a more noble form than in his prose. Heterosexual love, so maligned in his novels, is elevated to a place of

respect in his drama. Alban's flawed filial love is atoned for in Mariana's love for her father and maternal love, so very much undermined in some of the mothers of Montherlant's prose work is exalted in the creation of Inès in *La Reine morte.*

Purity in love was not so apparent in the prose work, but many of the women in the theatre possess a purity of spirit which, in some of them, is not at first recognisable. However, as each play progresses, we see into the depth of the female characters – Geneviève's blindness changes to clear–sightedness, Inès' softness becomes strength and Mariana's apparent subordination is revealed as self–sacrifice.

In Montherlant's theatre purity is not necessarily seen as an absence of sin. None of the heroines is totally devoid of sin – not even Mariana, who briefly acquiesced to Don Bernal's plan of deceit wherein he would tell her father that the king himself requested the knight's presence in the New World. Soeur Françoise's sin undoubtedly lies in her pride and stubbornness whereas Soeur Angélique's is the self–pity of which Mère Agnès accuses her.

According to Weiss[1], Montherlant did not intend Inès and Geneviève to be heroines of his plays. Certainly Montherlant said that l'Infante, along with Ferrante, 'est le plus rare caractère de la pièce'.[2] But Weiss fails to avoid the trap, when dealing with Montherlant, of taking one piece of the author's criticism as gospel, as Montherlant is the master of contradiction. In the same essay, *En Relisant La Reine morte*, he goes on to say,

> Les hommes, ici, sont deux coquins et un benet; tous trois (no doubt referring to Ferrante, Egas Coelho and Pedro) en outre, à des degrés divers, lâches,[3]

whereas he describes the two women, l'Infante and Inès, as

> ...l'une est grande par l'intelligence et l'autre par le coeur; et les deux par le caractère.[4]

It can be seen that, with the exception of *Don Juan*, all these very different plays have a thread of purity in common, and it is the women in the plays who

demonstrate this quality. They each have their own personal code of purity, and it is different for each of them. It is manifested in religious terms in Mariana, Soeur Angélique and Soeur Françoise and in sacrificial terms in most of them. Their purity takes the form of moral cleanliness which emanates from the soul.

In creating these heroines of this theatre, Montherlant counterbalances the females of his novels. Some critics believe this was his expiation after the many accusations of misogyny he suffered in respect of the novels, most of which preceded most of the plays. More plausibly, he is drawing different aspects, in exaggeration, of the female. This being so, the magnification of these theatrical heroines results in creations which are more pure, more noble, more suffering and more proud than their male counterparts.

Montherlant abides by his personal concept of 'syncrétisme et alternance' in the creation of his male characters. He believed that man was made up of many contrasting elements, all of which share equal importance in a person's character, and he tried to portray humans as they really are, with their faults as well as their good qualities. His female figures are more unbalanced portraits, both in his prose and in his theatre.

Montherlant was very interested in human motivation and he explored this extensively in all his work. His theatre lends itself particularly to this. Personalities who oppose each other are the external manifestation of the internal psychological conflict of the main characters. This conflict maintains a constant state of tension in the plays which is not present in the prose. His theatre is concerned with the individual's response to crisis and his characters are constantly called upon to examine their consciences and to make decisions.

The quest for 'la vie intérieure' is central to Montherlant's theatre and this is investigated at length. In most of his plays Montherlant confines this examination to his heroes, but, in *Port-Royal*, he directs his psychological research towards the

nuns. Soeur Angélique is in some ways equated with Montherlant's heroes in that her isolation and self-doubt and quest for self-knowledge are not resolved - like Ferrante and Don Juan - whereas Soeur Françoise finds peace with God, as does Alvaro.

There remains an unresolved conflict between the heroes' outer actions and their 'vie intérieure' (and here again I must include Soeur Angélique in with the heroes). this is not so with Montherlant's women. Their strength is internal rather than physical and it is through the exposition of the hero's psychological struggle that this is revealed.

The polarisation of male and female characters permits comparisons to be drawn. Simone de Beauvoir believes that such is Montherlant's portrayal of females that

> ...étant absolument inférieure, l'existence de la femme dévoile la substantielle, l'essentielle et indestructible supériorité du mâle; sans risque.[5]

I beg to differ. I conclude that the contrast and confrontation between the sexes reveals the superior noble and moral characteristics in the women and so the role that she accuses Montherlant of betraying between male and female is reversed. Their stature is defined by their contrast with the men. They are in no sense shadows of their male counterparts. Yet, it is a paradox that lies at the very heart of Montherlant's differentiation of the sexes, that these creations of moral superiority, in the last resort, have their definition by their relation to the men.

Conclusion

Notes

1. Aurélieu Weiss, *Heroïnes du théâtre de Henry de Montherlant*, pp. 23 and 29.

2. Henry de Montherlant, *En Relisant La Reine morte*, in *Montherlant Théâtre*, p. 192.

3. *Ibid.*, p. 195.

4. *Ibid.*, p. 195.

5. Simone de Beauvoir, 'Montherlant ou le pain du dégoût', in *Le Deuxième Sexe*, extract in André Blanc, *Les Critiques de notre temps et Montherlant*, p. 64.

APPENDIX

'Les cris', requested by Montherlant, and sent to him by Elisabeth Zehrfuss on 14th June, 1942, for his use in the creation of Inès in *La Reine morte*.

Mon enfant! ... Le jour, il ne m'occupe pas: il est seulement comme une douce charge à laquelle je dois faire attention, dont je dois prendre un tendre soin. Je suis la coupe qui porte la graine fragile qui s'épanouit silencieusement. La nuit, l'idée de sa présence, la responsabilité où je m'engage, grandissent. Je rejoins l'Humanité, l'immense Humanité. J'obéis à l'éternel destin, et l'idée que je ne suis pas différente des autres, que j'obéis à la Loi, me remplit à la fois d'orgueil et de soumission. Je ne suis plus une femme, mais la Femme. Je ne suis plus une mère, mais la Mère qui, à travers les siècles, a été conçue pour mettre au monde, pour donner la Vie. Je deviens anonyme, consciente de moi-même; dans le jour; la nuit je perds toute personnalité; je confonds avec moi toutes les femmes; elles sont toutes en moi, je suis l'éternelle féminité, douce et féconde; je suis l'arbre de vie; le divin coule en moi comme une source fraiche. Mon enfant remue et je le caresse doucement. Il tient la place qui de tous temps a été préparée pour lui; en moi se forme un corps, une pensée, un être, qu'on jugera, dont on dira du bien et du mal, qui fera le bien et le mal. Mais comment pourra-t-on dire du mal de mon enfant? Et comment pourrait-il faire le mal? Lui qui ne connait pas ce que c'est? Il a été créé sans qu'il le veuille. Et peut-être un jour on détestera, on maltraitera celui qui n'a pas voulu être! Peut-être souffrira-t-il, pleurera-t-il? Comment retenir ses larmes, les recueillir pour moi, les faire couler en moi? Moi, je puis tout supporter, je puis souffrir, pleurer pour lui. Mais lui, comment le préserver de la misère du monde? Comment l'écrin de tendresse où il repose tout nu, tout innocent, pourrait-il ne jamais disparaître? Un jour, il saura ce qu'est

Appendix

l'humanité, avec ses méchancetés, ses mensonges. Peut-être, à son tour, apprendra-t-il d'autres que moi le mensonge, la trahison, l'infidelité! Je pense à tous ceux qui, le long des siècles du monde, ont été malheureux, gravement, irrémédiablement malheureux. Ils n'ont pas demandé cependant à être malheureux; ils sont nés du caprice ou de l'inconscience de deux êtres. Comment inscrire dans le coeur et dans la vie de mon enfant un sourire éternel? Une fraicheur? Comment lui donner le repos, l'assurance que mon amour le protégera? Mais mon amour saura-t-il le protéger? Sera-t-il suffisant? Pourtant je le sens immense, sans fond. Il sera attaqué, cet amour. Déjà la lutte s'engage: on me dit "Faites ceci", ou "Faites cela". On me désapprouve, on me conseille. Pourtant, je voudrais offrir au monde l'amour que j'ai pour mon enfant et préserver les hommes de la haine. S'ils savaient combien j'aime mon enfant, peut-être leur méchanceté s'arrêterait-elle au bord de leur coeur! Si toutes les mères aimaient à ce point leur tâche!

Je tiens doucement, passionnément, entre mes mains, ce petit corps dont je ne sais rien encore. Je lui parle, je l'interroge. Je le veux beau, mais s'il n'est pas beau, je l'aimerai davantage pour le consoler et lui demander pardon de l'avoir souhaité autre qu'il n'est. Comment ne pas l'aimer plus encore pour me faire pardonner de lui donner la vie! C'est un morceau de cristal que je porte en moi, et je le laisse tomber dans la boue du monde! Je ne puis faire autrement; il repose en moi et je le protège, mais je vais le lâcher au milieu de l'univers! Oh! la minute effroyable, indicible que je voudrais retarder! Celle où mon enfant sera séparé de moi! La dureté de ces ciseaux immpitoyables! Elle viendra pourtant cette minute et le fera indépendant de moi. Comment le préserve de penser autrement que moi, car s'il ne pense pas comme moi, il me sera étranger celui qui sera moi!

Appendix

Que le vaste monde qui l'accueille ne le traite pas en ennemi, car il ne connait pas la haine. Que la profonde terre le juge avec douceur et compréhension, car il ne sait rien encore de ses terribles secrets.

J'ai le sentiment que je suis au coeur d'un miracle. Moi qui aime tant d'être aimée, j'aurai fait moi-même un être dont il dépend entièrement de moi que je me fasse aimer. Que je voudrais lui donner de moi une idée qui le préserve de tout toute sa vie. Il s'agit d'être encore plus stricte avec soi, de se garder de toute bassesse, de vivre droit, sûre, nette, pure pour qu'un être puisse garder plus tard l'image la plus belle possible, tendre et sans reproche.

Parfois, il remue doucement en moi, tendrement, puis tout à coup un mouvement plus violent m'éveille. Et puis tout se tait. Dans le grand silence de la nuit, je l'écoute. Je l'attends. J'attends son petit signe: nous sommes complices. Il frappe timidement. Alors je me sens fondre de tendresse et une larme de joie me vient, parce que je l'avais cru mort tout à coup, ce petit si fragile. Je voudrais qu'il me fasse plus mal encore, qu'il ne s'arrête pas de bouger pour que cessent ces minutes d'angoisse où j'imagine qu'il ne bougera plus jamais. Pourtant ce sont ces minutes qui préparent la divine minute de sa vie retrouvée!

Hommes qui allez recevoir mon enfant, sachez qu'il vous aime, et ne lui enseignez pas votre haine.

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