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THE IDEA OF HEROISM

IN THE POETRY OF

LECONTE DE LISLE

Thesis presented for the  
degree of M.A. in the  
University of Durham

by

Anthony Suter, B.A. (Dunelm)  
of University College

October, 1966

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ABBREVIATIONS

In footnotes, works are usually designated by the name of the author, unless more than one work by a writer is listed, in which case the work is referred to by the significant words of its title. The following is a list of other abbreviations adopted throughout the notes, apart from those used specifically in the Bibliography: L. de L. = Leconte de Lisle, P.A. = Poèmes antiques, P.B. = Poèmes barbares, P.T. = Poèmes tragiques, D.P. = Derniers Poèmes, Préf. P.A. = Préface des Poèmes antiques (1852), Préf. P. et P. = Préface des Poèmes et Poésies (1855).

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A.S.

PREFACE

One of the chief reservations to be expressed concerning any work which purports to study a particular aspect of an author's writings is that selection of this particular aspect does not mean that the critic feels this to be the chief or necessarily the most important feature of the author's work. In Leconte de Lisle, heroism is an important theme which exists side by side with others, such as art and history. It is, therefore, with this idea of perspective in mind, that I have approached the thesis. I have tried to show the importance of Leconte de Lisle's idea of heroism within his work as a whole and its intimate links with other themes. Any seeming over-emphasis on the idea of heroism in the interpretation of individual poems, however, is necessary to a grasp of heroism as a distinct theme.

It is with the idea of balance and perspective in mind that several of the chapters have been made fairly general in nature. The first one - on the nature of heroism - is an attempt towards understanding what heroism means. Within the scope of this thesis it cannot be exhaustive, but it does try to juxtapose what various writers have thought about heroism and to find what common ground there is between them, so as to establish some guide for the reader in relation to the heroes of Leconte de Lisle.

The second chapter - on the poet's life - gives a biographical background because it was felt best to deal with biographical details in a separate section on their own rather than let them intrude into the main discussion of the poetry. The common Romantic idea of the poet as hero is a sufficient justification for such a chapter, but not for an ex-

planation of every feature of the poetical works by biographical data.

The need for perspective prompted Chapter III, on ideas. Leconte de Lisle's views can be understood much better in the context of the history of ideas in the nineteenth century than in isolation.

Categorisation caused problems of balance. It was difficult to arrange the poems. It was necessary to do some justice to whole poems in their own right - I have made an attempt at literary criticism of poems which have not received much treatment before, Khirôn, for example, - while at the same time indicating various types of heroism. The latter had to be done without too much repetition and also characters deserved to be treated in their own right as individuals. Any categorisation is bound to be to a certain extent artificial, but I have tried to balance the disparate factors involved. Characters have been placed in sections where their dominant interest lies and brief cross-references have sometimes been made.

The layout of the thesis was governed by what was thought to make for the greatest ease for the reader. Page references to the poems are given when they are first mentioned and are to the 1927 Lemerre Edition of Leconte de Lisle's poetical works. The bibliographical notes on each chapter explain which books and articles were of most use in my composition of the particular section of the thesis. Full details of these books and articles and of all other works read or looked at during my course of study, either briefly alluded to in the thesis or which may have had influence on what I have written, are contained in the alphabetical bibliography at the end.



CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTORY NOTE ON THE NATURE OF HEROISM

Bowra sees the basis of heroism, and this is the aspect of heroism which I think most important and which the reader should keep in his mind, in the self-assertive principle and he associates it with the life of action and the honour of action. This he later qualifies. Heroism is for the happy few and it does not necessarily mean just physical might - moral qualities have their place too. (1) Taking these as the basic heroic qualities, they can be summed up in the idea of the superior energy of the exceptional man. Bowra, who is talking with especial reference to the heroes of ancient times, provides a convenient beginning to this discussion, because Leconte de Lisle based so many of his heroic poems on the Greek and Norse literary material which Bowra treats and because it seems natural to look for a genuine basis for heroism in the earliest epic literature.

Bowra's view is supported by de Vries who sees heroism as superior strength and courage also linked with an idea of honour. (2) (Honour is a theme of heroism dealt with by Leconte de Lisle in the Poèmes barbares.) Auden, writing about the nineteenth century, conserves the same basis when he defines the hero as the "exceptional individual".(3)

After this simple (doubtless over-simplified) definition, one must pass on to variations and especially to complications with relation to the nineteenth-century view. For although de Vries says that the archetype of the hero still exists in the

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1. Bowra, pp. 1, 53, 56.      2. de Vries, pp. 180, 186.

3. Auden, p. 83.

European consciousness (1), there are modifications and variations through time. Obviously, the rôle of the hero will be modified by changes in society. From our position in a modern, industrial democracy, we ask questions. Is the hero merely a man of superior energy and/or of exceptional talent? Is being exceptional enough? Are there other qualities which are common to exceptional persons in different fields?

Auden helps the discussion by greater clarification and extension of his definition, the "exceptional individual". He defines the rôle of the hero in relation to other people (i.e. in relation to the vast majority). He talks of the dangers which afflict the heroic position, a position especially difficult since the hero depends on the vast majority, for without their recognition he would not be seen for what he is. This connects with de Vries' idea of the hero having to win fame (2) and with Carlyle's hero-worship which he elevates to the level of a religious faith. (3) Leconte de Lisle's heroes of civilisation automatically win fame, for the classical framework is an accepted heroic one. Hero-worship for the barbarians and animals is in the poet who is their audience and who tries to persuade others to worship them too.

To use Auden's terminology, the hero has to exercise "authority" over those around him. This he divides into three types - "aesthetic", "ethical", "religious".

"Aesthetic authority arises from a necessary inequality of finite individuals in relation to one another. The aesthetic hero is the man to whom fortune has granted exceptional gifts." The danger here is of pride. The hero must humbly realise that it is by mere chance that he has greater gifts than others and

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1. de Vries, p. 182. 2. de Vries, p. 180. 3. Carlyle, p. 193.

that in the end death will reduce him to nothingness equally arbitrarily. Also, he depends on others to the extent that he has to demonstrate his superior abilities in order to be recognised. Many of Leconte de Lisle's characters are of this type - Thyoné, Glaucé, Niobé, for example.

"Ethical authority arises from an accidental inequality of individuals to the universal truth. The ethical hero is the one who at any given moment happens to know more than the others."

The ethical hero must teach what he knows, to show what he is, and thereby he loses his authority. The temptation is to convert ethical authority into a false aesthetic authority by keeping others ignorant of the truth. This is not so common in Leconte de Lisle, but Viçvimatra in Çunacépa is a good example.

"The religious hero is one who is committed to anything with absolute passion....."

The commitment may be to a religion or to any other cause, as long as that commitment is absolute. The chief dangers here are doubt and loss of faith. All who are engaged in great causes unto death in Leconte de Lisle - Hypatie, the Barde de Temrah, the Druids, Le Runoña, - are of this type. (1)

Since it is clear that the heroic position is often one in relation to other people, the question of morality is raised. The popular, non-literary conception of the hero is of a man whose exceptional qualities serve morally good ends. This idea leads naturally to a discussion of the relationship of heroism and morality. The dangers which assail Auden's heroes are those of a moral or spiritual nature. Perhaps in this there lies the key to the problem of whether heroism is simply a question of energy - whether there is some quality common to

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1. Auden, pp. 83-87.

exceptional persons in different fields. The idea of something spiritual or moral is called to mind by Bowra and de Vries when they both say that an ideal of honour lies behind the physical energy of the hero. They do not question whether this is good or not. Carlyle goes further. With reference to the Norse heroes he stresses the greatness of soul behind physical might and in the same section he describes the hero as "a wise, gifted, noble-hearted man", which seems to imply moral approval.

(1) Therefore, it would appear at first sight that the concept of heroism and morality are linked - morality meaning some spiritual force for good which is implied in the idea of honour and that of greatness of soul.

Is this necessarily always so? It is not possible to deny a relation between non-physical powers and heroism, but to state that heroic energy is always directed to good ends is not true. It would be too artificial and unjust to obvious literary evidence to limit heroic energy to that which serves purely morally good ends. The reader is faced with this in Leconte de Lisle's poems on Le Cid, Don Pèdre and Klytaimnestra. Reference to other literature of the nineteenth century shows that Leconte de Lisle was not alone in picturing exceptional physical and spiritual energy put to non-moral ends.

The hero of the Russian novel of the nineteenth century, as Henry Gifford shows in The Hero of His Time (the title is based on that of Lermontov's novel, A Hero of Our Time), was essentially a man of his own time, his personality expressive of the society in which he lived. The Russian novel is often concerned with the moral problems arising from the interaction

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1. Carlyle, pp. 210, 205.

of the hero and his own age. Dostoyevsky in Crime and Punishment explores the problem of the hero and morality. (1)

Raskolnikov (2), a self-absorbed student, is driven to crime to prove himself strong. He sets himself above society and above morality by murdering an old hag of a money-lender. He thinks he can expiate his crime by the good works he can do with the money stolen from the old woman. Anyway, he thinks her worse than worthless.

Raskolnikov thinks there are a chosen few who can make a mark on history. On this subject he has written an essay of which he talks:

".....law-givers and arbiters of mankind, beginning from ancient times and continuing with the Lycurguses, Solons, Mahomets, Napoleons and so forth, were without exception criminals because of the very fact that they had transgressed the ancient laws handed down by their ancestors and venerated by the people. Nor, of course, did they stop short of bloodshed, if bloodshed - sometimes of innocent people fighting gallantly in defence of the ancient law - were of any assistance to them. It is indeed a remarkable fact that the majority of those benefactors and arbiters of mankind all shed rivers of blood. In short, I maintain that all men who are not only great but a little out of common, that is, even those who are capable of saying something that is to a certain extent new, must by their very nature be criminals....." (3)

However, the problem of Dostoyevsky's hero is more complicated than the terms of his thesis may suggest. Even though the crime committed by the exceptional person is evil, it is, paradoxically, linked with the morally good end of benefiting humanity. Also, Raskolnikov's feelings are confused. He commits a murder which he sometimes tries to justify according to

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1. Gifford, pp. 201-2. 2. The name, of course, comes from the Russian word for dissenter. The raskolniki were dissenters from the Russian Church. 3. Dostoyevsky, p. 276.

his thesis, but he is at the same time obsessed with guilt. After several days, he is impelled to reveal his crime: does he confess in order to be recognised as an exceptional person or because he bows to society's law and wants to expiate his crime in society's way? The confusion has no answer; it reflects the complexity of the problem.

Raskolnikov does not go through with his original plan of service to humanity. He is not successful. Raskolnikov does not become another Napoleon, just as in Le Rouge et le Noir, Julien Sorel's "Napoleonic" campaign for power, the fundamental image of which is that of the spurs beneath the cassock, is in the end unsuccessful. Success marks the difference between Julien and Napoleon.

Napoleon happens to have made a mark on history. The connection of heroes and history is not so simple as Carlyle suggests:

"No great man lives in vain. The History of the world is but the Biography of great men." (1)

This is a view now discredited by modern historians who see the movement of the course of history dictated by impersonal economic and social forces. Also, Carlyle's view is in opposition to that of Tolstoy in War and Peace: after vividly recreating Napoleon and Kutuzov as individualised characters, he tells us that their actions are but dictated by the forces of history. (2) The rôle of chance, which Auden insists upon, is, therefore, very important, and a deterministic view of history limits the moral action of the hero, but gives grea-

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1. Carlyle, p. 206. 2. War and Peace, Bk. III, Pt. 1, pp. 715-18; Pt. 2, pp. 810-13, 895-900, 931-33, 949-52; Pt. 3, pp. 974-80; Bk. IV, Pt. 2, pp. 1168-72, 1183-86, 1216-17; Pt. 3, pp. 1220-25, 1266-72; Epilogue, Pt. 1, pp. 1339-50; Pt. 2, pp. 1400-44.

ter authority to and earns greater admiration for those who recognise history. History plays a very important rôle in Leconte de Lisle. There is obvious approval for characters such as Hypatie, the Runoïa and the Maoury chief who see clearly the forces of history.

The idea of the hero beyond morality is found in other nineteenth-century writers. Nietzsche translates the idea into philosophy. Nietzsche saw life in terms of the individual's struggle to power. The hero for him is the man whose superior talents and, moreover, whose greater will, allow him to dominate the vulgar, mediocre herd. The will to power is the key test. He who displays this to a sufficient degree above the average is hero. The emphasis on individual human power leads to both a denial of God:

"If there were Gods, how could I bear to be no God? Consequently there are no Gods." (1)

and takes the hero beyond morality. (Beyond Good and Evil is the title of one of Nietzsche's chief works.) The man who can reach this pitch of self-assertive will - embodied in Zarathustra - is the 'Übermensch' or Superman.

Nietzsche's hero beyond morality connects with the Romantic hero of the nineteenth century. Camus considers one of the basic aspects of Romantic revolt to be the definite choice of evil. Hence the preference for Satan in Milton rather than God. Camus sees the Dandy as a key figure in Romantic revolt. The Dandy is a figure above morality in a similar sense as Nietzsche's Superman is; he pursues the self-assertive principle to its logical conclusion. Baudelaire's Dandy has no ideals in life save the cultivation of the self and of personal interests. To so-

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1. Quoted in Aiken, p. 206

ciety he presents a façade of imperturbability, for, while wanting to "épater le bourgeois", with his amorality, he must never appear shocked himself. Baudelaire says:

"Le dandysme est le dernier éclat d'héroïsme dans les décadences." (1)

The examples just given provide evidence enough that heroism is not necessarily connected with morally good aims.

It is beyond the scope of this brief introductory chapter to make more than a short reference to the special, Romantic conception of the hero. However, the last example gives a useful link with the new twist to the idea of heroism - the hero-poet. (2) In the ancient past (and up to the present day in primitive societies) the deeds of the heroes were preserved in the poems of the great bards - it was one of the hero's ambitions to win fame in this way. The new twist introduced by the Romantics was of the poet perpetuating himself in his own writings; Byron is a good example of this. Leconte de Lisle, as we shall see, was against this very personal approach and sought a more objective poetry.

It remains to put forward some clear notion of the basic qualities of the hero. Since there is no necessary connection between the hero and morality, we must seek elsewhere the qualities common to heroes. Carlyle and Auden give clues to this, Carlyle when he speaks of sincerity:

"No Mirabeau, Napoleon, Burns, Cromwell, no man adequate to do anything, but is first of all in right earnest about it; what I call a sincere man. I should say sincerity, a deep, genuine sincerity, is the first characteristic of all men in any way heroic." (3)

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1. L'Art romantique, p. 94. 2. Carlyle has a section on The Hero as Poet (Lecture III, pp. 243-70).

3. Carlyle, p. 218.



This connects with Auden's idea of religious authority - a character's pursuit of a particular aim, with religious devotion, without reference to good or evil, without reference to consequences. This is, without question, a basic feature of heroism, but secondary to the main feature.

The very basic idea is of the hero as the exceptional individual. His exceptional gifts are not directed to any particular end to qualify him to be a hero, nor do these gifts have to be in any particular field (such as courage, physical hardship). His position is relative - relative to his situation. There is no absolute of heroism that all or most could possibly achieve at the same time. To be a hero is to be one of the few. And the exceptional qualities of heroism are exceptional only in relation to the norm of the situation. If the majority reaches a similar standard in the field in which the hero was formerly outstanding, his achievements lose their exceptional nature and he ceases to be a hero. Likewise, heroism is relative to the recognition of the majority. Hero-worship is the natural concomitant of heroism. Therefore, it does not matter if the hero is constantly changing his tack, a hypocrite like Molière's Dom Juan. He has to do so to maintain recognition and to remain one of the few. He is sincere in the most important respect - adherence to his individuality and this central adherence may easily lead to what superficially seem contradictory actions.

The archetype of the hero is the apotheosis of the individual.

CHAPTER II: THE POET AS HERO  
AN EXAMINATION OF HEROIC TRAITS IN THE CHARACTER  
AND CAREER OF LECONTE DE LISLE

"Il m'expliqua que derrière ces fenêtres demeurait un poète qui ne manquait pas de talent, mais qui s'obstinait à vouloir vivre de ce talent, ce qui le conduisait à vivre de misère en payant péniblement un loyer très modeste. Je fus peu touché par cet argument de propriétaire. Il me parut au contraire que, derrière ces fenêtres, quelque chose d'héroïque et de saint devait se passer, et je gardai l'impression qu'une sorte d'élaboration mystérieuse, de recueillement triste et douloureux présidait au commerce de la poésie." (1)

Calmette's story of his visit to the rue Cassette as a child establishes a basic division of views, the two extreme outlooks on Leconte de Lisle that it is possible to hold. The uncle establishes a common-sense norm, putting material security as the greatest ideal and is definitely anti-Romantic. The narrator gives an idealistic, sentimental and very Romantic view of the situation. Both extremes contain some truth. The following chapter is an attempt to get nearer the whole truth by balancing the two views in the light of the material detailed in the notes. It is not an attempt at detailed biography which would be beyond the scope of this thesis, nor is it an attempt to take the easy option of playing up heroic aspects of Leconte de Lisle's character at the expense of others. The aim is a just balance and to see whether the heroic traits are dominant. Putter, in the first volume of his study of Leconte de Lisle's pessimism, while, of course, biasing his biographical work towards his specialist topic, has given a balanced critical judgement of Leconte de Lisle's life as well and has avoided the chief danger of literary biography which is to in-

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1. Calmettes, p. 1.

interpret every aspect of a literary work according to the author's life.

### The Early Years, 1818-1837

Charles-René-Marie Leconte de Lisle was born on 22 October, 1818, on the Ile de Bourbon (Réunion). I do not want to dwell on the early years too much, having no desire to indulge in amateur psychology about the influence of the formative years which 'explain' traits of character of the mature man. (1)

However, I do not want to go to the other extreme - equally fallacious - of discounting the influence of an upbringing on the Ile de Bourbon. It had an obvious effect on the subject-matter of his poetry, as Jobit (2) has shown, and on the short stories he wrote when he first went to France. His reading during these years was mainly of the Romantics, especially of Lamartine, Hugo and Scott. Also, at the instigation of his father, he read Voltaire and Rousseau. Therefore, some radical notions were instilled in him before he left Bourbon.

Life on an island which depended on slavery for its prosperity meant that he had direct experience of something he was to revolt against later on. As with his reading of eighteenth-century writers, there was something for the extremist ideas he would meet in France to feed upon. In fact, if we are to believe the popular story of the ending of his first love, Leconte de Lisle was already discontent with the treatment of slaves on Bourbon. (3)

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1. Flottes' view has now been discredited by Putter, Pessimism 1.
  2. Pierre Jobit: Leconte de Lisle et le Mirage de l'Ile natale.
  3. Hippolyte Foucque (Contribution à la biographie de Leconte de Lisle) reminds us how, in Mon premier amour en prose, the poet relates how the sight of his first love ill-treating one of her slaves made him declare: "Madame, je ne vous aime plus."

The Breton Period, 1837-1843 (1)

The whole question of the consideration of Leconte de Lisle as hero comes to a head with his behaviour and attitude when he went to France for study from 1837 to 1843. On 11 March, 1837, he set off from Bourbon for Brittany, where he was eventually to study law. After gaining a mediocre baccalauréat, in November, 1838, he enrolled for law studies at the Faculté des Lettres of the University at Rennes.

It is not necessary to go through all the details chronologically, but to establish the basic facts. Leconte de Lisle's parents were in no way lacking in parental affection, devotion and care, although perhaps a little possessive. They cut off his money in 1840 only when it became clear that he had no intention of pursuing his studies conscientiously, after they had sent him numerous warnings which went unheeded. Soon, his father was sending him money again, so that he would suffer no real hardship.

Leconte de Lisle himself does not seem to have been, at this stage, a person capable of great affection: he sent few letters home. He was only mediocre at his work - when he did any, for he neglected his studies most of the time. He spent his time writing some of his first poetry; he also engaged upon some journalistic ventures, Le Foyer (1837) and La Variété (1840) which ended in failure and the satirical Le Scorpion (1842) which was banned before publication.

He saw his parents as insensitive to his artistic ambitions when they cut off his money for a time. To a large extent, his situation was self-willed, caused by his own selfish-

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1. Tiercelin provides one of the most detailed accounts of this period.

ness. But it meant that he could pose as the Romantic poet-hero, the outcast from society, starving in a garret. (His reading of Romantic poets, both on Bourbon and during his stay in Brittany, no doubt influenced him.)

However, it is possible to have some sympathy for Leconte de Lisle's attitude, when we consider that what partially estranged him from his father was the thought of the latter's materialism. When he first lived in Brittany, at Dinan, with his uncle who was mayor there, he could easily have felt a genuine exile in a bourgeois and materialistic society. It is easy to see this attitude as the result of an increasing devotion to art. This, however, does not make what he did any the less a genuine choice. Again, it can be seen as a Romantic attitude - the desire to be alone, the desire to suffer, to join 'l'aristocratie de la souffrance'. Thus, Leconte de Lisle, during the years he spent in Brittany, can be seen as posing as a hero, in a Romantic way.

### The Rebel, 1843-1848

Leconte de Lisle returned to Bourbon in 1845. Despite the impression of nostalgia for the 'île natale' in some of his juvenilia, he disliked the actual reality of Bourbon when he returned there. He had even less in common with people there than most he met in France. Thus, it was a time of solitude and misery, solitude and misery made worse by his attitude to the question of slavery.

Putter (1) doubts whether Leconte de Lisle was really incensed about slavery. He finds it difficult to believe that

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1. Putter's section in Pessimism 1, The Breton Period, expresses this.

his pessimistic nature could have applied itself with enthusiasm to the idea of the emancipation of slaves and thinks it likely that he was as much against the material greed of the blacks as against the attitude and domination of the whites. This probably contains some truth, especially when we consider Leconte de Lisle's later revulsion from politicians and practical politics, but this is not to deny that the idea of the abolition of slavery fired his imagination. He saw around him the cruelty of the white man against his black slaves and the resulting human degradation. It was against the principle of the dignity of Man.

Leconte de Lisle's actions when he was back in France show his enthusiasm for the cause he espoused. He lent a willing hand in the movement which led to the abolition of slavery (28 February, 1848). His father, along with many other plantation-owners whose wealth depended on slavery, was ruined and he immediately cut off the allowance he was still paying to his son and broke off all relations with him. The only doubt about the sincerity of Leconte de Lisle's motives comes over the fact that his final estrangement led him to stand (pose?) as the Romantic suffering for his idealistic convictions.

The opportunity to show his views in a more positive way had come with the offer, from some of his old acquaintances in France, of a post on the editorial board of La Démocratie pacifique which he eagerly accepted and he returned to France in June, 1845. La Démocratie pacifique was a fourierist journal, founded to propagate the mystical philosophy of Charles Fourier, about whose concept of society, based on the idea of harmony, Leconte de Lisle enthused. (1)

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1. See the section on Fourierism in Chapter III.

He contributed several articles of a political nature to La Démocratie pacifique, including: La Justice et le Droit (24 October, 1846), Un dernier attentat contre la Pologne? (21 November, 1846) and L'Oppression et l'Indigence (28 November, 1846). Also, he wrote short stories: Le Prince Ménalcas, Marcie, Sacatove, for the fourierist magazine, La Phalange. Based on his experience of Bourbon and the relations of the black and white races there, these stories provide the background to his part in the campaign for the abolition of slavery.

But what show his political 'engagement' most of all are the poems contributed to La Phalange at this period. Hélène (1) expresses his hopes for progress to a future harmony symbolised in the beauty of Helen. He says:

"Oh! cherchons en avant l'Hélène universelle....." which would bring: "Entre l'homme et la terre une amitié sacrée!"

La Recherche de Dieu (2) concludes with an expression of faith in the future of society:

"Marche! les yeux tendus vers le but radieux!  
Marche à travers la nuit et la rude tempête,  
Et le soleil demain luira sur ta conquête!"

Le Voile d'Isis (3) examines the rôle of the monarch in society. Perhaps most important of all is Les Epis (4), which treats of the social rôle of the poet. It is typically Romantic in that the poet sets himself up to offer moral guidance to humanity. (We are reminded that Hugo and Lamartine concerned themselves with politics.)

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1. D.P., p. 146. 2. D.P., p. 162 3. D.P., p. 182 D.P., p.157.

The Change, 1848-1852

This is no attempt to put forward any idea of a dramatic change in Leconte de Lisle's attitude. This would be unrealistic. However, about this time came the crystallisation of the view which for the rest of Leconte de Lisle's life was to put art first. For at this time starts the suppression of early socially committed poems and the alteration of poems such as Niobé which originally had a fourierist conclusion. Putter (1) gives the sanest account of this period, suggesting how devotion to art, always present, gradually became dominant.

This can be seen in some of the early poems mentioned above. A general atmosphere in La Recherche de Dieu is transformed artificially into one of hope for the future of society. The voice of 'L'Esprit de la Terre' is a fourierist 'deus ex machina'. In Hélène, regret for the past glories of Greece does not really fit in with a vision of harmony in the future. Also, already at this period there is scorn for the vulgar herd, something which certainly does not go with the love of the people required of a true republican. L'Architecture (2) indicates that if there is a choice between art and the people, the poet puts love for art first. He expresses scorn for those who do not appreciate art and fears the danger of the prostitution of art.

"La banalité mord l'esprit comme un ulcère,  
Et dans un transport faux, l'impuissance lacère  
Les voiles frémissants de la blanche pudeur."

The changes in Niobé and in the original Eglogue Harmonienne (3) make them more in tune with the love of art. It is true to say

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1. Putter: Pessimism 1 - The Revolutionary Period. 2. D.P., p.150.  
3. For Niobé, see Chapter IV. Eglogue harmonienne - See Chant alterné, P.A., p. 270 and the note on the Eglogue harmonienne, D.P., Notes et Variantes, pp. 285-87.



that Leconte de Lisle never really felt much in common with the masses, nor with politicians. He was attracted, rather, by political idealism and mysticism. After some contact with politicians, some of the shine wore off his idealism and he became disillusioned.

Never at any time did Leconte de Lisle put a political idol higher than a literary one. In fact, he expressed biting scorn for the prophet of society, Blanqui:

".....l'oeuvre d'Homère comptera un peu plus dans la somme des efforts moraux de l'humanité que celle de Blanqui." (1)

Also, he never let his intelligence give way to any sort of political faith:

"Donnons notre vie pour nos idées politiques et sociales, soit, mais ne leur sacrifions pas notre intelligence." (2)

Thus, the impression of the mature poet emerges: it is in this devotion to art that we are to see his heroism.

#### Maturity, 1852-1894

Leconte de Lisle's was not a complete reaction so that there was no political attachment in the later years. Leblond (3) lays great stress, in fact, on the political writings of his later years. However, Leblond's is an extremist work, suspect because written according to a socialist thesis, and it emphasises Leconte de Lisle's political and polemical writings too much, at the expense of his main preoccupations, poetry and translations from Greek. Still, it is necessary to put forward the facts in a level-headed way, and this Jones (4)

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1. Quoted by Leblond, p. 242. 2. Quoted by Estève, L. de L., p. 70. 3. Leblond: Chapters : IX: L'Oeuvre révolutionnaire, pp. 252-73; XII: 1870-1871, pp. 340-62; XIII: Le 'Testament politique' du Poète, pp. 363-402.

4. Review of Egli's L. de L. - Poèmes choisis.

does.

Leconte de Lisle produced the following polemical works: L'Inde française (1857), which is patriotic and praises the missionary zeal and moral ends of the French colonisers as opposed to the greed for easy gain of the English; Catéchisme populaire républicain (1870); Histoire populaire de la Révolution française (1871); Histoire populaire du Christianisme (1871) which is a polemic against clericalism; and there is a black picture of the Middle Ages in a republican vein, the Histoire du Moyen Age (1876), published under the pseudonym of Pierre Gosset. (1) Also, there are some poems of a republican flavour which praise liberty: 1859, A L'Italie (2); 1860, Le Soir d'une Bataille (3); and 1870, Le Sacre de Paris (4).

Therefore, Leconte de Lisle remained republican, but a republican in words and ideas rather than in actions. Also, when compared with the vast mass of his output, his poetry and his translations from Greek, it is clear that his art was his dominant preoccupation. Another thing is clear too; in these years of maturity - maturity both of character and of artistic creation - he drops his Romantic posing.

This retreat from posing and from political action cannot be seen as cowardly. In choosing the road of devotion to art, Leconte de Lisle chose definitely what was the harder, more dangerous, courageous and individual way.

It was definitely a way which would gain him, he knew, less easy sympathy (which he scorned). He began to be regarded - often with contempt - as 'l'impassible'. It was for this that Dumas fils anathematised him in a far from

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1. See Jones: A Pseudonymical Prose Work of L.de L. - 'Histoire du Moyen Age' par 'Pierre Gosset'.

2. P.B., p. 252. 3. P.B., p. 229. 4. P.T., p. 77.

friendly 'welcoming' speech on his entry to the Académie on 31 March, 1887:

"Vous avez immolé en vous l'émotion personnelle, vaincu la passion, étouffé le sentiment. Plus d'émotion, plus d'idéal, plus de foi, plus de battements de coeur, plus de larmes. Vous faites le ciel désert et la terre muette. Vous voulez rendre la vie à la poésie, et vous lui retirez ce qui est la vie même de l'Univers, l'amour, l'éternel amour." (1)

However, he appeared 'l'impassible' only in contrast with the Romantic 'heart on the sleeve' confessions (which were so often false), and the discerning could penetrate to the true nobility of his character - "un absolu mépris pour des choses temporelles et transitoires" (Anatole France - 2). Leconte de Lisle had no intention of prostituting his art by selling volumes of confessions:

"Dans mon orgueil muet, dans ma tombe sans gloire,  
Dussé-je m'engloutir pour l'éternité noire,  
Je ne te vendrai mon ivresse ou mon mal,

Je ne livrerai pas ma vie à tes huées,  
Je ne danserai pas sur ton tréteau banal,  
Avec tes histrions et tes prostituées." (3)

The difficulties of the artist who tried to live off the proceeds of his work cannot be underestimated. (4) Various possibilities were open to the artist. He could be attracted to the revolutionary parties and write merely for them. Here, there was no hope of gaining real appreciation from the masses. It was lowering himself to the level of Blanqui (the highest common factor here, and one remembers what Leconte de Lisle's scorn for him was like!). Also, he gained the scorn of the pure artist: Flaubert despised Victor Hugo's Les Misérables.

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1. Quoted by Flottes, Le Poète L. de L., p. 245.  
2. France, La Vie littéraire, VI, p. 92. 3. Les Montreurs, P.B., p. 221. 4. Cassagne and Sharoder emphasise these difficulties throughout their books.

Leconte de Lisle avoided this possibility, after first being tempted.

The artist could write for the bourgeoisie, write something 'safe', conventional, easily-understood and according to popular, middle-class taste, and so possibly gain an easy living. Leconte de Lisle scorned easy money gained by these means and despised those who sank so low as to put material gain before all else:

"Hommes, tueurs de Dieux, les temps ne sont pas loin  
Où, sur un grand tas d'or vautrés dans quelque coin,  
Ayant rongé le sol nourricier jusqu'aux roches,  
Ne sachant faire rien ni des jours ni des nuits,  
Noyés dans le néant des suprêmes ennuis,  
Vous mourrez bêtement en emplissant vos poches." (1)

It is not surprising that Leconte de Lisle was in poverty for much of his life, for he chose the third road, the hardest of all, that of devotion to pure art. There is no doubt that he genuinely suffered great hardship in the cause of his art. (2) He was reduced to asking for a pension in October, 1856, and again in 1859.

When the accounts of Napoleon III's civil list were revealed in 1870, there was great consternation at the discovery that, since 1863, Leconte de Lisle had been receiving a pension from the private purse of the Emperor. It seemed out of keeping - to left-wing and artistic circles - that the author of Aux Modernes and Les Montreurs should have deigned to receive money from a would-be despot, and the genuine poverty Leconte de Lisle had suffered in the 1850's was forgotten.

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1. Aux Modernes, P.B., p. 352. 2. Flottes (Le Poète L. de L., II: Sous L'Étreinte de la Défaite, 6: Pauvreté, p. 61 ff.), Putter (L. de L.'s Abortive Ambitions: Unpublished Correspondence) and Bonnerot (Lettres inédites de Laprade et de L. de L., II: La Pauvreté de L. de L.) all affirm this.

Was Leconte de Lisle, in the words of the title of Browning's poem about Wordsworth's acceptance of the Poet-Laureateship in England, a "lost leader"? -

"Just for a handful of silver he left us,  
Just for a riband to stick in his coat....." (1)

In reality, Leconte de Lisle's attitude was the most practical and at the same time the most idealistic one. His acceptance of the pension did not involve the prostitution of his art. He did not become an official laureate, and, without accepting, his continued devotion to his art would have been impossible. He was able to reply with noble disdain:

"Permettez-moi de vous déclarer que je n'ai jamais aliéné la liberté de ma pensée, ni vendu ma plume à qui que ce soit. Depuis 1848, je n'ai jamais écrit une ligne qui touchât à un événement contemporain. Cette allocation de 300 francs qui m'a été offerte, et qu'une inexorable nécessité m'a contraint d'accepter, m'a uniquement permis de vivre dans la retraite, en travaillant à mes traductions d'Homère, d'Hésiode, de Théocrite et d'Eschyle." (2)

Since Leconte de Lisle sought above all to be a poet and placed his art above everything, it is by this he should be judged. It is in his self-effacement before his art that his peculiar individualism lies. In judging him it would be well to bear in mind the words of Kipling's The Appeal:

If I have given you delight  
By aught that I have done,  
Let me lie quiet in that night  
Which shall be yours anon:

And for the little, little span  
The dead are borne in mind,

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1. Browning, p. 208. 2. Part of a letter to Le Gaulois, quoted by Estève, L. de L., p. 228. L. de L.'s affirmation is not strictly correct. The poems, A l'Italie and Le Sacre de Paris, are probably inspired by contemporary events - Napoleon III's aid to the movement for Italian unity and the Siege of Paris of 1870.

Seek not to question other than  
The books I leave behind. (1)

In conclusion, it may be said that, in Leconte de Lisle, there are two main strains of heroism, the second effacing the first: in the early years, the Romantic, posing as the revolutionary and outcast from society; secondly, in maturity, the religiously zealous devotee of art.

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1. Kipling, p. 299.

CHAPTER III: LECONTE DE LISLE'S IDEAS AS POET AND HISTORIAN  
AND THEIR RELATION TO HIS TIMES

Fourierism

A discussion of Fourierism and its influence on Leconte de Lisle's thought is a convenient start for a description of the poet's ideas. Fourierism was one of his first great enthusiasms and although he turned away from his fourierist sympathies, the change was not a sudden or a complete one (1), and, anyway, the fourierist part of Leconte de Lisle's career and of his ideas can be viewed as the outward sign of something deeper.

Charles Fourier (1772-1837) was a poetic visionary rather than a political thinker. It is useful to bear this fact in mind when considering Leconte de Lisle's attraction to Fourierism. Fourier's dream of future civilisation was far more likely to appeal to the sensibility of a growing poet than the system of a thinker more orientated to reality such as Saint-Simon. (2)

A comparable figure in England was Robert Owen (1771-1858), although he, perhaps, was less extreme than Fourier, but he held a similar idea - the establishment of model communities, under the name (and in the spirit) of 'New Harmony'. Just as with Fourier's schemes, there were ventures in America to put them into practice. (3)

Fourier's main works in which he set forth his ideas were: La Théorie des Quatre Mouvements (1808), Le Nouveau Monde industriel et sociétaire (1829), La Fausse Industrie et l'In-

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1. See Chapter II. 2. Janet, p. 621, makes the contrast of Saint-Simon in touch with reality and the mystical Fourier.  
3. Woodward, p. 130 ff.

industrie naturelle (1831) and La Phalanstère ou la Réforme industrielle (published posthumously, 1832). Fourier thought humanity had developed little since the state of savagery; the only progress was from savagery to a state little better, that of barbarism. The idea of great bounds of progress towards modern 'civilisation' was, in Fourier's view, false. He saw 'civilisation' as a sham. 'Civilisation' perverted Man's basically good nature by artificially restricting his passions. Man's passions were good or God would not have created them, and they only seemed bad because of the evil influence of modern society in which there were no adequate channels for their outlet.

It was necessary to find the right kind of society where the individual could give free rein to his passions, without interfering with the free play of passions of others. The problem was how to reconcile liberty and order. It was possible to achieve this reconciliation, this perfect state, through the natural instinct of Man, Man's 'instinct harmonien' and his basic 'attraction passionnelle'. It was Fourier's idea that Man, through these basically good qualities of his nature, should organise himself into the kind of society where he could achieve absolute fulfilment, fulfilment for men and women both as individuals and as members of a community. 'Phalanges', sort of profit-sharing cooperative associations, would be set up, and people would live together in communities known as 'Phalanstères' (Fourier thought that about 1600 was the ideal number of inhabitants). In these, outlets would be provided for all different types of activity to suit Man's need for variety (Fourier called this 'la papillonne') and his passions.

The basic theme of Fourier's thought, and the one to be



stressed in relation to Leconte de Lisle, is that of harmony. It is easily understandable that the philosophy of a man who saw the state as a work of art appealed greatly to the young poet. This link with Leconte de Lisle is also perhaps the reason why Fourierism never caught on in France to the extent of Saint-Simonisme. Although it was prompted by Victor Considérant and there was some attempt to set up 'Phalanstères' in America, it was too much a product of imagination working in isolation from reality to be regarded by the majority as other than the wild dream of a half-crazed brain.

The area of mutual sympathy has been traced. Leconte de Lisle's political disillusion - which came through his contact with practical politicians - has been shown in Chapter II. The fact that Leconte de Lisle's views changed gradually and that he still wrote some politically biased works in his later years indicates that some sympathy for Fourier's ideal remained, although he no longer had any faith in translating this into action. The ideal of harmony, first revealed in the Trois Harmonies en une, logically led, in the end, to Greek civilisation. Flottes sums up well how the development of Greek and political ideas went together and had their common source in the notion of harmony:

"Il ne l'a pas incité seulement à rêver sur les espaces stellaires dont son enfance avait contemplé l'éblouissante profondeur; il lui a parlé d'harmonie, il l'a grisé de ce mot, familier aux poètes, mais dont il élargissait le sens. Que sera l'harmonie pour Leconte de Lisle? Dans l'ordre social, elle sera l'apparement des destinées aux caractères, et le développement rationnel de toutes les forces de l'être: son instrument est la justice. Mais dans l'ordre esthétique, elle est rythme, elle est mesure, elle s'identifie à la beauté. Les deux idées convergent vers un but unique; l'art chantera le progrès social, et la beauté des vers un but unique servira en quelque sorte d'armure à l'idée politique. Le fouriérisme précipite donc Leconte de Lisle vers deux voies tout

ensemble; il en fait un journaliste qui va tressaill<sup>er</sup> d'indignation pour le pauvre ou pour la Pologne, et un poète dont la sensibilité plus haute demandera à la Grèce antique des symboles pour exprimer la grandeur de l'Europe future." (1)

Leconte de Lisle lost his faith in the future perfectibility of Man, but never in the belief in the ideal of the harmony of Ancient Greece.

### History / Religion

A link between poetry and history is established by Leconte de Lisle in the first page of his preface to the 1852 edition of the Poèmes antiques. He says that there is little trace of the contemporary in his poetry, and the emphasis is on study, in an objective way, of the past: "l'impersonnalité et la neutralité" (2) are aims of a historian. Archaism, therefore, is by deliberate choice:

"Or, ces poèmes seront peut-être accusés d'archaïsmes et d'allures érudites peu propres à exprimer la spontanéité des impressions et des sentiments; mais si leur donnée particulière est admise, l'objection est annihilée." (3)

Leconte de Lisle's view of history is that he sees degeneration from a former golden age to the present day. There has been a descent from the classical age of harmony to the barbarism of modern times, and this is intimately linked with poetry:

"Depuis Homère, Eschyle et Sophocle, qui représentent la poésie dans sa vitalité, dans sa plénitude et dans son unité harmonique, la décadence et la barbarie ont envahi l'esprit humain." (4)

Leconte de Lisle wants to serve faithfully the subjects he

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1. Flottes, Le Poète L. de L., p. 48, quoted by Hunt, Le Socialisme et le Romantisme, pp. 268-9.

2. Préf. P.A., p. 205. 3. Préf. P.A., p. 206. 4. Préf., P.A., p. 208.

has chosen to study in his poetry and to right the misconceptions and the inaccuracies which colour so much modern thinking about the classical era of Greece. (1)

Leconte de Lisle can be linked, because of this serious interest in the past, with the general nineteenth-century interest in history, although not with the nineteenth-century cult of progress, for, as we have seen, he is pessimistic and sees not 'progress' in the sense of the advance of humanity, but degeneration. (2) The following should give some idea of how Leconte de Lisle was part of a huge movement whose ideal was objective truth, the faithful representation, re-creation of Man in past ages. Just one indication of the movement towards history is that 'chef d'oeuvre' of Parnassian prose, published in the same year as Leconte de Lisle's first collection of poems on the barbarian races (1865) - Salammbô. Gustave Flaubert wrote (and we shall see this as one of Leconte de Lisle's reasons for turning to the past) that he went to the past because of his disgust with the sordid present - a very Romantic reason - as well as for the past's intrinsic interest for him:

"Je vais écrire un roman dont l'action se passera trois siècles avant Jésus-Christ, car j'éprouve le besoin de sortir du monde moderne, où ma plume s'est trop trempée et qui d'ailleurs me fatigue autant à reproduire qu'il me dégoûte à voir." (3)

In the 'pure' historians, there was, rather, the pursuit of their study and especially that of religion as the best guide to an understanding of the real nature of Man. This

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1. Préf. P.A., p. 212. 2. Hunt, Epic, VI, 3, p. 325 ff., sees L. de L.'s attitude as one of undeveloped pessimism, as if it were something negative. This is not so since he has a positive ideal for life and for poetry - that of Ancient Greece.  
3. Salammbô, preface by Jacques Suffel, p. 1.

linking of the study of history and religion is one of the most striking features of the whole movement. Some important early nineteenth-century works helped to establish the trend: Creuzer's Symbolik und Mythologie der alten Völker (1810-12, translated into French, 1825-51), Constant's De la religion (1824-31) and Görre's Mythengeschichte der asiatischen Welt (1810, translated into French, 1819). So the movement was not just a French phenomenon.

Many works followed in their wake. There were works by Thalès Bernard, Alfred Maury and Jules Denis. Two of the most important figures, as far as Leconte de Lisle is concerned, are Edgar Quinet (1803-1875) and Louis Ménard (1822-1901). Quinet's chief work was Le Génie des Religions (1842). He believed that the development of religious thought revealed the growth of Man's understanding. The appreciation of the divine by humanity was shown in social and political institutions and also <sup>2</sup> this is very important for Leconte de Lisle - in the art and architecture of the past, the chief things that history can be sure of because of the concrete examples that exist for us still today. (1)

Ménard shows a similar profound interest in religion. His ideal was that of religious syncretism, as set forth in his main works: 1862, Du Polythéisme hellénique, 1876, Rêveries d'un Païen mystique; and in that great burst of erudite production of his later years: 1881, Histoire des Anciens Peuples de l'Orient, 1883, Histoire des Israélites, 1884, Histoire des Grecs. Ménard has sympathy for all religions at all times, because they expressed truth as it was seen at different

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1. Le Génie des Religions, VI, 2, p. 443 ff.

times, by different peoples, and, therefore, they contained some part of the absolute truth:

"Car l'humanité ne s'est jamais trompée, tous ses dogmes sont vrais, tous les Dieux qu'elle a adorés sont réellement des types divins." (1)

Carlyle makes this point in his lecture on the hero as divinity, when he says that pagan beliefs may seem absurd to modern man, but they all had some truth in them and meant much to the worshippers of pagan times. (2) Ménard even goes so far as to reconcile his historico-religious thinking with modern science. He says that, whereas the Ancients saw various separate divinities behind natural phenomena, now science sees physical forces. However, the meaning is the same. It is simply a question of different names for the same things, for the same truths.

Ménard and Quinet share with Leconte de Lisle his desire for the just comprehension of the past. They also share his Hellenistic ideal. His belief in the perfection of Ancient Greece is matched by Quinet:

"Je remarque que le genre humain n'a connu de véritable paix qu'au sein de la civilisation grecque." (3)

and in Ménard, when he speaks of:

".....Grecs, nos maîtres et nos modèles en politique et en morale comme en littérature et en art." (4)

It remains, to conclude this part of the chapter and to lead on to the next section, to remind the reader that when Leconte de Lisle talks of 'science' he is really refer<sup>r</sup>ing

1. Ménard, Poèmes et Rêveries, Vox in Deserto, p. 3. The peculiar spelling is Ménard's own. 2. Carlyle, p. 1.  
3. Quinet, Préface to Prométhée, OEuvres complètes, tome 12, p. 32. 4. Ménard, Poèmes et Rêveries, Gloria victis, p. 176.

to his study of history. It is another word for the 'philologie' that Charlton defines as the 'science' of the history of the human spirit through the ages. 'Science' in this sense has the very wide meaning of 'knowledge'. (1)

### Science / Positivism

Leconte de Lisle proposes the union of science and poetry:

"L'Art et la science, longtemps séparés par suite des efforts divergents de l'intelligence, doivent donc tendre à s'unir étroitement, si ce n'est pas à se confondre." (2)

Possibly because of a misunderstanding of Leconte de Lisle's special use of the word 'science', there has been some attempt in the past to link him with one of the best examples of a fully systematised philosophy of science in the nineteenth century, Positivism. In a chapter on the literary theory of the Art for Art's sake movement, Van Tieghem puts forward the theory of the union of poetry and Positivism:

"Ce que les purs artistes de 1830-50 refusèrent aux Saint-Simoniens, les poètes de 1850-60 l'accordèrent au positivisme." (3)

What Van Tieghem says may be true of Sully Prudhomme and the sweeping nature of the statement is probably due to necessary over-compression in a book of small scale on a large subject, but great pains must be taken to disassociate Leconte de Lisle from what he says. This has been excellently done by D.G. Charlton (4) and his arguments will largely be followed.

It is useful to outline Positivism and then to show how

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1. Charlton, Secular Religions, p. 136. Fusil does not grasp this basic definition and this leads him to say that there is a contradiction between Leconte de Lisle's preface and his poetry. Fusil says that L. de L. 'confuses' science with erudition, when this is what L. de L. meant! See Fusil, Chapitre IX, pp. 154-66. 2. Préf. P.A., p. 211.  
3. Van Tieghem, p. 242. 4. Charlton: Positivism and L. de L.'s Ideas on Poetry.

Leconte de Lisle differs; it is revealing to play off one against the other in this way. The most important and influential figure is Auguste Comte (1798-1857). He expounded his ideas in the Cours de philosophie positive (1842) and the Système de politique positive (1852). Basically, Positivism is epistemology. It is a theory of knowledge based entirely on science. Science is the only reality, for all we can really know of the world, Comte claims, is scientifically observed facts and their relationship with one another.

Comte's view of history is his famous 'Loi des trois états'. The first stage is variously known as 'fetishistic' or 'fictitious', when humanity personified natural phenomena. Belief in the existence of many divinities gradually narrowed into the second stage, monotheism: one God was seen as the necessary cause of the Universe. The third stage, Comte declared, was dawning in the nineteenth century. This - the positivist stage - is synonymous with the epistemology described above: the limitation of knowledge to what science can tell us, without the search for causes beyond natural phenomena as in the earlier stages.

Comte erected his Positivism as a religion whose faith was to be in science. Where Comte created a logical contradiction against his own philosophy was in his preoccupation with the new science of sociology (he invented the word). His study of society led him to socialist-type moralising which went beyond scientific objectivity.

Leconte de Lisle, it is possible, had a general sympathy for Comte's conception of unity and order in society, but mutual sympathy of ideas does not go much beyond this. This similarity and that of the scientific attitude to the study of the past are things not peculiar to Positivism.

With Positivism in its basic, narrowest definition - as a theory of knowledge - there is conflict. For the poetic imagination goes beyond scientifically observed fact and tries to pierce the surface of appearance, beyond information of the sense impressions.

Comte's view of the three ages is an optimistic one. He saw the development of Man towards the positivist stage as progress towards perfection. Leconte de Lisle was pessimistic. For him the age of Greek polytheism was the ideal and the movement from this represented degeneration.

Comte's sociology goes against Leconte de Lisle's view of art. As we shall see in more detail in the section on his ideas on the rôle of poet, Leconte de Lisle opposed the use of art to social ends. This is in direct conflict with the view of Comte who thought that art should serve a social purpose.

### Industry

Leconte de Lisle's declaration of the need for the union of science and poetry led not only to his work being confused with positivist philosophy but also with industry. He was anxious to disassociate himself from the praise of modern, scientific inventions, a subject which Maxime Du Camp tried to erect into a new and vital theme for modern poetry in Les Chants modernes (1852). This volume is a hymn of praise of modern, industrial power, of steam, of the machine. (1)  
Leconte de Lisle hits back at those who confused him with this sort of thing by drily expressing his lack of enthusiasm;

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1. Grant, p. 83 ff.



in the preface to his second collection of poetry, he says:

"Les hymnes et les odes inspirées par la vapeur et la télégraphie électrique m'émeuvent médiocrement, et toutes ces périphrases didactiques, n'ayant rien de commun avec l'art, me démontreraient plutôt que les poètes deviennent d'heure en heure plus inutiles aux sociétés modernes." (1)

This antipathy springs from deep wells - from Leconte de Lisle's basic view of the development of humanity which is pessimistic. He cannot side with those who rejoice in scientific progress:

"Que les esprits amoureux du présent et convaincu des magnificences de l'avenir se réjouissent dans leur foi, je ne les envie ni les félicite, car nous n'avons ni les mêmes sympathies ni les mêmes espérances." (2)

To show how far Leconte de Lisle is from the nineteenth-century spirit of optimism, one may quote from the American poet, Walt Whitman, who links the rôle of the poet with that of the scientist in the great surge of human progress:

"After the seas are all crossed, (as they seem already  
crossed,)  
After the great captains and engineers have accomplish'd  
their work,  
After the noble inventors, after the scientists, the chemist,  
the geologist, ethnologist,  
Finally shall come the poet worthy of that name,  
The true son of God shall come singing his songs." (3)

### Art

In turning from modern poetry to the past, Leconte de Lisle is rejecting the Romantic notion of the truth and value of the confession, for he feels this is synonymous with a fu-

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1. Préf. P. et P., p. 216. The use of the word 'inutile' is ironical when used by one of the great champions of the Art for Art's sake movement against a poetry which claimed to be more in touch with the modern world. 2. Préf. P. et P., p. 216.  
3. Whitman, A Passage to India in Leaves of Grass, p. 321.

tile sentimentality:

"Bien que l'art puisse donner, dans une certaine mesure, un caractère de généralité à tout ce qu'il touche, il y a dans l'aveu public des angoisses du coeur et de ses voluptés non moins amères, une vanité et une profanation gratuites." (1)

The irony of the position of the modern poet is, as Leconte de Lisle sees it, that he has set himself up as prophet and moral teacher - without justification, for poets set forth no common principles or truths. They are too much concerned with the cult of the self, without reference to eternal truths, however much they like to persuade their readers that their personal lamentations represent eternal truths. In view of all this, what right have poets to preach to humanity?

".....ô Poètes, que diriez-vous, qu'enseigneriez-vous? Qui vous a conféré le caractère et le langage de l'autorité? Quel dogme sanctionne votre apostolat?" (2)

This is the sorry state of modern poetry, its inspiration dired up:

"La source n'en est pas seulement troublée et souillée, elle est tarie jusqu'au fond." (3)

This can be compared with the attitude of Renan:

"Les sources poétiques du monde contemporain sont tariées....La poésie n'est plus que dans le passé, en sorte que les vrais poètes de notre temps sont le critique et l'historien qui vont l'y chercher." (4)

Out of scorn for the poetry of his own time. Leconte de Lisle turned to the past. (It is ironical that his disgust for Romantic poetry leads to the very Romantic desire to escape from the sordid present and flee to an ideal past!) A return to the purity of the past, Leconte de Lisle feels, is the only

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1. Préf. P.A., p. 205. 2. Préf. P.A., p. 207. 3. Préf. P.A., p. 209. 4. Quoted in Putter, Pessimism 2, p. 350.

thing which will resuscitate poetry for the future:

"Et plus tard, quand les intelligences profondément agitées se seront apaisées, quand la méditation des principes négligés et la régénération des formes auront purifié l'esprit et la lettre, dans un siècle ou deux, si toutefois l'élaboration des temps nouveaux n'implique pas une gestation plus lente, peut-être la poésie rev<sup>ra</sup>tiendra-t-elle le verbe inspiré et immédiat de l'âme humaine." (1)

It is impossible to put too much stress on Leconte de Lisle's love of the ideal of pure art, art unsullied by the corrupting contact of materialism and sordid utility. In this, he can be linked with Théophile Gautier, one of the foremost figures of the Art for Art's sake movement. The idea of making art utilitarian was anathema to Gautier:

"En général, dès qu'une chose devient utile, elle cesse d'être belle.....l'art c'est la liberté, c'est le luxe, l'efflorescence; c'est l'épanouissement de l'âme dans l'oisiveté. La peinture, la sculpture, la musique ne servent absolument à rien....." (2)

Leconte de Lisle, too, puts forward strongly the view that poetry should serve no end but itself, for the special reason that it contains in itself all that is worthwhile:

"Le Beau n'est pas le serviteur du Vrai, car elle contient la vérité divine et humaine. Il est le sommet commun où aboutissent les voies de l'esprit."

And the task of the poet is to "réaliser le Beau". (3)

The idea that moral truth resides in the very essence of beauty means that there can be no end in view beyond beauty. This leads us back to the question of utility which has no necessary connection with beauty, a question which was one of the major points of debates on aesthetics in the nineteenth

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1. Préf. P.A., p. 211. 2. Préface to the Poésies of 1832, quoted by Van Tieghem, pp. 239-40. 3. Avant-propos to the Poètes contemporains, p. 240.

century. One of the foremost French thinkers of the age on aesthetics, Victor Cousin, shows this preoccupation, but he does not go to such extremes as Gautier:

"Ce qui est utile n'est pas toujours beau, ce qui est beau n'est pas toujours utile, et ce qui est à la fois utile et beau est beau par un autre endroit que son utilité." (1)

What then, in the light of Leconte de Lisle's critical writings and their relation to his time, can we expect to see as his concept of heroism? Unfortunately, his critical writings are not numerous and the space devoted directly to heroism not great. However, they do provide a few pointers to an idea of heroism. Firstly, there is his pessimism about the poetry of heroism:

"La poésie, réalisée dans l'art, n'enfantera plus d'actions héroïques." (2)

This is pessimism unrelieved except when he expresses some little hope for the future of the epic:

"Je ne crois donc pas qu'il soit absolument impossible que l'épopée renaisse un jour de la reconstitution et du choc héroïque des nationalités oppressives et opprimées." (3)

Otherwise, Leconte de Lisle is obsessed with the failure to produce an epic since the golden age of Ancient Greece. In his Préface des Poèmes et des Poésies, he notes the failure to produce a heroine without altering her nature to something virile. (But Leconte de Lisle himself could be accused of creating such characters - Hervor and Klytaimnestra, for example.) He notes Milton's near success in creating a great heroic character in Satan. (It is a Romantic trait in Leconte de Lisle that he should have admired Satan.) He sees the Possi-

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1. Cousin, p. 155. 2. Préf. P.A., p. 206. 3. Préf. P. et P., p. 222.

bility of Byron's characters as heroes in the ancient mould if they had been treated more objectively. Goethe, also, failed to create the truly great epic in Faust. Only Molière, in *Leconte de Lisle's* eyes, has in any way approached the classical ideal by giving his characters the dimensions of individuality and universality.

What *Leconte de Lisle* opposes to these failures is the Greek ideal which he talks of in these terms:

"Or les deux épopées ioniennes, le Prométhée, l'OEdipe, l'Antigone, la Phèdre, contiennent, à mon sens, ce qui sera éternellement donné à l'esprit humain de sentir et de rendre..."(1)

However, he does little to define the sort of epic and heroic poetry which he admires, just as he talks of the beautiful without really defining it. Even what we can glean by implication is not very much, but one fact emerges clearly: in speaking of the too personal nature of Byron's creations and in denigrating the sentimental, personal outpourings of the poetry of his time in general, he implies his admiration for a poetry of an objective nature. And this Bowra picks out as one of the central features of heroic poetry. The bard effaces himself before the narrative of the deeds of the hero. (2)

It is not my intention to seek a rigid definition of heroism and heroic poetry in *Leconte de Lisle's* critical writings and then to measure this against the poetry. Rather, the intention is to direct the reader to the poetry itself, with the background material in mind, so that *Leconte de Lisle's* work fits into a larger context, but also with an attitude which puts the poetry first. There enshrined, we shall find *Leconte de Lisle's* concept of heroism.

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1. Préf. P. et P., p. 218. 2. Bowra, p. 30.

CHAPTER IV: THE HEROES OF CIVILISATION

THE HEROES OF INDIAN CIVILISATION

It seems convenient to begin with the Indian poems, since they open the Poèmes antiques and represent the most ancient civilisation Leconte de Lisle dealt with. The general background to the interest in India in nineteenth-century France is a feature of the interest in history and religions. Charlton has a very good section on Indian religions and Buddhism where, while admitting that Leconte de Lisle selects and adapts those parts of Indian philosophy which suit his own personal view of life, he shows him to be the chief exponent in the poetry of nineteenth-century France of ideas based on Indian philosophy. (1) The sources for Leconte de Lisle's ideas on India and for his poems are a large number of works produced during the nineteenth century by various scholars. Leconte de Lisle's reading of these - on different periods of Ancient Indian civilisation and literature and some of them not wholly accurate - did easily lead to a historically inaccurate picture of India, but one of which something of the spirit remains true, and, moreover, this spirit was revived through the adaptation to Leconte de Lisle's personal philosophy.

The chief works on Indian history were: La Religion des Indous selon les Védah by Anquetil Duperron (1802), Recherches sur Buddou ou Bouddou, instituteur religieux de l'Asie orientale by Ozeray (1817), La Vie contemplative, ascétique et monastique

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1. Charlton, Secular Religions, p. 144 ff.

chez les Indous et chez les peuples bouddhistes by Boehinger (1831). Some of the most important translations were: Rig-Véda, ou livre des hymnes by Langlois (1848), Le Râmâyana de Valmiki by Fauche (1854-8) and Le Bhâgavat-Purânâ, ou histoire poétique de Krishna by Burnouf (1840-47). Burnouf was probably the most outstanding scholar on this subject and he also produced an Introduction à l'histoire du bouddhisme indien (1844).

It is not necessary to go into the vagaries of Indian philosophy and religion. The chief concern is with poetic effect and the idea of heroism, rather than seeing whether Leconte de Lisle absorbed every aspect of what is a very complex view of life. After the general indication above of the interest in India and of some of the sources Leconte de Lisle was able to draw upon, it serves simply to outline the chief facets of Indian-type thought in his work and to indicate the poems, other than those dealing with heroes, which help to elucidate his Indianism.

We must expect Leconte de Lisle's Indian heroes to be engaged in an attack upon the absolute. There are many signs, sources of this absolute. In Surya, hymne védique (1), the sun is established as the symbol of absolute being: the constant recurrence of the setting and rising of the sun gives the assurance of eternity. Also, there is death. The Prière védique pour les morts (2) teaches the acceptance, the welcome even, of death. There is no alternative, for, as La Joie de Siva (3) shows, all, even the gods and their religions, must bow before the supreme divinity, the god of death. Leconte-de Lisle goes beyond this (the omnipotence of death not being particularly Indian idea, of course) in adopting the most peculiar-

ly Indian idea in his work - that of illusion. It is put forward in its most extreme form in La Mâyâ.(1) The recognition that everything is illusion is the supreme deliverance from the cares of life.

This very extreme notion of illusion is different from ideas in other poems of Leconte de Lisle. In the description of the heroes, we shall find the struggle of spirit and body. Leconte de Lisle's conception of 'nirvana' seems to be the mastery of the body, its annihilation by the spirit, so that he who achieves this is beyond the cares of the earth-bound. There is, in Midi (2), an absorption of the spirit, which forgets the body, in "le néant divin". The traveller in Midi (this poem is transposed into a French setting) can return "...à pas lents vers les cités infimes ", as if purified by his immersion in nothingness.

It is difficult to describe what Leconte de Lisle means because he never makes himself entirely clear on this point, but the ideal seems to be the immersion of the self in a being which has the absoluteness of not-being and which is, therefore, beyond mundane, human feelings. However, there is a logical contradiction: absolute not-being cancels out the kind of satisfaction which the poet has in regarding his ideal state; a reflecting consciousness cannot be present in nothingness.

The heroic comes in the struggle between ~~the~~ the earthly and the spiritual sides of Man's nature, a struggle which precedes the attainment of the ideal state. La Mort de Valmiki (3) is one of the most striking examples of this struggle.

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1. P.T., p. 173. 2. P.A., p. 292. 3. P.A., p. 26.



### The Ascetic Ideal

La Mort de Valmiki shows what Leconte de Lisle thought typical of Hindu heroism - something essentially associated with the victory of the spirit over the flesh. The hero's being eaten by ants must not be taken as ridiculous, but as the symbol of the total control of mind over matter which is oblivion of the material world.

It is significant that Leconte de Lisle chooses a poet as his hero. Valmiki is the alleged author of the Ramayana, that great Indian epic. As a great poet he is one of the most spiritual of earthly beings, nevertheless he is bound to the world as much as to the spiritual preoccupations of his poetry, because the materials he uses are of this world. The poet has conquered the literary world - in the first line he is described as "le poète immortel" - so one of the most spiritual of earthly achievements has been attained, but now Valmiki must go beyond this world. Valmiki must absolutely conquer the body and thus prove his superiority.

The idea of Valmiki's scorn for the ephemeral nature of the things of this world is established at the beginning of the poem. The imagery suggests the swift passage of earthly things by reference to the swift bounding of the antelope and by the picture of the eagle soaring up from the "nid obscur" which is the world. The spirit is impatient of its fleshly bonds and desires to soar free. In contrast to the light, swift motions already described, Valmiki is heavy with years: his flesh is a burden to his spirit.

He is beginning to achieve spiritual detachment from life, however. He is now intellectually apart from life, as it were. The detached line, "Le temps coule, la vie est pleine, l'oeuvre est faite" shows this very mental detachment.

Valmiki's ascension of the mountain, Himavat, is described as a great physical struggle:

"Il a gravi le sombre Himavat jusqu'au faite.  
 Ses pieds nus ont rougi l'âpre sentier des monts,  
 Le vent des hautes nuits a mordu ses poumons;"

This is symbolic of the journey through life.

And now he is impassive. Another detached line reveals he is beyond the ordinary, naïve sorrows, joys and mortal emotions:

"L'Homme impassible voit cela, silencieux."

Valmiki embraces a serene, supreme joy, some thing beyond the scope of the individual consciousness in ordinary life. He can appreciate the harmony of the unified whole of existence. In steeping himself thus in the very essence of the meaning of life, he achieves the complete fulfilment of the individual self, by the paradoxical means of the absorption of the self into something greater. Therefore, it is significant that Valmiki comes to the point of death, not at evening (a traditional poetic parallel), but at midday, when the sun, symbol of the unifying principle of existence, floods the whole scene which his dying eyes survey. And Valmiki is absorbed in the elemental source of life:

"L'âme de Valmiki plonge dans cette gloire."

A new twist is introduced when Valmiki looks back on the literary fame he has achieved in his lifetime. His epic is associated with the source of eternal, absolute being, the sun:<sup>66</sup>

"Pourquoi, tout parfumé des roses de l'abime,  
 Semble-tu rejaillir de ta source sublime?  
 Ramayana! L'esprit puissant qui t'a chanté  
 Suit ton vol au ciel bleu de la félicité...."

The idea is suggested of the eternity of the literary work which now the poet is to take on too. This is something de-

rived from Leconte de Lisle's times rather than from Indian philosophy. The idea of the eternity of art, a more general theme than anything which would come particularly from India, was a favourite Parnassian doctrine. This transformation, in the poem, to the artistic world of Leconte de Lisle's own day is partly what must have prompted the following statement by Carcassonne:

"Valmiki, dans son horrible apothéose, fait songer aux fervents de la poésie, à Vigny, à Leconte de Lisle lui-même, à tous les artistes passionnés qu'un beau rêve console de la vie, que la gloire venge de l'injustice. Il est le génie toujours supérieur au vulgaire qui le déchire, l'artiste fragile dans sa personne, immortel dans sa création; c'est à dire qu'en définitive qu'il évoque beaucoup plus un parnassien ou un romantique qu'un solitaire des forêts de l'Hindoustan." (1)

and something similar must have been in Vianey's mind when he compared Valmiki to Vigny's Moïse. (2)

Valmiki is detached from and superior to the world of men and yet he is still sufficiently part of this world to associate literary glory with eternity. This is an important point: it not only shows how Leconte de Lisle has mingled his personal view of the poet with Indian-derived ideas, but also is important for the idea of the hero. Leconte de Lisle admires the poet as hero. Also, the hero is sufficiently like Mankind to be recognisable as a man, yet he is superior to a great degree to human frailties.

Indian-derived ideas take over again in the last two sections of the poem. They are announced by the single line: "Le soleil grandit, monte, éclate, et brûle en paix." The sun is the symbol of destruction as well as of serenity.

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1. Carcassonne, L. de L. et la philosophie indienne, p. 641.  
2. Vianey, Sources, p. 4.

The paradox of destruction/creation is brought out in the rest of the poem. The ants, slaves to the physical instincts which Valmiki has learned to conquer, are roused by the heat of the sun and they set about their task of destruction.

The spiritual action comes to a climax with the last of the series of detached lines:

"L'esprit ne sait plus rien des sens ni de soi-même."

Valmiki is no longer conscious of the cares of the physical world. Physical annihilation is paralleled by spiritual ascent. The spirit has triumphed over the flesh.

Bhagavat (1) and La Vision de Brahma (20) present the same ideal of that perfect state beyond physical desires and beyond the anguish of the questioning consciousness. However, it is doubtful whether they can really be seen as heroic poems. (It is in discussion of this doubt that they gain a place in this study.) The doubt is because of the all-important presence of the divine in these poems. Bowra (3) is dubious whether characters who invoke the aid of supernatural powers can be regarded as heroes, since they are not exceptional through their own personal characteristics. Divinities cannot really be placed in the category of heroes because they are not subject to the human attributes which make for a heroic struggle and do not have the framework of reference of a norm as humans do. Emphasis in heroic poetry is usually on human powers that are exceptional. (4)

In Bhagavat, conflict between the flesh (and associated

1. P.A., p. 7. 2. P.A., p. 56. 3. Bowra, p. 91.

4. an exception is the very humanised Christ depicted by L. de L. See Appendix, Christ as Hero.

mental anxieties and problems) and the spirit could have led to personal heroic struggles towards the ideal. Maitreya is troubled by sexual desire. Narada cannot wipe out sorrow. Religious doubt tortures Angira. All three, at the same time, desire to attain perfection. The way to perfection is shown to them by the goddess, Ganga; and they do not reach it, therefore, by their own efforts alone.

The doubts of the secondary divinity, Brahma, on the contradiction between the manifold phenomena and the presence of pain and suffering in the world, and the idea of the illusion of these things, are quelled by the awe-inspiring voice of his superior deity, so that Brahma (who is, to a certain extent, humanised) does not win through to any heroic individuality.

#### The Assertion of Life

A different kind of heroism from the ascetic way of Valmiki (one is almost tempted to use T.S. Eliot's phrase, "negative way") is to be found in L'Arc de Civa (1). In a sense, it seems less of an Indian poem because of its ideal of physical energy rather than of illusion. This seems so because superior physical energy is perhaps something more easily recognised in the European consciousness as heroic. This is not to deny it any idea of moral force, though, nor to deny its source in Indian literature. The poem comes in fact from a story related in the first part of the Ramayana.

The old king, Daçaratha, yearns to see his son, Rama, once more. (In the source material, he has banished Rama, forcing him to leave his wife, Sita, but this is left unexplained in Leconte de Lisle's condensed version.) He sends his other son,

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1. P.A., p. 30.

Lakçmana, to seek him out, wherever he may be. So Lakçmana, troubled by his father's anguish, sets forth.

In his search, Lakçmana asks various people whether they have seen his brother. It has already been established that his brother is a man of courage. His father refers to "mon fils plein de courage". What is interesting is that Lakçmana gains no affirmative reply to his questions. Those he asks are indifferent. The background of indifference against which Rama carries out his deeds is interesting with reference to the hero and hero-worship. The general mass of the public do not recognise Rama as hero. His qualities are known - this is all the poem tells us - only by his brother and his father.

We are soon presented with a picture of Rama in his fight against the Rakças; he is an imposing sight with his weapon at the ready:

"Un pied sur un tronc d'arbre échoué dans les herbes,  
L'autre en arrière, il courbe avec un mâle effort  
L'arme vibrante, où luit, messagère de mort,  
La flèche aux trois pointes acerbes."

There is no doubt of his physical courage and might in combat.

Another deed Rama must perform. He learns, when he returns to the palace, that the beautiful Sita will be his if he can bend the huge, golden bow of Civa. Rama views his task with great self-confidence. He is assured of his powers:

"Je briserai cet arc comme un rameau flétri;"

The bow snaps like matchwood in his hands. And now he has gained complete heroic authority:

"La foule se prosterne et tremble."

The ending has some similarity to that of the Ulysses legend. There is a hint of moral force behind the physical, because by his physical prowess Rama regains what are his moral rights to

Sita and to a place in the palace.

The ascetic ideal and the ideal of physical energy have been shown in different poems. They come together and into conflict in Gunacépa. (1)

The contrast of the teeming life of the Indian country and the view that it is illusion, a product of the "mensonge éternel" is the basic idea presented by the first section of the poem. Against this background is to be played out the story of a conflict.

In the first introduction of characters into the scene - the Richi, his three sons and his wife - one stands out from all the rest. He is apart because he is the least loved of the sons and because he possesses the greatest physical beauty:

"Bien que le moins aimé, c'est le plus beau des trois.  
Ses poignets sont ornés de bracelets étroits;  
Sur son dos ferme sa chevelure glisse  
En anneaux négligés, épaisse, noire et lisse."

Apart from his superior physical beauty he is marked out by something else - the passion of love which he nurses in his heart. The love theme is a new element introduced by Leconte de Lisle into a story from the Ramayana. The other basic details of the exposition he takes from that source.

The Maharadjah asks the sacrifice of one of the Richi's sons, in order to appease the god, Indra. Otherwise, the country will remain infertile, stricken with drought. In return for the sacrifice of the son, the Maharadjah offers a gift of cattle. The Richi dare not refuse.

The Maharadjah addresses his demand in such a way as to show that he regards the man who will willingly sacrifice himself as a kind of redeemer hero:

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1. P.A., p. 36.

".....Un homme, pur des signes détestés,  
Qui lave de son sang ma faute involontaire  
Et du ressentiment des Dieux sauve la terre."

The choice falls upon the middle son, the man already marked out in other ways, Çunacépa. The Richi cannot bear to sacrifice the eldest son, nor the mother the youngest, so there is no alternative. The hero declares himself, certain of his duty, but perhaps a little bitter at being the least loved:

"Je vois bien que le jour est venu de mourir.  
Mon père m'abandonne et ma mère m'oublie."

Çunacépa's last wish is concerned with his love - for a girl called Çanta. He begs one more day of life, in order to see her once more. Here, his love comes into conflict with his sense of duty. When he meets Çanta, he courageously declares he must die:

".....Çanta! qu'un jour encor s'allume,  
Il me verra mourir. Quand l'ombre descendra,  
Je répandrai mon sang sur le pilier d'Indra."

The struggle with temptation is great. Çanta urges him to flee with her. He is half won over, never more conscious than now of her loveliness. But he remembers his duty; once he has sworn, he cannot go back on his word. He puts forward a very Indian conception of honour - the honour of keeping a solemn promise and the sense of a whole family's good name.

Çunacépa's decision not to take the easy way out increases his stature as a hero. The question of whether his stature is diminished is raised with reference to the divine or magic powers which save him. The Brahmans of Bhagavat were denied the status of real heroes because their difficulties were solved not by their personal efforts but by divine help from outside. Nothing but the supernatural can save Çunacépa. However, Çunacépa's qualities are emphasised sufficiently in the poem for him to attain hero status. His extraordinary physical beauty and his willingness to die in order to satisfy his concept of



duty and honour are shown in the early part of the poem. Even after the road of salvation has been opened to him and his beloved by the great bird, he remains steadfast in courage.

His exceptional courage can be measured against the normal, human reaction, as represented by Çanta. She is repelled by the horrible picture of the physical decay that is Viçvimatra, the old ascetic to whom the two have been sent to beg for salvation. His attitude is one of courage and respect when he steps forward to speak. When it seems that his courage is questioned, he declares that he is not afraid to die:

"\* - O sage! si mon coeur est faible et déchiré,  
Je ne crains rien pour moi, sache-le. Je mourrai,  
Comme si j'étais fait ou d'airain ou de pierre,  
Sans pâlir ni pousser la plainte ou la prière."

When it appears there is no longer any hope for life, he is, in the Shakespearian phrase, "absolute for death":

"..... - C'est bien. Je te salue,  
Mon père, et je t'en crois; ma mort est résolue;  
Et trop longtemps, vain jouet des brèves passions,  
J'ai disputé mon âme aux Incarnations."

Despite the fact that Çunacépa, through the aid of Viçvimatra, does not have to die, (Viçvimatra's telling Çunacépa how to escape death by repeating a special incantation is an example of Auden's "ethical" authority in operation) the qualities detailed above give him the status of hero.

It is important to stress the difference from an Indian poem such as La Mort de Valmiki; for in Çunacépa, although both the ascetic ideal and the ideal of life are presented without direct comment by the author, it is difficult not to sympathise with the triumph of life which the conclusion of the poem represents.

THE HEROES OF GREEK ANTIQUITY

One of the outstanding <sup>forms taken by</sup> ~~features of~~ the interest in the past and in ancient religions is Hellenism. As mentioned in Chapter III, both Edgar Quinet and Louis Ménard saw Greek civilisation as the golden age of Man's past and this was a view shared by Leconte de Lisle. The movement, which was first called Philhellenism, <sup>eighteenth century and was given added impetus by</sup> can be traced to the ~~widespread~~ sympathy in Europe for the Greek insurrection of the 1820's. Byron's death in the fighting against the Turks in 1824 fired great enthusiasm and sent imaginations dancing back to the golden days of Greek antiquity.

Enthusiasm of the imagination was then followed up by accounts of journeys to Greece, and historical research began to bridge the gap between ancient and modern. Outstanding examples of the type of books which began to be written are Dupré's Voyage à Athènes (1825) and Quinet's De la Grèce moderne et ses rapports avec l'antiquité (1830). There was archaeological research into the ruins of Greece by such figures as Hittoëff; Lenormant and Millin gave lectures on this aspect of Greece at the Bibliothèque nationale. A resurgence of interest had come very early in the century. In 1813, appeared Madame de Staël's volume of a translation of Schlegel's lectures on the Greek drama. Works on literature were published by such scholars as Patin, Saint-Marc, Girardin and Egger.

Perhaps the greatest Hellenists, those who combined the greatest scholarship with the most enthusiastic imbibing of the spirit of Ancient Greece, were Thalès Bernard and Louis Ménard. Thalès Bernard's chief works on Greece were his Etudes sur les Variations du Polythéisme of 1853 and his Histoire du Polythéisme grec of 1854, although his purely creative works were al-

so Greek-inspired.

Louis Ménard is the more important figure for the purposes of this chapter because of his friendship with Leconte de Lisle. His vision of Ancient Greece, as expressed in Du Polythéisme hellénique (1863), is one of order and of harmony:

"La notion divine particulière à la Grèce, la révélation spéciale qu'elle a apporté dans l'histoire, est l'idée de la Loi, c'est-à-dire de l'ordre, de la proportion, de l'harmonie." (1)

These are notions very similar to those of Leconte de Lisle.

The heroes whom Ménard extols are the men who uphold the beauty of Greek order and justice and the poets who celebrate in their works these concepts. Such are the heroes of some of Leconte de Lisle's Greek poems. As Peyre makes clear (2), it is difficult to establish the influence of Ménard on Leconte de Lisle. Both are part of the general Hellenist movement. In agreement with Peyre (3), it seems reasonable that Ménard's influence was to accentuate existing tendencies in Leconte de Lisle.

It has been affirmed (Desonay, Ducros and Putter all seem to have this thought behind their works) that Leconte de Lisle transformed Greece from known historical facts, according to his personality. Desonay talks of:

".....un paysage intérieur qui correspond aux besoins de son âme et dont les éléments sont faits de son désir." (4)

and he blames him for producing pseudo-erudition and says:

".....Les Poèmes antiques n'ont avec l'érudition exacte, scrupuleuse, scientifique, en un mot que de très lointains rapports." (5)

All this is true, but it does not necessarily affect the

1. Du Polythéisme<sup>e</sup> hellénique, Introd., p. 2, quoted in Ducros, p. 99. 2. Peyre, Chapter XII, pp. 469-528. 3. Peyre, p. 497.  
4. Desonay, p. 242. 5. Desonay, p. 262.

quality of Leconte de Lisle's poetry. Certainly there is a contradiction between the Preface of 1852 which professes a historian's reconstruction of Ancient Greece and the Poèmes antiques whose chief purely historical merits seems to be a niggling over the transposition of proper names into French. However, one cannot entirely blame a poet for not carrying out what he states in his prefaces, when the poetry stands as great in its own right. Admittedly, Leconte de Lisle presents a vision of Ancient Greece which, for aesthetic and 'sentimental' reasons, he to a certain extent transforms from absolute reality. Through disgust for the present and despair for any hope for the future he made Ancient Greece his ideal. Although this Ancient Greece loses absolute historical reality by the transformation, it gains poetic reality.

Leconte de Lisle's vision established certain values - ones which we have already seen in the work of Ménard - values of order, of harmony, of justice, the free play of individual energy within the pattern of just harmony, but, above all, the first quality, which the next section will try to establish as an ideal of heroism, is that of beauty.

### Beauty

There can be no doubt of Leconte de Lisle's devotion to beauty. Desonay gives a long catalogue of the different types of beauty to be found in his Greek poems. (1) An important

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1. Desonay, p. 237: "Car c'est ainsi par la beauté, d'un bout à l'autre de l'oeuvre hellénique, d'Hypatie à L'Enlèvement d'Européia, le même cri d'admiration, le même ferveur, le même enthousiasme sacré.

Beauté de vierge (Thyoné, Glaucé, Klytie, Péristèris, Kléarista); beauté de la femme (Hélène); beauté de la mère (Niobé); beauté plus parfaite des déesses aux corps harmonieux (Vénus de

aspect of this is his love of plastic beauty. This is seen in his set-pieces which depict, albeit in a stylised way, the pastoral scene and the art of Ancient Greece, as in: Kybèle (1), Pan (2), La Source (3), Le Vase (4), Médailles antiques (5), Péristéris (6), Paysage (7), Les Bucoliastes (8), Kléarista (9), Symphonie (10), Les Eolides (11), and the Hymnes orphiques (12).

It is not surprising, considering this preoccupation with beauty by the poet, that devotion to beauty can be seen as one of the ideals of heroism. Possession of beauty gives "aesthetic" authority and devotion to beauty "religious" authority. There are, in fact, two ideals of beauty: firstly, a pure, cold abstract and spiritual kind of beauty; and, secondly, a beauty connected with warm, sensual pleasure and sexual love. It is the debate between these that forms the heroic struggle.

In Thyoné (13), the debate is between a young, virgin huntress and the youth who is in love with her. Thyoné is synonymous in herself with the pure beauty she upholds as her ideal. The lover's description leaves no doubt as to her great physical loveliness, "La neige de ton corps d'un marbre

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Milo, Médailles antiques, Hymnes orphiques); beauté de l'enfant (Niobé, L'Enfance d'Héraklès); beauté du jeune homme (Hélène, Khiron, Le Retour d'Adonis, Le Réveil d'Adonis); beauté virile de l'homme mûr et du héros (Héraklès au taureau); beauté grave du vieillard (Khiron); beauté sereine des Immortels (Hymnes orphiques); et la beauté animale (Héraklès au taureau, L'Enlèvement d'Européia); et la beauté de la nature inanimée (Le Réveil d'Hélios, Khiron, Paysage); le respect dû à la beauté (La Source); son caractère sacré (Penthée, Hypatie et Cyrille), et la toute-puissance (Hélène), la pérennité (Hypatie), la splendeur triomphalement claire de la beauté (Vénus de Milo): tel est, - éternellement, - le thème sans cesse renouvelé de cet hymne poétique de fidèle et dévotieux amour."

1. P.A., p. 125. 2. P.A., p. 128. 3. P.A., p. 139. 4. P.A., p. 172. 5. P.A., p. 224. 6. P.A., p. 229. 7. P.A., p. 231. 8. P.A., p. 233. 9. P.A., p. 238. 10. P.A., p. 240. 11. P.A., p. 262. 12. D.P., p. 12. 13. P.A., p. 69.

inanimé....". It is a loveliness unsullied by any impurity. The reference to static marble indicates a beauty which is not corrupt, not sensual. The young man knows she has never been stirred by sexual desire:

"Aphrodite jamais n'a fait battre ton coeur,  
Et des flèches d'Eros l'atteinte toujours sûre  
N'a point rougi ton sein d'une douce blessure."

This is proved by Thyoné's utter unwillingness to be moved by the young man's pleas. She is not going to be taken in:

".....Tes paroles sont belles,  
Mais je sais que tu mens et qu'Eros a des ailes!"

and she will remain faithful to the last to her ideal, confident, untroubled about her future:

"Mais moi je poursuivrai mes fières destinées;  
Fidèle à mon courage, errante et sans regrets....." and:

"Vierge j'aurai vécu, vierge sera mon ombre.....".

The rôles of the sexes are reversed in Glaucé (1). Klytios, a young and handsome shepherd, does not want to be tempted by what he calls "ces ivresses d'un jour":

"Ni les seins palpitants, ni les soupirs secrets,  
Ni l'attente incertaine et ses pleurs indiscrets,  
Ni les baisers promis, ni les voix de sirène,  
N'ont trouble de mon coeur la profondeur sereine."

However, he parallels his temptress's words by describing his ideal of beauty in a way which is sensuous:

"Et Kybèle aux beaux flancs est ma divine amante:  
Je m'endors en un pli de sa robe charmante,  
Et, dès que luit au ciel le matin argenté,  
Sur les fleurs de son sein je bois la volupté!"

The chief image that runs through the two poems is that of whiteness. It is an image that reminds one of Théophile Gautier's 'tour de force' of white, Symphonie en blanc ma-

jeur (1). "La neige de ton corps d'un marbre inanimé", "les grottes de nacre" and the "sein d'albatre" - all stress the purity of beauty which is the ideal of these poems.

A similar pure love of beauty is shown in the poem, Thes-tylis (2). Thestylis is of a pure, virgin beauty:

"Nul baiser n'a jamais brûlé sa belle bouche....."

Her love for the unspecified "Jeune Immortel" can be taken as a sign of her love of the divine, the infinite. And her devotion is unending. The "Jeune Immortel" does not come, but her hope is eternal. "Je l'aime et je suis belle! Il m'entendra demain!" is an expression of hope, confidence and determination.

The love of the eternal in this way and the determined preservation of virgin beauty in the two previous poems are things which are beyond normal, human powers. The heroes of these poems possess extraordinary qualities. They all happen to possess an unusual degree of physical beauty, and with a zeal which is religious they wish to preserve the purity of this beauty in fact.

The type of beauty put forward as ideal in these poems is that which is given fuller exposition in Vénus de Milo (3). The beauty of the Vénus de Milo holds authority over Leconte de Lisle. His worshipping eyes see in the statue all that is the essence of the beauty that he found in Greece. Thus, to him, the Vénus de Milo is a kind of heroine, worthy of hero-worship.

The Vénus de Milo has the energy of physical womanhood, so lifelike has the genius of the sculptor made her, but also, because she is a marble statue and not subject to the frailties of physical womanhood, nor to morality, she possesses the purest

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1. Emaux et Camées, p. 21. 2. P.A., p. 220. 3. P.A., p. 134.

harmony. In no way is her beauty limited. She has not the simple gaiety of naïve laughter and childish games, "...les Rires d'or avec l'essaim des Jeux....."; and she does not represent sensual pleasures which provide only the passing beauty of a moment. Hers is a beauty which both sums up all beauties and at the same time transcends them.

"Non! les Rires, les Jeux, les Grâces enlacées,  
Rougissantes d'amour, ne t'accompagnent pas.  
Ton cortège est formé d'étoiles cadencées,  
Et les globes en chœur s'enchaînent sur tes pas.

Du bonheur impossible, ô symbole adorable,  
Calme comme la mer en sa sérénité,  
Nul sanglot n'a brisé ton sein inaltérable,  
Jamais les pleurs humains n'ont terni ta beauté."

It is the universal significance and value of this serene beauty which appeals to the poet. The serene impassibility is of the sort we find set up as ideal in La Mort de Valmiki. The kind of extraordinary mastery of body by spirit and of individual self by a sense of a greater, more important, universal whole, which makes up the heroism of Valmiki, can be equated with the impersonal kind of serenity which is radiated by the Vénus de Milo. So enraptured is the poet by this impassive serenity that, paradoxically, his vision of the Vénus de Milo becomes more personalised. The universal regard which she attains is spoken of in terms of a proud conqueror receiving praise from a worshipping public:

"Salut! A ton aspect le coeur se précipite.  
Un flot marmoréen inonde tes pieds blancs;  
Tu marches, fière et nue, et le monde palpite,  
Et le monde est à toi, Déesse aux larges flancs!"

When she is referred to in these terms, it is not too much of an exaggeration to speak of her as a heroine.

The other side of the debate - the beauty associated with sexual love - is not presented in quite so sympathetic a light,



but, as indicated in Thyoné, there is a case for this side as well. In Thyoné, the young man's ideal has a kind of pure beauty:

"Ne me dédaigne point! Je suis jeune, et ma main  
Ne s'est pas exercée au combat inhumain....."

and he preserves a religious devotion to his ideal. This religious kind of devotion transforms sexual love into something sacred so that in Klytie (1), the lover can address his beloved in religious terms. The covering of the beloved's body inspires the mystic awe of a curtain to a temple's inner sanctum:

"Le lin chaste et flottant qui ceint son corps d'albâtre  
Plus qu'une voile du temple est terrible à mes yeux....."

And it replaces religion for the speaker:

"Si j'en touche les plis mon coeur cesse de battre;  
J'oublie en la voyant la patrie et les Dieux!"

Even the hideous Cyclops, painfully conscious in his statement of love of his own ugliness, is transformed into something noble because of this religious zeal which is a basic characteristic of all Leconte de Lisle's lovers. The Cyclops is prepared to sacrifice much for his love:

"Et si j'ai le visage et les bras trop velus,  
Eh bien! Je plongerai tout mon corps dans la flamme,  
Je brûlerai mon oeil qui m'est cher, et mon âme!"  
(Les Plaintes du Cyclope - 2)

What emerges from this side of the debate is an idea of male nobility, and such as is represented in Adônis - the essence of male beauty:

"Chantez l'Enfant divin qui sorte de l'Akhéron,  
Vêtu de gloire et de lumière!"  
(Le Retour d'Adônis - 3)

Hèraklès and Male Beauty

L'Enfance d'Hèraklès (1) recounts how the hero performed his first great deed only a little time after his birth. He performs his first great act of physical energy against two serpents which have been sent to exterminate him:

"Mais Hèraklès, debout, dans ses langes se dresse,  
S'attache aux deux serpents, rive à leur cous visqueux  
Ses doigts divins.....

.....  
L'Enfant sacré les tient, les secoue étranglés,  
Et rit en les voyant, pleins de rage et de bave...".

This deed is in accordance with a particular aspect of the pattern of the heroic life outlined by de Vries. He points out that deeds of courage in childhood and/or youth are described in many narratives of heroism. (2)

A deed of great strength and physical courage is recounted in Hèraklès au taureau. (3) His defeat by superior physical strength of the bull:

"Mais, ferme sur ses pieds, tel qu'une antique borne,  
Le héros d'une main la saisit par la corne,  
Et, sans rompre d'un pas, il lui ploya le col,  
Meurtrissant ses naseaux furieux dans le sol."

arouses the intense admiration of the ordinary human beings who are standing by:

"Et les bergers en foule, autour du fils d'Alkmème,  
Stupéfaits, admiraient sa vigueur surhumaine.....".

Thus, the hero is hero-worshipped.

Even though of strength beyond that of ordinary human beings, Hèraklès is still mortal. Hèraklès solaire (4) shows that the hero must die - but obviously a glorious death:

"Et dans un tourbillon de pourpre tu rends l'âme!"

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1. P.A., p. 177. 2. de Vries, p. 214. 3. P.A., p. 182.  
4. P.A., p. 243.

Purple is the colour of majesty and is appropriate to his death, his consumption by that fire that is also the source of life, the sun.

What is significant about Leconte de Lisle's description of Hèraklès is that he does not just make us aware of physical force. This is the aspect of the character which Hérédia emphasises in the section of Les Trophées called Hercule et les Centaures (1). The impression is mainly of a savage sort of physical force:

"Mélant l'homme à la bête, un monstrueux héros." (Némée) and  
 "Hercule tout sanglant sourire au grand ciel bleu." (Stymphal).

Leconte de Lisle links moral force with physical force. Hèraklès is the "Roi purificateur" (Hèraklès solaire), and, as a baby he is addressed thus:

"Dors, Justicier futur, dompteur des anciens crimes,  
 Dans l'attente et l'orgueil de tes faits magnanimes."  
 (L'Enfance d'Hèraklès).

This connects with the "Antique justicier" of La Robe du Centaure (2). Hercules personifies Greek energy and morality. Reference to the ideal of justice shows that his unusual energy is put to the task of righting wrongs. Although pictured as sleeping in this poem, there is no real repose while there still remain wrongs to be righted. So, like the sun (and Hercules came to be regarded as a solar deity) which consumes itself in fire in order to be the source of life, he is forced to use his superior powers in the cause of justice. Expiation of sins is achieved through physical suffering. His very greatness, which has to be revealed in action to show that it is in fact greatness, is consumed in this process of constant action.

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1. Les Trophées, pp. 3-7. The quotations are from p. 3.  
 2. P.A., p. 123.

The hero must pay for being great:

"Ni trêve, ni repos! Il faut encor souffrir:  
Il te faut expier ta grandeur, et mourir."

This is a very Romantic idea - that of the hero who expects to suffer and who feels he can 'afford to suffer' because of his greatness. It is an idea built into the image of the Romantic artist, as Shroder shows. (1)

### Khirôn

Khirôn (2) shows another character whose great powers will enable him to perform great deeds. It also indicates - like La Robe du Centaure - how greatness must be expiated by death.

Heroism is, in this poem, very subtly indicated. There is hardly any narrative of heroic deeds in the present; what is recounted shows the need for a new leader, a new hero. The magnificent deeds of the past and those of the future are those which are related, and this is done by means of the relationship between Khirôn and Orphée. Khirôn represents the past and Orphée the future. In Khirôn's reminiscences of the past, we see the heroic standards of former times. This reflects onto the present, indicating what is needed there. And Khirôn's vision of the future shows that his actions of the past will be paralleled in the future.

This concentration on the past and future does not mean that we are not aware of Orphée's greatness in its own right - it is just that the flashbacks add an extra dimension to his character. Apart from this, we are made aware of something great. Orphée's entrance is dramatic: it conveys a sense of majesty which is obviously not lost on onlookers, who are

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1. Shroder, p. 52. 2. P.A., p. 184.

stricken with awe:

"Mais voici qu'au détour de la route poudreuse  
Un étranger s'avance; et cette foule heureuse  
Le regarde et s'étonne, et du geste et des yeux  
S'interroge aussitôt. Il approche. Les Dieux  
D'un sceaux majestueux ont empreint son visage.  
Dans ses regards profonds règne la paix du sage.  
Il marche avec fierté.....".

Khirôn too is filled with awe. He recognises the man who has come to visit him as Orphée. He feels greatly honoured by the visit, since he is well acquainted with Orphée's fame:

"Ta présence m'honore, et mon antre sauvage  
N'a contenu jamais, entre tous les humains,  
Un hôte tel que toi, Chanteur aux belles mains!  
Ta gloire a retenti des plaines Helléniques  
Jusqu'aux fertiles bords où les Géants antiques  
Gémissent.....".

Orphée's fame resounds just as the beautiful strains of his music do.

Orphée is modest; far from seeking praise, he has come to seek Khirôn's help. Orphée wishes to serve him; he worships him, knows his greatness. Orphée explains the situation: a god has stolen from the Minyens the Golden Fleece; now it hangs in the temple of Aëès at Kolkhos, where a fearsome dragon guards over it. To wrest the treasure back from the forces of evil, a host of mighty warriors has been assembled - from -

"Le puissant Hèraklès, fils de Zeus et d'Alkmène,  
Qui déploie en tous lieux sa force surhumaine..." - to -

"Le cavalier Nestor, et Lyncée aux grands yeux  
.....  
Et vingt autres héros.....".

"Ils n'attendent qu'un chef.....", Orphée explains. The list of great names he has just given is in itself a resounding catalogue of heroism, but it also provides a build-up to the man who will command them. Indeed, what sort of man would

have the stature sufficient to take on this task with success? It would seem that earthly greatness could go no further.

It is Khirôn whom Orphée expects to take the command. This is not to be so. In his long narrative, Khirôn speaks of the days of his youth, when the health and young energy of a new world uncovered by the Flood is symbolised by his own bounding energy:

"Oui! J'étais jeune et fort; rien ne bornait mes vœux:  
J'étreignais l'univers entre mes bras nerveux;  
L'horizon sans limite aiguillonnait ma course,  
Et j'étais comme un fleuve égaré de sa source,  
Qui, du sommet des monts soudain précipité,  
Flot sur flot s'amoncelle et roule avec fierté." (1)

But this is Khirôn's former strength. In defining the kind of heroic might necessary for the situation Orphée has described, Khirôn has defined himself out of the position of leader of the assembled forces. He realises the decline of his own powers. He is in despair at this degeneration:

"...Jamais plus, de flots noirs partout environné,  
Je ne verrai l'Olympe et ses neiges dorées.....".

Orphée tries to reassure him and urges him to continue the story of his past life. Khirôn continues with a further evocation of the young universe and of his youthful self. Also, he recounts the invasion of the Pélasges by the Hellènes and the revolt of the Giants against the gods.

Khirôn's strength, apart from being his greatness, was also his weakness. His strength gave him pride and his pride made him criticise the gods for their weakness, weakness which he despised. For this he was punished:

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1. Note how various of L. de L.'s characters, such as Quain in his vision of Eden, look back onto a glorious, innocent past. There is the same return to the past in some of his personal poems, such as Dies Irae. See Chapter VII.

"J'osais délibérer sur le Destin des Dieux!  
Ils m'ont puni. Bientôt les Kères indignées  
Trancheront le tissu de mes longues années;  
La flèche d'Héraklès finira mes remords;  
J'irai mêler mon ombre au vain peuple des morts."

It is for this reason that Khirôn refuses to accept the mission Orphée asks him to undertake:

"Je ne foulerai point Argô chargé de gloire,  
Noble Aède! J'attends le jour expiatoire;"

This idea of the "jour expiatoire" is very important: it links with the idea of greatness having to be expiated by suffering in La Robe du Centaure. It contains an important warning for Orphée. But, at the moment, Orphée's powers are untrammelled: no sin of pride has yet stained him, nor does the suffering of expiation weigh upon him. And his powers are undoubted. He has but to touch the strings of his lute and all his hearers are enraptured.

"Un chant majestueux, qu'on dirait éternel,  
Enveloppe la lyre entre tes bras vibrante;  
Et l'oreille, attachée à cette âme mourante,  
Poursuit dans un écho décroissant et perdu  
Le chant qui n'étant plus est toujours entendu."

In this way, Leconte de Lisle links his hero with art; in the serenity of the music is an echo of the feeling which the Vénus de Milo inspires in the onlooker. Khirôn's rapture at this harmony shows that he has recognised the new hero, and Orphée, too, sees from the old man's wisdom that it is now his task to go. Khirôn's prophetic vision is of the future Orphée is marching towards:

"Je vois le noir Argô sur les flots furieux  
S'élançer comme l'aigle à son but glorieux,  
Et dans le sein des mers les blanches Kyanées  
Abaïsser à ta voix leurs têtes mutinées.  
Et Kolkhos est vaincu!"

Orphée departs in the same manner as he arrived. This

stately progress - watched by admirers from their rustic surroundings - forms the framework to the poem. The departure, though, has added significance; firstly, because of the words Orphée speaks: he leaves his hearers with an inner calm which will remain eternally; secondly, the character who departs is no longer a mysterious stranger: through the reflection of the words of Khirôn, we know now the deeper basis of his majestic presence. Khirôn can be said to express, in his tale of youth and vigour, the ideal of early Greek consciousness. Orphée takes over all this and also adds something new, for art and beauty are linked to his heroism by his music.

#### Hypatie and Martyrdom

One implication of the idea of suffering and expiation met in La Robe du Centaure and Khirôn is the conscious choice or willing acceptance of martyrdom. Hypatie and Hypatie et Cyrille (1) which show martyrdom for the ideals of Greek civilisation. This is an exercising of the "religious" authority of which Auden speaks. The Chant alterné (2) opposes Greek and Christian ideals. The Greek is represented as an ideal of voluptuous liberty and of beauty, the Christian as virgin purity and spiritual sacrifice. Here there seems to be nothing more than a simple opposition - no attempt by the author to direct the reader in favour of one or the other. (3)

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1.P.A., p. 65 and p. 275. 2. P.A., p. 270.

3. Elsenberg, Le Sentiment religieux chez L. de L., p. 135, sees in the original version of this poem - the Eglogue harmonienne of 1846 - equal sympathy for Greek beauty and Christian chastity, and, in fact, in this version, the poet intervenes at the end to exhort the reader to sympathise with both ideals. See D.P., Notes et Variantes, p. 287.



This is definitely not the case with Hypatie and Hypatie et Cyrille where the poet's upholding of the Greek ideal and his hatred of its conquest by Christianity are very violent.

Hypatie was in fact, an Egyptian, but she studied intensively Greek mathematics and philosophy and so she personifies the Greek ideal. This ideal is harmonious and many-sided, but the Christianity which replaced it, Leconte de Lisle says, is a narrow fanaticism. Its intolerance, unwillingness to pay any heed to former beliefs to see if any good lies in them is expressed in the vicious killing of Hypatie. (She was stoned to death.) Thus, Christianity is seen as a crudely destructive force.

Hypatie remains firm in her adherence to the Greek ideal, where others weakly gave in and were converted to Christianity:

"Mais le siècle emportait ces âme insoumises  
Qu'un lien trop fragile enchaînait à tes pas;  
Et tu les voyais fuir vers les terres promises;  
Mais toi, qui savais tout, tu ne les suivis pas!"

Because of her refusal to sacrifice her ideal, she is struck down and it is as if the ideal itself is being struck off the face of the earth:

"Le vil Galiléen t'a frappée et maudite,  
Mais tu tombas plus grande! Et maintenant, hélas!  
Le souffle de Platon et le corps d'Aphrodite  
Sont partis à jamais pour les beaux cieux d'Hellas!"

"Mais tu tombas plus grande!" indicates how Hypatie's heroic stature grows because of her death. By killing her, the Christians have done something they would never have wished, they have made her immortal, and the harmonious combination of mind and body, "Le souffle de Platon et le corps d'Aphrodite" is immortal too. The ugliness of Christianity is now in control of the world:

".....L'impure laideur est la reine du monde....", but

true beauty survives in eternity:

"Elle seule survit, immuable, éternelle.  
La mort peut disperser les univers tremblants,  
Mais la Beauté flamboie, et tout renaît en elle,  
Et les mondes encor roulent sous ses pieds blancs!"

And this is Hypatie's justification.

Hypatie et Cyrille is a more dramatic account of the story of Hypatie and gives more weight to character. The opening scene is a contrast between the exceptional individual and the ordinary one. Hypatie's nurse displays very normal human fears, but when compared with Hypatie's fortitude, they seem cowardly. The fears are, in a sense, well grounded, for the nurse can see the hostility which is building up against those, such as Hypatie, who keep to the old religion, but they are cowardly in the sense that, although she has no sympathy for the representatives of the new religion (her language shows her loathing and horror:

"Ces monstres en haillons, pareils aux animaux  
Impurs, qui vont toujours prophétisant les maux....")

she does not want to fight against them but to play safe.

Hypatie's belief that she has nothing to fear is not realistic, yet at least it shows a clear conscience:

"J'ai dans ma conscience un plus sûr bouclier."

and this kind of confidence in her own rightness will be a major factor in her debate with Cyrille.

The Christian Bishop, Cyrille, comes to reason with her. He begins in a moderate tone, saying that no-one is blind to her virtues and how afflicted he is by her remaining outside the Christian Church, but also he makes it clear that he thinks her gods worthless. The latter reveals his narrowness of outlook. Hypatie, on the other hand, is willing to admit that different religions strive towards the same sort of ideal:

"Jean n'a-t-il point parlé comme autrefois Platon?  
 Les mots diffèrent peu, le sens est bien le même.  
 Nous confessons tous deux l'espérance suprême,  
 Et le Dieu de Cyrille, en mon coeur respecté,  
 Comme l'Abeille Attique, a dit la vérité."

Here is an echo of the religious syncretism of the nineteenth century.

Cyrille will not see the good which exists in other religions:

"Confondre de tels noms est blasphème ou démente."

He thinks of the earlier religions as entirely impure, not as more imperfect gropings towards the same end as Christianity.

Along these lines the struggle develops. The wide, balanced attitude of Hypatie which views Christianity with the same favour which she accords to other religions:

"Je rends ce que <sup>je</sup> dois au Prophète inspiré,  
 Et comme à toi, mon père, il m'est aussi égale,  
 Et de ton maître aux miens marque mieux l'intervalle.  
 Sois équitable enfin."

against the narrow fanaticism of the Bishop, whose 'idée fixe' makes him blind to everything save Christianity and bloats him with pride in his so-called humility. It leads him to deny beauty and to associate old cults with lewd unchastity.

He lacks Hypatie's depth and breadth of insight, for he sees Christianity as the only possible religion of the future, whereas Hypatie - and this is in accordance with Leconte de Lisle's own philosophy of history - understands what he calls 'progress' as dégénération. If Christianity really were as strong and irresistible as he says, it would not have to resort to ferocious violence:

"Mais ~~pourquoi~~ jusqu'à la fureur pourquoi vous emporter?  
 Jusque dans nos tombeaux pourquoi nous insulter?  
 Que craignez-vous des morts, vous de qui le mains pures  
 S'élèvent vers le ciel vierges de nos souillures,

Et qui, seuls, dites-vous, êtes prédestinés  
A donner la sagesse aux peuples nouveaux-nés?"

This show of force springs from the weakness of fear, not strength, and is, anyway, against what the Christian Church itself professes to teach ("...la paix, l'amour qu'enseignent vos églises"). In its turn Christianity will pass away, as all religions do. Hypatie is showing true humility before what she understands to be the course of history.

Hypatie takes on the rôle as the personification of her ideal as she does in Hypatie, and she reminds Cyrille that he cannot kill the old gods while they live on in the hearts of the old believers. Nothing can destroy the beautiful harmony of the old religion.

Despite a final plea from Cyrille, Hypatie remains firm. Hers is a willing, conscious choice of martyrdom, for by the end of the conversation with the Bishop, it is clear that if she does not give in and be converted, she will face death. She faces it with confidence that she has been faithful to her beliefs and that immortality will be her reward:

"Je vais être immortelle. Adieu!" (14)

### Niobé

Refusal to comply with a new religion is one of the bases of Niobé (2). Leconte de Lisle's source material, as Vianey points out (3) is the story of Niobe in the sixth book of Ovid's Metamorphoses. Ovid describes Niobe's pride in her lineage (she is the daughter of Tantalus and has Atlas and Jupiter

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1. It is interesting to link this defence of a passing religion with the same theme in P.B., e.g. - Le Barde de Temrah, Le Massacre de Mona and Le Runoña. 2. P.A., p. 142.

3. Vianey, Sources, p. 348 and Ovid, pp. 150-55.

among her forbears) and how she ascribes to herself a demi-god-like state. Also, she has great pride in her children - seven sons and seven daughters. Niobe orders her attendants to stop the sacrifices they have been making to the goddess, Leto; in revenge, Leto sends her children, Apollo and Diana, to kill Niobe's children - one by one. Niobe's grief turns her to stone, in which state, however, she continues to weep copiously. She is carried away by a whirlwind to a mountain-top where she will weep - eternally.

Without altering any of this basic material, Leconte de Lisle transforms it into something that is typical of himself. In the bare outlines of Ovid's story, there is not much attempt to capture the reader's sympathy. Indeed, the reader could be definitely hostile to Niobe because of her great pride. The idea of pride is one which Leconte de Lisle produces in his poem:

"La fière Niobé, la fille de Tantale,  
Droite dans son orgueil, avec félicité  
Contemple les beaux fruits de sa fécondité...".

If this were all her character, the reader would perhaps be antagonised, but Leconte de Lisle makes very much more of the sacrifices to Leto. The poem shows his ability to create a sense of mounting tension. At first, we are set at a distance from Niobé by the fact that the chorus describes her. Through the chorus, the reader is told of Niobé's angry look when the bard sings the praises of the gods; through the chorus we see her rising in proud wrath. Then the storm breaks. And in the speech that follows we see Niobé rise to a stature that she never achieves in the original version of the story.

Her anger is not just motivated by a sense of afflicted pride in herself, but because of her genuine sympathy for the

old, fallen gods. Here is an example of a theme very important in the works of Leconte de Lisle and for his idea of heroism - that of revolt. Niobé is a great rebel in her support for

".....celui d'où sortait toute science humaine,  
L'illustre Prométhée aux yeux perçants, celui  
Pour qui seul entre tous l'avenir avait lui,  
Le Ravisser du feu, cher aux mortels sublimes,  
Qui, longtemps, enchaîné sur de sauvages cimes,  
Bâtissait un grand rêve aux serres du vautour;"

This praise of Prometheus Leconte de Lisle finds just because Prometheus was the god who attempted to preserve a strong personal link between the divinities and humanity and because he is against any narrow worship of one jealous god.

Leto certainly proves to be a jealous goddess, and this makes Niobé's stand against her all the more courageous. Bowra (1) remarks how the struggle against the curse of the gods has been an outstanding feature of much heroic poetry. Disaster breaks loose with the arrival of Apollôn and Artémis. The avenging pair loose their arrows upon the children of Niobé, and one by one they fall dead. Their father, Amphion, for very grief, commits suicide. No such fate awaits Niobé: she is turned to marble. In this form she takes on a new beauty: "Que la douleur est belle, ô marbre sans pareil!"

because she is lifted above ordinary, earthly sorrow and is given the serenity of a great work of art. Niobé still lives in this form. It is as if an artist has created a great statue of suffering:

"On dirait à te voir, ô marbre désolé,  
Que du ciseau sculpteur des larmes ont coulé.

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1. Bowra, p. 89.

Tu vis, tu vis encor!"

Niobé in this form takes on the heroic qualities of the type possessed by the Vénus de Milo. She is the epitome of human emotion but at the same time is without human transience. Niobé's suffering is perpetuated in marble in the same way as the Romantic poet perpetuated his suffering in his own poetry. This perpetuation of suffering is, in a sense, Niobé's reward for her courage. She has the eternity of a work of art which will for ever excite the sympathy of onlookers. It is interesting to see Leconte de Lisle adopting an essentially aesthetic solution to the problem of the dénouement of his poem (1), and it shows his understanding of the link between art and religion in Ancient Greece. (2)

### L'Apollonide

L'Apollonide (3) forms a fitting conclusion to this section of the chapter, not only because it was Leconte de Lisle's last poem on Greek civilisation (published in 1888), but also because it perhaps sums up better than any other single work, his Greek ideal and his ideal Greek hero. It conveys the dominant impression to be given in this section of the chapter. Anatole France says that the Apollonide of Leconte de Lisle

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1. The last line, "Niobé, Niobé! Souffriras-tu toujours?" must surely be taken as rhetorical. In 1847, under fourierist influence, there was a conclusion of an extra 25 lines which anticipated the resurrection of Niobé, "mère Humanité", in a future age, and in 1852, a shortened conclusion, but of similar meaning. See D.P., Notes et Variantes, pp. 264-5. The aesthetic solution of the final version is, however, far more satisfying and far more worthy of the mature L. de L.

2. Quinet, Le Génie des Religions, Chap. VI, 2: Le divin dans l'humanité. Des religions grecques dans leurs rapports avec la poésie et les arts, p. 443, 3; Suite. Le Drame dans ses rapports avec les religions grecques, p. 455. 3. P.T., p. 255.

transports us to:

"La sainte Athènes des poètes, des sculpteurs, des architectes et des philosophes.". (1)

Iôn is introduced as a character of extraordinary piety and devotion to the deity it is his duty to serve. His is a total worship of beauty, which he describes in ecstatic terms, his only wish being to match his ideal in purity:

"O sources, qui jamais ne serez épuisées,  
Qui fluez et chantez harmonieusement  
Dans les mousses, parmi les lys lourds de rosées,  
De la pente du mont solitaire et charmant!  
Eaux vives! sur le seuil et les marches Pythiques  
Epanchez le trésor de vos urnes d'azur,  
Et puisse aussi le flot de mes jours fatidiques  
Couler comme vous, chaste et pur!"

His nobility of character is shown by his immediate sympathy for the troubles of Kréousa. His devotion to his deity, Apollôn, is not a blind one. He has a great sense of justice and, although shocked almost to unbelief at first by the story of the rape perpetrated by Apollôn, he soon declares the god's action, if it be so, to be wrong:

"Apollôn fut injuste, et je dis hautement  
Qu'il est mal, homme ou Dieu, de trahir son serment."

His words reveal his courageous love of truth and justice.

Iôn still remains faithful to his duties at the Temple. He will not leave his appointed place when Xouthos arrives and demands to be taken to the inner sanctum. There is, on the whole, the impression that Iôn is a person too good for this world. When King Xouthos declares him to be his son and tells him he should follow him to Athens, Iôn shrinks from such a rôle. He wants an obscure, happy life of peace. He does not

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1. France, Vie litt., p. 457.



relish the thought of going into a position where he might have to shed blood, something alien to his present way of life.

His genuine reluctance not to have to kill Kréousa, when it has been proved she has attempted to poison him, comes out in the third part of the dramatic poem. (Kréousa, it must be noted, has done the deed out of love for her lost son; she does not believe Iôn, whom her husband, Xouthos, has picked out, to be he, and she cannot bear another to reign in her son's place.) He is urged on by the attendants but he fears to shed blood at the altar. He is relieved to be prevented from his terrible task by the Priestess, and the fact that he is Kréousa's son is proved.

Of the other characters apart from Iôn, little need be said. Kréousa is a pathetic rather than a heroic figure: sympathy is built up for her plight as the victim of Apollôn and the mother of a lost child rather than wonder at any exceptional qualities, although she does have one heroic moment when she confesses her crime. Xouthos is a less sympathetic character, of no extraordinary gifts and of little regard for his wife's suffering. Le Vieillard, Kréousa's old servant, however, proves himself as a man of great loyalty and bravery. This is one of Leconte de Lisle's greatest departures from his Greek original, the Ion of Euripides. In the original, a messenger relates how, after torture, the old man blurts out the truth of how he agreed to murder Ion at the command of his Queen (1), whereas, in Leconte de Lisle's direct presentation of the scene, he takes all the blame on himself and remains firm even after the threat of torture.

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1. L. de L., Euridipe, tome III, p. 202 ff.

Leconte de Lisle's alteration of his source is significant. He is concerned with presenting a more idealistic picture than Euripides who took a realistic, perhaps cynical view of human frailties. The play of Euripides is deliberately ambiguous in effect. Ion is left disturbed by what has happened to him. Euripides, it is probable, was indulging in satire at the expense of the gods.

However, Leconte de Lisle's conclusion is clearer. A genuine rejoicing is shown, whereas, in the original, Athene's confirmation that Ion is Creusa's son and her prophecy of a glorious future for him leaves the hero perturbed. Leconte de Lisle turns this section into a great hymn of praise for Greek art and civilisation. Instead of Athene, appear the Muses - Leconte de Lisle's usual emphasis on the connection of Greek civilisation and art comes out here - who proclaim the golden future. Now Ion has no doubts. Whereas before he shrank from the position which was thrust upon him, he now gladly accepts his heroic rôle, for which his qualities fit him. He himself sees the vision of future greatness:

"O Muses, ô ma mère, ô prodige! Le mur  
Du Temple disparaît... Dans l'aurore et l'azur,  
Emplissant l'horizon de sa splendeur soudaine,  
Monte aux cieux élargis la Cité surhumaine,  
Et la grande Pallas, le front ceint d'un éclair,  
Dresse sa lance d'or sur les monts et la mer!"

TOWARDS BARBARISM

The decision to divide this chapter in this way came out of a recognition that Leconte de Lisle's picture of India and Greece is not a one-sided one. The break between the two sorts of Indian poems is a very obvious one, especially so since the three poems to be dealt with in this section are all in the Poèmes barbares (a temptation to deal with them with the rest of the barbarian poems). However, all the Greek poems in this section have the framework of reference of civilisation, even though they show barbarian forces breaking out. It is true that Leconte de Lisle held a very idealised view of Ancient Greece, but, as his philosophy of history shows, he was not blind to those forces which eventually destroyed it (except for its eternal heritage in the minds of poets and scholars). Leconte de Lisle recognised these forces but preferred the harmonious aspect of Greece.

Already we have seen the threat of chaos, in the form of the advance of Christianity, in Hypatie and Hypatie et Cyrille. There are also poems in which the agents of chaos work from within. The framework of these works is the harmony, peace and beauty of the ideal Greece, but the heroes, instead of identifying themselves with this ideal and trying to live according to its difficult precepts are in conflict with it and are in torment. This shows a movement towards barbarism, where the restraint of the Greek kind of harmony will be gone. It also indicates the essential difference between the heroes of civilisation and those of barbarism. The individual energies of the former are directed towards and contained by the harmony of the whole of civilisation, whereas the barbarian heroes direct their energies to more personal ends.

The forces of revolt were shown in Niobé, but the revolt here was towards freedom of worship (in accordance with Leconte de Lisle's ideal of polytheism) and the conclusion establishes by its aesthetic solution. However, savagery is let loose in Le Combat homérique (1). In Hélène and Les Erinnyes (2), individual energy and harmony clash most forcibly.

### Hélène

Hélène takes up the theme of revolt against the restraints of society and struggle against the fate imposed by the gods. The framework of Greek civilisation is provided in the utterances of the bard, Démodoce, and the speeches of the choruses. In the very first speech of the poem, Démodoce links the glories of Greece with:

"Hélène aux pieds d'argent, Hélène au corps sublime!" -

but it is clear from Hélène's first words that her outward, physical beauty, which seems to symbolise the harmony of civilisation, in fact contrasts with the inner turmoil of her feelings. Her mind is disturbed by some mysterious foreboding. Leconte de Lisle builds up mitigating circumstances for her: it is obvious that she is frustrated through her loneliness and boredom, which will make her an easier prey to Paris when he arrives.

She has a great longing for deliverance from her trouble, for peace, "Ce partage des Dieux, la paix et l'harmonie." But such peace is not to be her lot.

Hélène is excited by the arrival of Paris and she quickly makes known to him that her husband is absent. (This makes her ripe for the picking.) Interesting and subtle is the ef-

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1. P.B., p. 45. 2. P.A., P. 81 and P.T., p. 177.

fect of Paris's long description of how he has been directed by the gods to seek out H el ene (compare the effect of the Witches' prophecy on Shakespeare's Macbeth). It seems to circumscribe the characters' freedom without really doing so; it gives a sense of fate without entirely depriving the characters of liberty, so that the reader has the premonition of H el ene's fall, although she at first reacts indignantly to Paris's suggestion that she should flee to Troy with him. Only her duty as a hostess prevents her from asking him to leave the palace immediately.

The chorus of women reveal their terrible fear for the future. H el ene is disturbing the beautiful harmony of their peace:

"Dieux! donnez-vous raison aux terreurs de la Reine  
C'en est-il fait,   Dieux, de notre paix sereine?  
Je tremble, et de mes yeux d ej  remplis de pleurs,  
Je vois luire le jour prochain de nos douleurs."

Here they are carrying out something which is constantly happening in the poem; they are making reference back to the ideal of Greek civilisation, which D emodoco also voices:

"Bienheureuse l'aust ere et la rude jeunesse  
Qui rend un culte chaste   l'antique vertu!"

This is a note of warning for H el ene too; for he sees the future ruin of Troy and the triumph of Greece:

"Les vents emporteront ta poussi ere inf econde,  
Ilios! Mais Hellas illumine le monde!"

This, of course is designed to have a special effect on the reader, who knows this vision of the future will come to pass. This adds extra authority to what D emodoco will say.

Even with this truth in mind, the reader cannot help but admire H el ene's struggle to master her passion. It is courageous of her, in the first place, to admit to herself her passion, as she pleads for strength:

"..... vierge Pallas, gardienne de l'hymen,

Qui porte l'olivier et la lance en ta main,  
Vois combien ce regard me pénètre et m'enflamme!"

Despite this, she resists Paris:

"Je ne quitterais point Sparte aux nombreux guerriers."

The turmoil produced by sexual desire and at the same time her wish for peace expresses itself in conflicting emotions:

"Je le hais! Mais qu'il parte, et pour jamais!...Grands Dieux!  
Je l'aime! C'est en vain que ma bouche le nie,  
Je l'aime et me complais dans mon ignominie!"

The struggle is terrible:

"Aphrodite et Pallas, ô combat abhorré!  
Se disputent Héléne et son coeur déchiré."

Paris's action in leaving Héléne brings a temporary respite. This is Paris's great heroic moment. He loves Héléne enough not to want to hurt her and enough to risk the anger of the gods by leaving her:

"Pardonne! Je retourne en mon lointain pays.  
Rebelle aux Immortelles, je pars et t'obéis,  
Heureux si ta pitié, par delà l'onde amère,  
Suit durant un seul jour ma mémoire éphémère."

Héléne recognises his noble self-denial:

"Il est digne des Dieux d'où sort ta race antique;  
Et se vaincre soi-même est d'un coeur héroïque!"

Still peace shuns Héléne: ".....le doux repos s'est éloigné de moi...." and she recognises her love for Paris:

"Je l'avoue, - et mon front en rougit, tu le vois, -  
Mon oreille a gardé le doux son de sa voix;"

At the same time, she blames the gods for her fate:

"..... Eros! voilà de tes funestes jeux!..."

Despite her railing against the gods, there is her constant awareness of what is right and good. She reveres Démodoce:

"J'écouterai toujours d'un esprit favorable  
L'harmonieux conseil de ta voix vénérable."

However, her wrath against the gods rises again:

"Oui, les Dieux sont cruels!...." and "O Dieux cruels, Dieux sourds! ô Dieux, je vous renie!" (1)

Hélène's denial of the gods leads inevitably, immediately to her command that Paris be called back. Hélène is not a great heroic figure in the same way as most of the other characters described in this thesis, but she does deserve discussion because she is a great tragic heroine. She is a creature of exceptional physical beauty in a situation for which she has not the mental strength. She suffers mental agonies when torn between what she knows to be right and the forces of desire which eventually conquer her. These are the factors which gain her the reader's sympathy.

### Les Erinnyes

Leda's other daughter is the central character in what is Leconte de Lisle's most savage Greek work. There are not the same obvious references to a framework of harmony in Les Erinnyes as in Hélène. To show the extremes to which Leconte de Lisle goes, a comparison with his other dramatic poem, L'Apolloide, is useful. It has the usual pattern of Greek tragedy, of three parts, with the third and final part re-establishing harmony after the suffering and expiation of the earlier sections. As shown earlier, harmony is re-established in L'Apolloide which ends in a great hymn of praise to the glories of Greece. In Les Erinnyes, however, the third part of the

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1. Putter, L. de L. et l'Hellénisme, p. 188, sees Hélène as a Greek version of Quain, but terrifying though her denial of the gods is, she is not the same sort of figure. Her revolt has not the universal quality of Quain's, which makes him represent humanity. Instead her revolt will work against humanity, by bringing - the reader knows - years of chaos and the destruction of a great city.

cycle created by Aeschylus is omitted: there is no restoration of justice at the end - just a terrifying picture of Orestès in flight, pursued by the Eumenides. Many of the other alterations Leconte de Lisle makes from his source are in the spirit of this basic change - the desire to transform the original into something more savage.

The central and most savage character is Klytaimnestra. She completely dominates the first part of the work (it is significant that Leconte de Lisle changes the title of this part from the Agamemnon of Aeschylus to Klytaimnestra, and that Aegisthos makes no personal appearance, is only mentioned, - thus shifting more of the burden of the evil onto Klytaimnestra) and even in the second part when she is absent from the scene for most of the time, the memory of her is overpowering.

Our first view of Klytaimnestra is of her savage joy in reaction to the news of the capture of Troy. Her imaginative picture of Troy being burnt by the Greeks is one which reveals an intense fascination for details of horror and destruction:

"J'entends tourbillonner Pallas dévastatrice,  
Et la foule mugir et choir par grands monceaux,  
Et les mères hurler d'horreur, quand les berceaux,  
Du haut des toits fumants écrasés sur les pierres,  
Trem pant d'un sang plus frais les sandales guerrières.  
Ah! la victoire est douce, et la vengeance aussi!"

Leconte de Lisle, in her next speech, does not quite capture all the subtlety of the original (1), where her ten years of sorrow at the absence of Aegisthus can be taken both as an expression of relief that it is over and as a reproach. However, there is no doubt in either version of the hint of the

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1. L. de L., Eschyle, p. 162.



words at the end of the speech which will become retrospectively ironic:

"Je vais à tout Argos annoncer cette joie,  
Et, sous le vaste ciel, faire, de l'aube au soir,  
De cent taureaux beuglants ruisseler le sang/noir."

The image of flowing blood is appropriate to a woman who is about to murder her husband. To reinforce the sinister impression of her delight in blood is the vague unease experienced by Talthybios and Eurybatès. They can be said to sum up normal, human reactions to situations in the work, against which the extraordinary actions of Klytaimnestra and Orestès can be measured. Therefore, their speeches have a choric value; (in fact, many of the speeches of the chorus in the original are condensed into theirs).

The scene of Agamemnôn's entry into Argos is important for its subtle treatment of the idea of the hero's triumphant return. Klytaimnestra has had a purple carpet laid on the path to the palace. It is her purpose to persuade Agamemnôn to tread on this, for such a welcome was thought fit only for the gods and a presumption on the part of human beings, so that if Agamemnôn acquiesces he will alienate the gods. This point is made more clearly in the original (1), where Klytaimnestra prays the gods to aid her. Agamemnôn knows it would be presumptuous to step on the carpet:

"J'entrerais simplement dans la haute maison;  
Je veux être honoré, non comme un Dieu, non comme  
Un roi barbare enflé d'orgueil, mais tel qu'un homme;"

Without heeding his rebuke, Klytaimnestra continues to exercise her powers of persuasion, trying to twist his better nature by appealing to his pride.

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1. L. de L., Eschyle, p. 177 ff.

The end of the scene is not quite so clear in Leconte de Lisle's version as in the original. There, Agamemnon is persuaded to step on the carpet and immediately Clytemnestra utters a blood-curdling scream of triumph - interpreted as a cry of recognition of the victor by onlookers but really indicative of the success of her plan. Leconte de Lisle misses a great dramatic moment by not including this scream. Also, it is by no means obvious that Agamemnon treads on the carpet. Nothing in his words indicate so. In fact, what he says after his wife's further attempt at persuasion implies his refusal:

"Ecoute,  
Femme! Garde en ton coeur ma parole: ôbéis!"

However, several lines later, he enters the palace, and there is nothing to show he does not walk on the carpet, save the above. The point is important. If he does in fact walk over the carpet, then he is doomed by his own pride, whether Klytaimnestra murders him or not. If he appropriates in a vain manner all the glory of the campaign for himself, then Klytaimnestra's guilt is lessened, for her murder would coincide with the wishes of the gods. However, Leconte de Lisle may be altering his source, so that all the guilt falls on Klytaimnestra, so that she appears a more savage figure. This would be more consistent with the general tenor of the work, which is more ferocious than the original.

This may well be Leconte de Lisle's intention. Agamemnon's humility would increase the reader's sympathy for him. Also, it would fit with his magnanimity to Kasandra:

". . . . . sois douce à l'Etrangère,  
Rends moins rude son mal et sa chaîne légère."

he says to Klytaimnestra. Klytaimnestra is impatient of Kasandra. Her mood reflects the urge she feels to carry out

the murder, which is soon committed. When the deed is done, she affirms it with a terrible ferocity:

"Moi, moi, je l'ai frappé! c'est moi! la chose est faite.  
Ah! ah! j'ai longtemps rêvé cette heure-ci.  
Que les jours de mon rêve étaient lents. Me voici  
Eveillée et debout! et j'ai goûté la joie  
De sentir palpiter et se tordre ma proie  
Dans le riche filet que mes mains ont tissu."

Talthybios voices the ordinary, human reaction to this:

"J'admire ton audace, et reste épouvanté."

Klytaimnestra's next words show what kind of a world this drama is being enacted in:

"J'ai frappé sûrement, vieillards! la bête est morte."

The key word is "bête" - a word more appropriate to Klytaimnestra than to Agamemnôn. Eurybatès reflects this view in his phrase, "monstrueux courage". The reaction of the city is fear and horror, kept at an intense pitch by the continued feverish ferocity of Klytaimnestra.

She now gives the motivation for her murder: the sacrifice of her daughter to the gods by Agamemnôn in order to get a fair wind to Troy ten years before:

"Et lui qui, plus féroce, hélas! qu'un loup sauvage,  
Du cher sang de ma fille a trempé le rivage,  
De celle que j'avais conçue, et que j'aimais,  
Aurore de mon coeur éteinte pour jamais....."

This revelation of motive comes too late for it to be taken as providing mitigating circumstances for Klytaimnestra. In the original, this aspect of the background to Klytaimnestra's crime is recounted by the chorus earlier in the play (1), but in Leconte de Lisle's version it comes at a time when the reader is struck by the full horror of Klytaimnestra's deed, and

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1. L. de L., Eschyle, p. 157.

this lessens the mitigating effect. Also, almost in the same breath, she reveals that she has murdered Kasandra too. Thus, cruelty is piled on cruelty. Added to this is her harsh indifference to the fate of her son Orestès:

"Je consens qu'il grandisse, éloigné de mes yeux,  
Sans patrie et sans nom. C'est assez qu'il respire.  
L'exil est dur? La mort irrévocable est pire."

Klytaimnestra is completely bound up in her own violent hatred and bitterness. So terrifying is the spectacle she presents that the ordinary citizens dare do nothing. She is so confident that she is indifferent to fate, and the first part of the poem ends in proud defiance:

"J'aime, je règne! et ma fille est vengée!  
Maintenant, que la foudre éclate au fond des cieux:  
Je l'attends, tête haute, et sans baisser les yeux!"

The dominant strain of her character so far - superiority to normal human emotions, fears and weaknesses - is continued in part two. When, as part of Orestès's ruse to lull her into a sense of false security, he tells her Orestès is dead, she is quite unmoved and makes no attempt to conceal the fact, for she shows not even the conventional reverence for the dead. This is another of Leconte de Lisle's alterations of the original in order to make more brutal the character of Klytaimnestra; in Aeschylus, she makes a show of great grief. (1)

However, in the rest of the work, although the reader can never rid himself of the overpowering sense of evil associated with Klytaimnestra and built up in the first part, she is not so dominating vis-à-vis the other characters, for she crumbles into terror before the avenging fury of Orestès. It is ironic, and perhaps pathetic, that she appeals to the law of love

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1. L. de L., Eschyle, p. 252.

which she herself has broken:

"On ne peut pas tuer sa mère!" and  
 "Respecte, mon enfant, le sein qui t'a nourri!"

Finally, she mingles threats with a pitiful plea for mercy:

"Crains d'entendre aboyer le troupeau haletant  
 Des Spectres de l'Hadès! Mon cher fils, un instant!  
 Non! non! tu ne veux pas sans doute que je meure..."

Then she becomes more and more hysterical, with shouts of vengeance, until Orestès puts an end to her life.

Léconte de Lisle brings out the savage, evil side of Klytaimnestra's character, whereas in the original, she is appor- tioned less guilt and gains appropriately more sympathy, so that a case for Klytaimnestra as a tragic heroine could be made out there. It would be difficult to establish Léconte de Lisle's character as a tragic heroine, but heroine she certainly is, because of her supreme superiority to ordinary, human feeling (except at the end of the poem). Any attractiveness she has for the reader is that of a Lady Macbeth: she has the immoral energy of a 'fleur du mal'.

Orestès is the other main heroic figure of the work. However, it is also possible to make out a case for a kind of heroism in Kasandra. It may be argued that because her prophetic rôle has been forced upon her by the gods and, therefore, her freedom is limited, her heroic stature is diminished. However, she bears with great courage the burden thrust upon her by fate, and also her prophetic power separates her from and sets her above ordinary humanity. She has to believe and proclaim what ordinary humanity does not like to listen to - the unpleasant truth. One can contrast the 'it could never happen to us' attitude of Eurybatès:

"Il est vrai que ces murs malheureux, autrefois,  
 Ont vu couler le sang et les larmes des Rois;  
 Mais ces calamités ne doivent plus renaître."

Orestès too has to fulfil a rôle that has been thrust upon him. The ancient laws demand the expiation of killing by killing - this means for him the killing of his own mother. This idea - so abhorrent to ordinary human beings that they could not face the task - Orestès faces with resolution. His resolution can be measured against the attitude of the weak and fearful, yet greatly more human Elektra.

At first, she desires vengeance for her murdered father to whose grave she brings libations:

"Chère Ombre! sois terrible à ce couple pervers,  
Et dresse le Vengeur promis à nos revers!"

She welcomes Orestès as avenger and prays for his success. She remains firm even after the killing of Aigisthos, but after Orestès has killed their mother, she feels remorse, repentance:

"Mon frère, qu'as-tu fait? Horreur! ton crime est pire  
Que tous les siens... C'était ta mère!"

For her brother, she feels both love and loathing, as expressed in the oxymoronic phrase - "Hélas! malheur à toi,  
Qui m'es horrible et cher!."

This remorse is deliberately invented by Leconte de Lisle. It provides a precedent for Sartre in Les Mouches, who also makes Elektra relent. She is showing the natural human reaction. She has experienced years of bitterness and hatred, but her being quails from reality.

Orestès shows no such irresolution. With great cunning, he plays the trick of giving Klytaimnestra news of his own death. Having gained an entry into the palace, he proceeds ruthlessly to murder Klytaimnestra's paramour, Aigisthos. He does not show hesitation whether to kill his mother as in the original. (1) He proceeds to kill her mercilessly:

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1. L. de L., Eschyle, p. 262.

"Tu n'es plus  
 Ma mère. C'est un Spectre effrayant qui t'accuse  
 Et qui te juge. Toi, tu te nommes la ruse,  
 La trahison, le meurtre et l'adultère. Il faut  
 Que tu meures!"

He has some stirrings of sinister fear when he contemplates the staring corpse before him:

"Qu'elle est grande! On dirait qu'elle m'écoute...."

but he is convinced of the justice of his action:

"L'acte est bon.  
 Justice est faite. Il faut que tout forfait s'expie."

It is the manner in which Orestès does not shrink from the task which fate and his own sense of justice impose upon him that one must chiefly bear in mind in assessing his stature as a hero. Too much must not be made of the fact that he loses sympathy by killing his mother. This is, in fact, how he proves himself as a hero, for it is an act which requires him to go beyond what an ordinary human being could do. There are mitigating circumstances, too, it is true, - he is in a world which is without any established rule of justice. This feature of the work makes it appropriate to the Towards Barbarism section of the chapter. Orestès is heroic in pursuing staunchly what he believes to be right against a background of irresolution and chaos.

#### India towards Barbarism

As remarked before, the placing of some of the Indian poems in the Poèmes barbares obviously indicates their general tone. Nurmahal (1), Djihhan-Ara (2) and Le Conseil du Fakir (3) serve to show that Leconte de Lisle saw a more savage side to India

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1. P.B., p. 135. 2. P. B., p. 144. 3. P.B., p. 156.

in the same way as he saw one to Greece.

Just as there is a framework of reference of the harmony of civilisation in Hélène, so there is a kind of harmony in these Indian poems. It is the sort of harmony established in La Vérandah (1). In this poem, physical, sensory impressions are dominant and there is no <sup>id</sup> idea of a moral beauty behind the physical. Therefore, the harmony is a surface one:

"Au tintement de l'eau dans les porphyres roux  
Les rosiers de l'Iran mêlent leurs frais murmures,  
Et les ramiers rêveurs leurs roucoulements doux.  
Tandis que l'oiseau grêle et le frelon jaloux,  
Sifflant et bourdonnant, mordent les figes mûres...."

Surface harmony or the harmony of appearances is important for Nurmahal, where vice pays a tribute to virtue by keeping to the letter but not to the spirit of justice. Djihan-Guîr loves Nurmahal, who is married to Ali-Kahn. When the latter departs for the wars, he gives his wife the following injunction:

"Car jusqu'au tombeau tu lui seras fidèle,  
Femme! tu l'as juré dans vos adieux derniers;"

She swears this and she remains faithful, but there is a sinister twist to the kind of faith she practises:

"Mais Nurmahal n'a point parjuré ses promesses;  
Nurmahal peut régner, puisque Ali-Kahn est mort!"

Djihan-Guîr and Nurmahal are characters not afraid to take what they want in life, but what gives them a link, however tenuous, with civilisation, is their reverence for the letter of the marriage vows and for appearances. The kind of energy which has the courage to take what it wants seems to gain Leconte de Lisle's approval:

"Gloire à toi, comme toi, plus forte que l'épreuve,

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1. P.B., p. 133.



Et jusqu'au bout fidèle à son époux vivant,  
Par un coup de poignard à la fois reine et veuve,  
Dédaigne de trahir et tue auparavant!"

It is an admiration of the kind of 'fleur du mal' beauty which exercised such a powerful effect on Baudelaire.

A similar mixture of surface beauty and inner evil is presented in the character of the Begum d'Arkate in Le Conseil du Fakir. She is of great physical beauty:

"La jeune femme est belle, et sa peau délicate  
Luit sous la mousseline où brûlent les rubis."

This beauty completely deceives the Nabab, Mohammed-Ali-Khan, who heeds not the words of the fakir.

The fakir, whose filthy, unkempt appearance contrasts strangely with the splendour around him, is courageous in his denunciation of the Nabab. The menace from without, which will eventually strike the Nabab dead, is paralleled by his own inner corruption which makes him deserve his fate. He is in danger because his own folly makes him court it:

"Pourquoi réchauffes-tu le reptile en ton sein,  
O Mohammed?"

Treachery can lie beneath beauty:

"Malheur à qui ne sait que l'amour, la beauté,  
La jeunesse qui rit avec la bouche rose,  
Fleurissent pour l'Enfer quand le sang les arrose!"

But the Nabab, reassured by the gay laugh of the Begum, will not believe. And the night brings his reward:

"Le sang ne coule plus de sa gorge; et, nageant,  
Au milieu d'un pourpre horrible et déjà froide,  
Le corps du vieux Nabab gît immobile et roide."

- the reward for cherishing a 'fleur du mal'. It is important - and Leconte de Lisle conveys this effect well - that the reader should gain an impression of the attractiveness of this kind of beauty as well as feel repulsion.

A simpler kind of heroine to admire and to understand is in Djihhan-Arâ. An interesting feature of the poem is the way in which the real heroine of the poem gains no recognition (except from the poet and his readers, of course), whereas the usurper of the throne is acclaimed by the populace as hero.

Alam-Guîr assassinates his elder brothers and has his father, the Emperor, deposed. He allows his sister, Djihan-Arâ, to accompany her father in his imprisonment. Her fortitude and her virtue in comforting her old father in his distress gains no other reward but itself. Alam-Guîr himself emphasises the transience of earthly life and the lack of recognition for real virtue:

<sup>1876</sup>  
"Ton nom même, ton nom si doux fut oublié;  
Et Dieu seul se souvint, quand tu quittas la terre,  
De l'ange qu'en ce monde qu'il avait envoyé."

But his power, too, will pass away with his death, yet, ironically, on earth he is seen as a great God-appointed leader:

"L'empire a reconnu le maître qui se lève  
Et balayé le sol d'un front blême d'effroi:  
C'est le sabre d'Allah, le flambeau de la foi!  
Il est né le dernier, mais l'ange armé du glaive  
Le marqua de son signe, et dit:- Tu seras roi!"

This illustrates the fortuitous nature of so much heroic authority, in the same way as Napoleon happened to become a hero and Julien Sorel did not. Self-assertive, immoral energy gains worship in Djihhan-Arâ, while virtue, requiring greater fortitude and more moral strength, is consigned to oblivion.

It is a pattern often to be seen in the Poèmes barbares and one of the chief reasons why this section provides an excellent link between the heroes of civilisation and those of barbarism.

CHAPTER V: THE HEROES OF BARBARISM

Alison Fairlie argues that Leconte de Lisle did not imply a deliberate contrast between 'antique' and 'barbare' when he wrote his poems, but that rather, the Poèmes barbares represent an extension of his interests to other civilisations and that the title, Poèmes barbares, is one that was chosen as suitable to cover the variety of material in the volume of poetry (1). This view contains much truth. The Poèmes barbares is not a unified collection like the Poèmes antiques: it covers many peoples, many settings, many kinds of verse. So varied is the volume, in fact, that any title would be to a certain extent unable to sum up the disparate parts of the whole.

However, while all this is true with reference to the widest sense of 'barbare' (i.e. a contrast between all of the Poèmes antiques and all of the Poèmes barbares is false; anyway, the barbarian elements in the Poèmes antiques have been noticed), it is still possible to make a contrast between civilisation and barbarism, and it is on this division that part of this present study rests.

The basic framework of reference of the Poèmes antiques, even in those poems which show the outbreak of barbarian forces, is the harmony of civilisation. The hero in the Poèmes antiques is seen in the light of this: as an individual he is judged with reference to the ideals of beauty and harmony and the good of the whole of the community and universe, which the poet establishes.

In barbarism there is no such easily recognisable ideal. The forces which were seen under the restraint of harmony ~~and~~

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1. Fairlie, p. 1 ff.

and then beginning to break from this hold, in the Poèmes antiques, are free in the Poèmes barbares. It would be an exaggeration to speak of a complete freedom or of a complete lack of ideals, but the different races and lands which Leconte de Lisle deals with are so varied as to admit of no unification into any one rigid system. Themes there are which are common to different poems, but the individual heroes tend to act according to individual ideals in a very personalised channeling of energy. These ideals are often similar; sometimes they cut across different poems, but no one ideal ever assumes the importance of the Greek ideal in the Poèmes antiques.

The following chapter tries to bring out the disparate nature of the Poèmes barbares, treating its characters as far as possible as individuals, but at the same time indicating and linking themes. The order is roughly based on a progression from the individual's struggle with his own character and with other individuals in close contact with him, to the wider field of whole races and their representatives, which leads to a discussion of the religious hero and martyr, and finally there is the greatest struggle by human energy of all - that of Quain against God.

### Superiority to Death

Thomas Carlyle in the first of his lectures on heroes refers to the savage valour of the Norsemen and how they believed that it was cowardly and ignoble to die a peaceful 'straw death'. Their code of honour demanded death in battle.

(1) Not only was death in battle a requisite to entry into

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1. Carlyle, p. 208.

Valhalla, but also the correct attitude to this death was necessary.

Le Coeur de Hialmar (1) deals with such a death. Leconte de Lisle alters his source. (He no doubt read the Chant de Mort de Hialmar in Xavier Marmier's Chants populaires du Nord - 2.) In Leconte de Lisle, Hialmar faces death alone. With telling alternation of short and long phrases, is evoked the grisly scene, somehow permeated with eerie silence and with cold death:

"Une nuit claire, un vent glacé. La neige est rouge.  
Mille braves sont là qui dorment sans tombeaux  
L'épée au poing, les yeux hagards. Pas un ne bouge.  
Au-dessus tourne et crie un vol de noirs corbeaux."

The scene is lit by the lurid light of the moon. This is the décor for Hialmar's grim situation. It is this which will test his heroic mettle, for, as Bowra points out (3), the acceptance of hideous situations is the material of much heroic poetry.

There is no human companion for Hialmar's death to have an effect upon. The warrior's cries to see whether anyone still lives remain unanswered. Therefore, any bravery he shows will not be for its effect upon others, but for its own sake. What Hialmar shouts out is important, since it sets the tone of his attitude to the situation. It is no despairing plea for aid, but rather, a grim joke with a retrospective appreciation of the irony that the men who were strong and joyful a few hours before are now lying dead:

"Holà! Quelqu'un a-t-il encore un peu d'haleine,  
Parmi tant de joyeux et robustes garçons  
Qui, ce matin, riaient et chantaient à voix pleine

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1. P.B., p. 77. 2. Vianey, Sources, p. 112, and Tolkien, pp. 6-10. 3. Bowra, pp. 72-3.

Comme des merles dans l'épaisseur des buissons?"

Hialmar's ability to make a joke of the whole matter indicates his superiority to fate. He cannot be superior to death physically, but he can be in a moral sense.

He wants to cheat death in another way - by making his death more hideous than it need be. So he calls to a crow:

"Viens par ici, Corbeau, mon brave mangeur d'hommes!  
Ouvre-moi la poitrine avec ton bec de fer."

This is a new twist, introduced into the original song by Leconte de Lisle; it is based on an incident from the Spanish Romancero (1). Leconte de Lisle welds the incident of the crow into the original story which tells of Hialmar's lover. The crow is to carry his bleeding heart to her, whereas in the main source a companion is charged with taking her his hauberk.  
(2)

Hialmar's attitude to death has its extension in the feelings of "la fille d'Ylmer", who will accept the offering without a tear:

".... Elle reconnaîtra  
Qu'il est rouge et solide et non tremblant et blême;  
Et la fille d'Ylmer, Corbeau, te sourira!"

The fact of his death is unimportant to her compared to the attitude with which he meets it. Hialmar is confident of her reaction, just as he is confident that he has earned his place in

1. Fairlie, p. 116. Perhaps a reference to an eagle which will eat his flesh also suggested the idea, Tolkien, p. 9.

2. In Tolkien, she dies at the news of his death - from shock in one version, or in another she commits suicide, Tolkien, p. 10. I do not know whether this part of the story is reproduced in Marmier, since up to the time of writing I have not been able to see a copy of Les Chants populaires du Nord. If he did know of this, then L. de L. is making his heroine more inhuman by giving her the ability to smile grimly at her lover's death.

à Valhalla:

"Moi, je meurs. Mon esprit coule par vingt blessures.  
J'ai fait mon temps. Buvez, ô loups, mon sang vermeil.  
Jeune, brave, riant, libre et sans flétrissures,  
Je vais m'asseoir parmi les Dieux, dans le soleil!"

This is a typically Nordic aspect of the hero, but Leconte de Lisle's historical evocation should not blind us to the fact that the poem is more than this. Although Hjalmar and his fiancée go beyond ordinary human feelings (and in their capacity to do this lies their heroism), the poem has a universal human value. The popular idea of heroism is associated with courage (1), and often with courage in the face of death, so that Hjalmar's personal concept of honour, which requires a death without regret, has relevance to all time. The extraordinary nature of Hjalmar's courage - the way in which he blocks the usual outlets of emotion - is pointed by the reader's recognition of how much he has to lose by dying: the youthful vigour of the warrior, his beloved. (2) Thus, there is a sense of poignancy in the poem which elevates Hjalmar's harsh suppression of feeling to new heights of grandeur and nobility.

### Honour

Hjalmar's achievement of personal superiority over death is, as remarked, in a sense gratuitous because it does not gain him any hero-worshippers. However, he shows determination

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1. Although the popular idea of heroism is associated with courage, as Chapter I establishes, courage is only one of many fields in which the hero may work.

2. We can contrast this with the circumstances of the superiority to death which Tiphaine achieves in Le Jugement de Kormor. She has nothing to lose by death because her lover is already dead.

in what he believes to be right, without reference to anything else. This attitude is none other than a highly developed idea of personal honour which in Chapter I was seen to be closely connected with heroism. It is an idea of honour which is paralleled in several other of the Poèmes barbares - both as something entirely personal and also as something connected with the wider ties of family.

La Mort de Sigurd (1) is based on variants of the first and second Songs of Gudrun. The situation behind Leconte de Lisle's poem is as follows: Brunhild loved Sigurd, but he was married to Gudruna; Brunhild incited Hoegni to kill Sigurd; once the deed was done she killed herself.

Leconte de Lisle concentrates all his material into one closely-knit dramatic scene which builds up to a violent climax. The most important character is Brunhild. Of the four women who watch by the bier of the dead Sigurd, she alone is conspicuous by her lack of obvious emotion:

*Assises contre terre, aux abords du cadavre,  
Tandis que toutes trois sanglotent, le front bas,  
La Burgonde Brunhild, seule, ne gémit pas,  
Et contemple, l'oeil sec, l'angoisse qui les navre."*

Thus, immediately, Brunhild is picked out as beyond normal human responses to the situation. Her silence contrasts with the grief-stricken outcries of Herborga, Ullruna and Gudruna.

After the last plaintive cry has been heard, Brunhild springs up; like a fire which has long smouldered, she leaps into flame. Her grief is too deep for tears. It goes beyond what the other women, in their fairly normal positions in life, can understand. She is a woman of intensely passionate charac-

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1. P.B., p. 96.



ter, whose powerful, complex love/hate, attraction/repulsion relationship with Sigurd is a kind of experience above the norm represented by the other women in the poem. She has had the extraordinary will-power to express the hate she felt for Sigurd when he remained faithful to Gudruna. She describes how her love turned to hatred when she discovered that Sigurd loved Gudruna:

"J'aimais le roi Sigurd; ce fut toi qu'il aima.  
L'inextinguible haine en mon coeur s'alluma;  
Je n'ai pu la noyer au sang de ces dix plaies."

Love and hate are very close here, so close as to be almost indistinguishable, despite the fact that she tells of a progression from love to hate. Her feelings about Sigurd are very complicated, as her suicide shows. It must have gone against her feeling of love to kill Sigurd, but her personal sense of honour, paradoxically, could not let the man who would not love her live. Torn between love and honour, she shows her devotion to the latter by having Sigurd killed, then she expresses her love by taking her own life:

"La Burgonde saisit sous sa robe une lame,  
Ecarte avec fureur les trois femmes sans voix,  
Et, dans son large sein se la plongeant dix fois,  
En travers, sur le Frank, tombe roide, et rend l'âme."

Brunhild shows a supreme contempt for the weeping women around her and a supreme confidence in her own individual course of action. Although savage and unnatural, this type of action can gain a certain admiration, mainly because of its extraordinary nature. Brunhild has dared to go to the point of action in her revolt against her situation, an action, which, although immoral according to normal standards of good and evil, is at least the expression of a more complex and deeply feeling character than the almost stereotyped grief of

the other women is.

A similar solution to the conflicting demands of love and honour is found in the poem, Le Jugement de Komor (1). Leconte de Lisle completely alters his source, the story of Komor by Emile Souvestre in the Foyer breton in 1845, where the king is represented as a kind of grotesque Bluebeard who kills off his successive wives as they become pregnant. Leconte de Lisle's Komor is not a hideous figure of evil, but a man caught in a terrible situation, torn between the love of his wife and his sense of honour.

Just as in the Coeur de Hjalmar, Leconte de Lisle opens his poem with a vivid evocation of the wild and gloomy background against which the story will unfold. The forces of nature and the tower of Komor's castle are given a sort of personal existence, prefiguring the struggle of Komor against his situation:

"Sous le fouet redoublé des rafales d'hiver  
La tour du vieux Komor dressait sa masse haute,  
Telle qu'un cormorant qui regarde la mer." (2)

The anguish of the elements parallels the torment in the soul of Komor, who is torn with rage and at the same time with grief:

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1. P.B., p. 107. 2. It would be as well to mention, in passing, how important the general background is to L. de L.'s poems on the barbarians. By skilful use of local colour (more effective use of erudition than in the Greek poems which tend to be rather stylised in their descriptions) L. de L. builds up setting and atmosphere. The atmosphere and scene do provide an extension to character and sometimes help to explain character. Bowra, in Chapter IV of his Heroic Poetry, called The Realistic Background, shows how this, the general use of a kind of pathetic fallacy, is a common feature of the poetry of heroism. Ditchy in Le Thème de la Mer chez les Parnassiens. L. de L. et Hérédia shows one particular aspect of L. de L.'s use of the natural background in his poetry.

"Muet, sourd au fracas qui roule et se prolonge,  
Comprimant de ses poings la rage de son coeur,  
Le Jarle s'agitait comme en un mauvais songe.

C'était un haut vieillard, sombre et plein de vigueur,  
Sur sa joue au poils gris, lourde, une larme vive  
De l'angoisse soufferte accusait la rigueur."

Komor is waiting to carry out the execution of his wife who has committed adultery, and the lines above indicate the mixed feelings to which he is subject - mixed feelings which will seem to be banished when he carries out the action, but which also, in retrospect, make the action appear more terrible and hard to perform.

By the time his wife, Tiphaine, has been summoned to the place of execution where he waits, he has, with great effort, mastered himself outwardly, so he can look at her with a "regard sans merci". But, inwardly, the battle of opposing feelings goes on: "plein d'amour et de haine".

The character of Tiphaine, although subordinate in interest to that of Komor, is interesting for its kind of resignation which attracts the reader's sympathy. This sympathy is a feeling altogether different to what is experienced in relation to a female character such as Brunhild. The reader has admiration for the energy in Brunhild, but here there is a quiet, passive acceptance. She has no desire to force herself violently and physically upon the recognition of others. Rather, she retreats into herself, in a dream-like state, and goes back to the days of her early purity:

"Tiphaine s'oublia dans un fêve enchanté.....  
Elle ceignit son front de roses en guirlande,  
Comme aux jours de sa joie et de sa pureté."

Although conventional morality sees her adultery as wrong, Tiphaine's affection for her beloved - because it is

so genuine, strong and lasting - it lasts beyond his death - cannot help but gain sympathy. It is possible to see Komor, apart from loving her for what she was before she dishonoured him by her infidelity, feeling the same kind of sympathy for her present position as does the reader. What makes her resignation so absolute and Komor's position as executioner more difficult is her acceptance that her husband is right to pass sentence on her. She accepts this and the feeling of love which overpowered her, fatalistically:

"Frappe. Je l'aime encor: ta haine est légitime.  
Certes, je l'aimerai dans mon éternité!  
Dieu m'ait en sa merci! Pour toi, prends ta victime."

Previously to this, Komor makes a Christian appeal to Tiphaine. It is clear that it is not only his personal sense of honour which is at stake but also his duty to his religious ideal. Although Leconte de Lisle was against the fanaticism, repression and corruption of the Christian Church as he saw it and most of the representatives of it in his work are bloated with evil, Komor is shown as sincere in his religion. His devotion to his religion is another facet of his heroism. It goes beyond ordinary human feeling in the sense that it forces him to feel that he has to carry out sentence of death on his wife. To suppress his love, the effort Komor has to make is, as we have seen, almost superhuman.

The superhuman (one might almost use the word unnatural) energy of the ending of the poem reflects much of the duality, love/honour, natural feeling/religion, of the earlier part of the work. When it comes to physical action, the deed is done with extraordinary violence which Leconte de Lisle's description makes almost palpable - first the light playing on the blade as it whirls in the air above the block, then the air

being broken with the sound of the sword's descent, finally the convulsions of the severed head with the warm, wet flow of the blood of death:

"On eut pu voir alors flamboyer et courir  
Avec un sifflement l'épée à large lame,  
Et du col convulsif le sang tiède jaillir."

Once he has cast the corpse from the top of the tower, Komor makes the sign of the cross which represents his religion, before embarking on the self-destruction which signifies his love and natural feeling. Therefore, as in La Mort de Sigurd, the only possible solution seen is that of death - sentence of death on the character who betrays the hero(ine) and suicide for the hero(ine) him/herself.

A more optimistic, though none the less savage tone comes over in the poems which depict family honour at stake.

Leconte de Lisle uses the same basic material, for his L'Épée d'Angantyr (1) as the Chant de Hervor in Marmier's collection (2), but with great difference of emphasis. Whereas in the Chant de Hervor, the overriding desire of the heroine is to possess her father's sword (3), the idea is given a new twist in Leconte de Lisle. The sword comes to symbolise the family honour. Hervor needs the sword to preserve the honour because she is the only surviving adult; so she howls at her father's tomb:

"Angantyr, Angantyr! donne-moi ton épée.  
Tes enfants, hormis-moi, roulent, nus et sanglants,  
Dans l'onde où les poissons déchirent leurs reins blancs..

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1. P.B., p. 73. 2. Tolkien, pp. 10-12 and Appendix A V, pp. 78-9.  
3. It is not possible to know, without having had reference to Marmier, whether L. de L. was familiar with the relevant part of the saga, but there it is clear that greed for gain of the family wealth buried with her father in his tomb, motivates Hervor - A motive L. de L. would not have approved of. See Tolkien, p. 11.

Moi, seule de ta race, à la mort échappée,  
Je suspendrai la hache et le glaive à mes flancs."

Hervor is not convinced by her father's argument that the quiver is a suitable weapon for her. She is consciously taking on a male rôle, or even something less suitable to a female than that, for already she has been referred to as "la maigre louve". This gives the clue to her special desire - a terrible thirst for blood which overrides all human feeling and ties of love:

"Ne fais pas cette injure à ta race, ô guerrier!  
De ravir à ma soif le sang du meurtrier.  
Ou, sinon, par Fenris! puisse le loup sauvage  
Arracher du tombeau tes os et les broyer!"

Angantyr, in the face of such savagery, recognises her as "la fille des héros". He prepares to hand over the sword:

"Prends l'Epée immortelle, ô mon sang, et l'emporte.  
Cours, venge-nous, et meurs en brave. La voici."

Fairlie interprets "meurs en brave" as possibly a foreboding that Hervor will meet her death at the hands of her enemies once she meets them and says that this is an alteration of the source where Hervor's defeat of her enemies is recounted. She envisages Hervor as another of Leconte de Lisle's characters in a noble cause doomed to destruction. (1) However, this is not necessarily so. Since Hervor has taken upon herself the rôle of male warrior, her father is likely to expect her to die in the accepted Nordic manner, and so his words need have no significance for the particular situation she is going to tackle; rather, it is a general injunction. Also, his previous words are "venge-nous", which seems to indicate that he expects her to be victorious.

Victory is indeed the reward one can expect for Leconte de

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1. Fairlie, p. 113.

Lisle's amazon, as, scenting blood, she speeds away with the sword:

"Hervor, en brandissant l'acier qui vibre et luit,  
 Ses cheveux noirs aux vents, comme une ombre farouche,  
 Bondit et disparaît au travers de la nuit."

Family honour again is satisfied in La Tête du Comte (1) which recounts the same story as Hérédia used for his Roman-cero poems in Les Trophées (2). The poem falls into two parts. In the first part Don Diego laments his present dishonour, a sorry fall from his former state of glory. His feelings are mingled shame and anger:

"Au travers de sa barbe et le long du pourpoint  
 Silencieusement vont ses larmes amères," and:

"Il mâche sa fureur comme un cheval son mors....".

Too weak to carry out vengeance for himself, the old man can only fret and fume in a futile manner.

The second half of the poem marks a change with the entry of Don Diego's son, Rui Diaz. Retrieving the family honour is the bringing home of the head of Don Diego's enemy:

" - Regarde!

Hausse la face, père! Ouvre les yeux et vois!  
 Je ramène l'honneur sous ton toit que Dieu garde."

Don Diego reacts with a savage joy, now that he can hold up his head with pride, and:

"..... mieux que l'eau de tous les océans  
 Ce sang noir a lavé ma vieille joue en flamme."

The delight in blood (which here, paradoxically, wipes away the stain on the family honour) is something particularly barbarian and has already been seen in Klytaimnestra and Hervor.

What is also noteworthy about this poem is the way in which

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1. P.B., p. 283. 2. Les Trophées, p. 70.

Christian piety - seemingly incongruously - is mingled with physical violence (1). Don Diego says "Vierge et Saints" and he satisfies religious formality by murmuring a prayer before he and his son begin their meal. This mixture of religious piety with physical violence has already been seen in Le Jugement de Komor. It shows that the physical violence has some kind of framework other than that of mere personal gratification.

A conflict of love and honour, proceeding from the mixed feelings of the heroine, is seen in La Ximena (2). Basically, the conflict is the same as that shown by Corneille in Chimène in his play, Le Cid, of which Leconte de Lisle doubtless had knowledge, apart from Damas Hinard's Romancero général ou Recueil des Chants populaires de l'Espagne (1844) where the story of the poem also appears. La Ximena Gomez goes to the King to present a formal complaint against Don Rui Diaz de Vivar. She is motivated by loyalty to her father whom Don Rui has killed (i.e. she has a sense of family honour) and also her personal honour has been affronted, for Don Rui has let a falcon loose among her doves - a gross insult.

La Ximena is courageous to appear before the King as she does because she dares to upbraid her sovereign in familiar terms:

"Il n'est point roi, celui qui défaille en justice,  
Afin qu'il plaise au fort et que l'humble pâtisse  
Sous l'insolente main chaude du sang versé!"

Instead of being offended by her manner, the King is impressed:

" - Par Dieu qui juge! damoiselle,

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1. See Vianey, Sources, p. 244. 2. P.B., p. 291.



Ta douloureuse amour explique assez ton zèle,  
Et c'est parler fort bien."

He shows a real understanding of her situation. He is not prepared to punish Don Rui because he knows her father was killed in a fair fight, and also he knows La Ximena's true feelings:

"Si je garde Don Rui, fille, c'est qu'il est tien,  
Certes, un temps viendra qu'il sera ton soutien,  
Changeant détresse en joie et gloire triomphante."

The poem does not end conclusively, but there is a definite intimation that love will win against honour. So here we have a heroine who is likely to waver from the path of her duty.

So far in this section, we have only talked very vaguely about honour, but with reference to the last two poems and those next to be discussed, it is important to have some grasp of the Spanish concept of honour. This can help to explain how characters depicted in certain of Leconte de Lisle's poems can still be regarded as heroic although they commit acts of violence which gain no sympathy from the reader.

The idea of the code of honour took an especially exaggerated form in Spain and especially in the early part of the seventeenth century, as Brenan points out (1). It was, in Brenan's phrase, a kind of "idealistic egoism", a channel for selfish and aggressive feelings. What was important was reputation - preserved in the fickle opinion of others. In order to prove himself before others, a man had to be prepared to risk his life for the sake of his name. This led to duels and the multiple killings of the blood-feud. Thus, violence was often enshrined for the sake of honour, and the code became an excuse for self-aggrandisement and open murder. As Kathleen Gouldson says:

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1. Brenan, p. 280 ff.

"Whilst the honourable man would not brook the slightest offence against himself, he never hesitated to satisfy his own passions. Dishonour consisted not in committing, but in receiving an injury. Thus a code which owed its origins to high motives.....ended in the perversion of all ethical sense whatsoever." (1)

The sort of actions which the code pardoned are described in two plays by the seventeenth-century dramatist, Calderon, El Médico de su Honra and A Secreto Agravia Secreta Venganza (both of 1635). In the former, the central character, Don Gutierre, satisfies his honour by killing both his wife and her lover. In the latter Don Lope kills his wife and her former lover, rather than risk a further affair between them. Both heroes are seen to receive the approval of society for their actions.

We have already seen a deed of violence to satisfy honour in La Tête du Comte, but there the deed was not so blatantly barbarous as the killings in the Spanish plays mentioned above. It is in their sort of context, though, that we must see L'Accident de Don Inigo (2). Don Inigo accuses Rui Diaz de Vivar of disrespect to the King for not dismounting before him and also he mentions Rui Diaz's savage murder of Lozano. Rui Diaz takes this as a personal affront which only his accuser's blood can wash away:

"..... Don Rui tire sa lame  
Et lui fend la cervelle en deux jusqu'à l'âme."

The King affects a mild surprise at the sudden death of one of his companions and makes the inane remark:

"Don Inigo, ce semble, est fort endommagé.....".

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1. Kathleen Gouldson, Three Studies in Golden Age Drama in Spanish Golden Age Poetry and Drama (1946), quoted by Brenan, p. 281. 2. P.B., p. 287.

It is clear that he accepts the kind of incident he has just witnessed as something quite normal. Don Rui, too, is quite unconcerned. He departs "sans s'inquiéter qu'on le blâme ou poursuive", and as for moral qualms, they do not enter his head, for all that matters is that his honour is satisfied.

Here, honour is not synonymous with any idea of nobility of character, but is the cloak for inflated vanity and the desire for brutal self-assertion. It is this excess of pride and desire for self-aggrandisement which provides the main theme for three other poems of Leconte de Lisle based on stories from Damas Hinard's Romancero général: Le Romance de Don Fadrique (1), Les Inquiétudes de Don Simuel (2) and Le Romance de Dona Blanca (3).

The latter is an exception in that one of the things it depicts is a more noble kind of honour. Don Pedro tries to persuade the nobleman, Juan Fernandez, to carry out the murder of Dona Blanca for him, but the knight refuses to sully his honour:

" Sire Roi, mon épée est vôtre, non l'honneur.  
Je ne suis meurtrier, ni vil empoisonneur;  
Ma lignée est trop haute et mon sang est trop rouge."

Don Pedro's acceptance of this refusal shows that he at least conforms to a certain extent to some common ground of honour.

However, the way in which the assassination is carried out - by some low henchman - contrasts horribly with this nobility. The young girl - a pathetic figure - is secretly strangled by the hired killer. The secrecy with which the killing is done and the method - strangulation by cruel fingers on the delicate, innocent neck - seem to make the whole

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1. P.T., p. 163. 2. P.T., p. 158. 3. P.T., p. 168.

incident appear worse.

In Le Romance de Don Fadrique and Les Inquiétudes de Don Simuel, equally vile murders are carried out and in the second of the two poems financial motives make the killing seem even worse. In fact, the original idea of honour has been left so far behind here that it no longer forms even the vaguest moral framework to what amounts to a plunge into the extremes of barbarism.

There is a similar descent into barbarism in Le Lévrier de Magnus (1). From a noble knight, Magnus turns into the evil chief of a band of brigands:

"Il a tout renié, l'honneur et le serment  
Du chevalier, le nom et la foi des ancêtres;  
Il règne par l'embûche et par l'égorgement."

This is the denial of any sort of honour, barbarism at its worst, energy running completely wild.

### The Patriot Warrior Hero

We have already seen the death of a warrior in Le Coeur de Hialmar and a woman taking on the qualities of a warrior for the sake of her family honour in L'Epée d'Angantyr. It is in L'Apothéose de Mouça-al-Kébyr (2) and Le Suaire de Mohammed ben-amer-al-Mançour (3) that Leconte de Lisle gives a full picture of the warrior in the service of his country. They form an interesting pair, for one shows a warrior gaining his just reward for glorious service and the other how a warrior is misrepresented and deprived of the earthly honours due to him.

Le Suaire de Mohammed ben-amer-al-Mançour is a soldiers' lament for the death of their glorious warrior, a poem of

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1. P.T., p. 111. 2. P.T., p. 3. 3. P.T., p. 21.

hero-worship. It begins with an expression of grief at the passing of the great man. It is not just founded on fear or respect and it even goes beyond mere admiration, for terms suitable to love poetry are used:

"La fleur de Korthobah, la Rose des guerriers!"

The poem flashes back to Kala't-al-Noçour, the field of battle where Mohammed met his end. It was a battle against the infidels, "Contre ces vils mangeurs de porc, gorgés de vin," - Mohammed was not only in the service of a people but of a religion also. It is shown how Mohammed was a tremendous inspiration to others:

"Tu nous a déchaînés, ivres de ta vertu,  
Glorieux fils d'Amer, ô Souffle du Prophète!"

amid the clashing mêlée of battle:

"Le choc terrible, plein de formidables sons....."

But all comes to an end with the hero's death:

"Pâle et grave, percé de coups, haché d'entailles,  
Le Hadjeb immortel, comme il était écrit,  
Pour monter au Djennet qui rayonne et fleurit,  
Rend aux Anges d'Allah son héroïque esprit  
Ceint des palmes et des éclairs de cent batailles."

Purple, the colour of regal splendour, is appropriate to his death:

"L'âme est partie avec la pourpre du soleil."

The death of a man of such significance is taken as a sign of universal disaster:

"Nos temps sont clos, voici les jours expiatoires!"

The death of a man who symbolised a whole glorious epoch seems to mark the end of that era.

Mohammed is pictured in glory throughout, but our first view of Mouça-al-Kébyr is when he is led in chains before the Khalyfe, who is to hear the accusation against Mouça of trying

to usurp the royal authority. Even though the rags which Mouça wears are degrading, there is, in his bearing, something which makes him rise above his wretched situation. His rags cannot bring down his obvious pride:

"Le dédain lui gonfle la narine  
Et dans l'orbite cave allume son oeil fier."

Neither can his situation wipe out the proud scar on his brow, sign of service in battle. It is a brow which almost forbids insult:

"Qui se dresse, bravant l'envie accusatrice,  
Indigné sous l'outrage et hautain sous l'affront."

His refusal to bend the knee before the Khalyfe is symbolic of a heroic stature (Leconte de Lisle's own phrase is "stature héroïque") which will not be abased by circumstances. Thus, from the start, he is obviously intended to be regarded as a hero.

This defines what the reader's position should be with reference to the accusation of Mouça, which follows his entry. The accusation represents diligent, patriotic service as shameless self-aggrandisement. Mouça's conquests are all represented as being of the same terrible lust for blood. He is suspected of wanting to break the unity of the empire, and, moreover, of being irreligious. Mouça knows that he is the victim of prejudice and hate:

"Honte au mensonge et silence à la haine  
Qui bave sur l'honneur de mes quatre-vingt ans!"

In his defence Mouça puts forward the Mohammedan doctrine, beginning with the opening words of the Koran, "Louanges au Très-Haut, l'Unique!" and continuing:

"..... car nous sommes  
De vains spectres. Il est immuable et vivant.  
Il voit la multitude innombrable-des hommes,  
Et comme la fumée il la dissipe au vent."

So, instead of uttering self-praise, he immediately

So, instead of utterin<sup>g</sup> self-praise, he immediately humbles himself before his God - a complete contrast to the attitude he is accused of.

Mouça, therefore, as well as being a great patriot warrior is also a religious hero. He puts his trust in religion in his hour of greatest trial. His self-abasement before his God despite the fact that he has been great among men shows his superior min<sup>d</sup> which does not become inebriated with the experience of greatness and power. Earlier in the poem, there is a description of the Khalyfe as someone completely the opposite:

"C'est l'heure où le Khalyfe, avant la molle sieste,  
Au sortir du harem embaumé de jasmin,  
Entend et juge, tue ou pardonne d'un geste,  
Ayant l'honneur, la vie et la mort dans sa main."

The last line is ironic, as is made clear by his base and petty condemnation of Mouça later in the poem.

For condemned Mouça is, despite his eloquent defence. He knows that he is completely at the mercy of his accusers and is fully aware of how treacherously he is being attacked and he describes his attackers:

"..... le vil chacal qui vient mordre et déchire  
Le vieux lion sanglant au bord du tombeau." -

an image of aged nobility which recalls Leconte de Lisle's poem, La Mort d'un Lion (1).

What is more, Mouça realises that he is doomed from the start. However, what takes the sting out of their action is that his life is drawing to its close anyway; they cannot deprive him of many years. He is able to accept death now that his task in life seems done:

"Qu'ai-je à dire, sinon rien? Car ma tâche est faite.

1. See Chapter VI.

J'ai vécu de longs jours et je meurs, c'est la loi.  
 Mon sang, ma vie, Allah, les Anges, le Prophète  
 Plus haut que le tonnerre ont répondu pour moi."

This acceptance provides an echo of the superiority to death in  
Le Coeur de Hialmar.

After this Mouça is no longer concerned with uttering any  
 kind of defence, for he knows that it would be futile:

"..... les sages et les braves,  
 O Khalyfe! apprends-le, ne parlent pas deux fois."

From now on, he is oblivious to his situation. He is condem-  
 ned and ordered to be dragged away. There is no hero-worship:  
 he receives the abuse of the vile multitude.

Mouça's mind flashes back to his earlier years and cata-  
 logues his heroic deeds of former times:

"Allah! jours de triomphe, heures illuminées  
 Par l'héroïque orgueil hérité des aïeux!  
 Quand, du mont de Tharyq jusques aux Pyrénées,  
 L'étandard de l'Islam flottait victorieux....."

The memories of the warrior reinforce the sense of incongru-  
 ity of his present position in the reader's mind.

The warrior continues his recollections until he arrives  
 at the place of execution. Then the sudden transfiguration  
 takes place. The figure whose exterior was brought to such a  
 depth of degradation by his rags, now takes on an effulgence  
 which reveals his true nobility of spirit. Mouça is carried  
 away on the sacred horse of Mohammed, travelling in a blaze  
 of carmine splendour:

"Comme une torche immense ardemment secouée,  
 Le Couchant fait jaillir jusqu'à l'Orient noir  
 Le sombre et magnifique éclat de la nuée,  
 Et Mouça disparaît dans la pourpre du soir."

His transfiguration is a sign from God, his justification.  
 Thus is the hero recognised, rewarded.



Dying Races and their Representatives

L'Apothéose de Mouça-al-Kébyr and Le Suaire de Mohammed ben-amer-al-Mançour show heroes who belong to a race at the height of its powers. Although Le Suaire de Mohammed ben-amer-al Mançour hints at the close in a glorious epoch in Arab history, the greatest emphasis is on magnificent achievement. The time of decay has not yet arrived. In the next group of poems to be discussed, races suffer or have suffered defeat at the hands of other powers which are in the ascendant. The heroism is of the representatives of the dying races, in their resistance or in their resignation which can be a subtle form of resistance. Their deaths are of the type of religious martyrdom and they have Auden's "religious" authority.

The first view of the old chief who is the hero of Le Dernier des Maourys (1) is through the eyes of the European traveller. The opening of the narrative is cast in the form of a description from a highly-coloured travelogue. The scene is set, then the character of the old chief introduced. It is a physical description somewhat similar to that presented in Le Calumet du Sachem (2). Because seen as if through European eyes, the effect is merely of a savage, but there is the hint of something deeper in the stanza which links his physical appearance with his past years:

"A la rigidité rugueuse de ce torse  
Labouré de dessins l'un à l'autre enlacés,  
On sentait que le poids de tant de jours passés  
L'avait pétrifié sans en rompre la force."

The focus of the narrative shifts with the beginning of the Maoury's speech. From this the reader gains the impression

of something no less savage than was at first implied, but the savagery is coupled with an idea of nobility. The Maoury is intensely proud of his race, who, according to their conception of cosmogony, are the ancestors of all men. He looks back in pride and with nostalgia to the days of his early youth, when all was joyous energy. It is true that there were inter-tribal fights and that its people practised cannibalism, but his description of all this is pervaded by a sort of innocent delight and the idea is that such savagery was merely natural.

The days of joy lasted till his people were attacked by a tribe from a neighbouring island. A brave resistance was put up:

"Nous fîmes vaillamment, et le combat fut rude."

but the oncoming horde proved too much for them and they were forced to migrate from their island. Just as in the description of the days of prosperity and of the battle, the emphasis, in assessing the qualities of the chief and his tribe, should be in endurance of physical hardship. On the voyage they suffer terrible torment:

"La faim, la soif, l'ardeur des midis aveuglants  
Tordaient et déchiraient nos chairs et nos entrailles,  
Et nous buvions le sang des dernières batailles  
Qui, rouge et tiède encor, ruisselait de nos flancs."

When they arrive at another island, they conquer the race they find there, killing some, enslaving the rest. The pendulum has swung back in favour of them, but not for long, because the arrival of the whitemen, with superior weapons, brings their inevitable defeat:

"Votre fatal tonnerre, ô Blancs, nous foudroya.  
Et tous les miens sont morts."

The old chief is bitter, filled with hatred against the whitemen, but he is resigned. The swing of the pendulum of the

course of history, sometimes bringing favour within his grasp, at others taking it beyond his reach, is a process beyond the control of Man. The old Maoury is superior to his fate because he accepts it so resignedly:

"Si les Dieux l'ont voulu, soit!"

The old chief stands as a symbol of his race. Because of conquest by superior force, the race was extinguished, and he has the nobility of spirit to accept something which is part of the very pattern of the history of his race. He sums up the history of his people in his own life, and his disappearance into the dim shades along the sea shore:

"Fantôme du passé, silencieuse image  
D'un peuple mort, fauché par la faim et le fer,  
Il s'enfonça dans l'ombre où soupirait la mer  
Et disparut le long de la côte sauvage."

is symbolic of the disappearance of his people into the elemental being from which they came.

A very similar figure is the Red Indian in Le Calumet du Sachem, although the poem is more of a set-piece than Le Dernier des Maourys. The Indian chief has certain things in common with the old Maoury: he is the only surviving member of his tribe ("le dernier Sagamore") and - what is more important - he has the same stoical attitude. It is perhaps a stoicism taken to greater lengths than the Maoury's, because of his absolute lack of speech or motion, which signifies an inner silence and an inner calm almost inhuman. He has, in fact, gone further than normal humans can, in the suppression of his emotions, for not a flicker of joy or sorrow crosses his features:

"..... il fume d'un air grave  
Sans qu'un pli de sa face austère ait remué."

He is content to wait for death. This an entirely passive kind of heroism - none the less heroic for being passive, for

just as much superhuman effort is required, although in a different direction, as for positive physical effort towards superiority. It is a significant aspect of Leconte de Lisle's idea of heroism that he should choose to write about such figures, who prove themselves by utter control of human emotion and of the self, as much as about those who assert themselves over others.

The heroes of Le Runoïa (1) and Le Massacre de Mona (2), also, show this great capacity for resignation, but theirs is exercised in a somewhat different sphere. There is still the basic idea of the extinction of a race, but it is linked with religion, so the representatives of the race are also sufferers in a religious cause.

However, there is certainly no sympathy for the Christian religion that is traditionally associated with suffering and with martyrdom. These poems exemplify Leconte de Lisle's hatred for what he considered was the oppressive nature of Christianity. Certainly, in Le Runoïa and Le Massacre de Mona, Christianity is shown as just as barbaric and savage - if not more so - as the barbarian creeds it replaces.

In Le Runoïa, average human behaviour, the feelings of the normal mass, are represented by Les Chasseurs. They sit in the great hall of the castle, swilling drink and gulping down food. Unaware of the movement of the course of history and of the disaster which will overcome their race, they are concerned only with the pleasures of the moment:

"Frères, la vie est bonne à vivre sous le ciel!  
Vivons, ouvrons nos coeurs aux ivresses nouvelles;  
Chasser et boire en paix, voilà l'unique bien,

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1. P.B., p. 81. 2. P.B., p. 113.

Buvons! Notre sang brûle et nos femmes sont belles;  
Demain n'est pas encore, et le passé n'est rien!"

This is Man at his lowest, 'la bête humaine'.

The warning that the Infant Christ (1) gives them is the threat of a fiery hell as a reward for their unheeding debauchery. Christ may be the outstanding figure in the poem, but the heroic interest chiefly centres on the god-like leader of the old religion which Christ opposes with his "loi vengeresse". Le Runoia contrasts both with Christ and with the normal human beings depicted in the poem, not that he is any the less savage than the Christ figure. He calls upon the warriors to kill the child:

"Chasseurs d'ours et de loups, debout, ô mes guerriers!  
Ecrasez cet Enfant sous les pieux meurtriers;  
Jetez dans les marées, sous l'onde envenimée,  
Ses membres encor chauds, sa tête inanimée...  
Et vous, ô Runoias, enchantez le maudit!"

Since this violence is no worse than that threatened by Christ, it is a reflection on Christ rather than on Le Runoia.

What makes Le Runoia a more admirable figure is his less fanatical, wider view (according to Leconte de Lisle's philosophy of history). He has a profound view of the course of history, for he sees that his own religion must perish. That is why his call for the violent ejection of the Christ Child subsides into resignation and why he departs at the end of the poem. Just as his own religion dies, so does Christianity carry within itself the seeds of its own decay and it will die too. Such is the process of history that no one religion is more important than another.

"Tu mourras comme moi, Dieu des âme nouvelles....."

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1. See Appendix, Christ as Hero.

It is the Runoña's greatness that he can recognise this. The ideal that he sets in place of his own religion and the Christian one is that of humanity. "Car l'homme survivra!" he says. This connects him, ultimately, with Quaïn, hero of the revolt against God.

Le Massacre de Mona builds up a very strong picture of race and religion. The descriptions of the druidical ceremonies, at which are chanted their beliefs on the creation of the world, on the immortality of the soul, on their past history, are evocative of a deep sense of past which goes back to the fundamental roots of human existence.

Leconte de Lisle, as Fairlie points out (1), makes the Druids considerably less barbaric than they in fact were. This is to bring out a greater contrast with the representatives of the new religion, Christianity. The Druids are seen as peaceful, spiritual, their souls fixed on things beyond this world, whereas the Christians are savage and make their religion (clearly only newly acquired) an excuse for them to slake their thirst for blood.

The priestess, Uheldéda, foresees the disaster which will overcome the Druids at the hands of the Christians, so, prepared beforehand, they wait with that kind of resignation so characteristic of the heroes of Leconte de Lisle about to face death.

The Christian hordes descend, led by King Murdoc'h, in whose mouth the words about "Jésus, le vrai fils du Père tout-puissant", sound strangely incongruous. More appropriate to him, by this time sounding un-Christian, is his vision of vengeance, hell-fire and torment. The chief Druid knows the

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1. Fairlie, p. 151.

King's sinister purpose, which he pictures in an effective image:

"Comme un voleur de nuit, lâche et souillé de fange,  
Si l'animal féroce a faim et soif, qu'il mange.....".

His companions form a circle around him and they wait for death. As the fatal arrows and blows of sword and spear rain down upon them, they chant a final song, As their words go upwards to heaven, so does their spiritual gaze, making them "indifférents aux atteintes mortelles". This is the complete mastery of spirit over body (we are reminded of the Indian mystics), superiority to human emotion and fears and to death.

#### Religious Heroism and Martyrdom

The death of the Druids in the service of their religion provides a convenient link with the idea of religious heroism and martyrdom. Also, apart from in Le Massacre de Mona, the connection of a religious ideal with heroism has been noticed in Le Jugement de Komor, L'Apothéose de Mouça-al-Kébyr, Le Ru-  
nôma and even in La Tête du Comte.

Le Barde de Temrah (1) is a poem which - unusually for Leconte de Lisle - establishes both a Christian and a pagan hero, without detracting from the stature of either of them. The poem falls roughly into two parts, each of which sets up a hero figure. In the first part, we see a stranger (who is in fact Saint Patrick) travelling through the Irish countryside. The Christian Saint is on a missionary journey. A vivid scene of bright, fresh weather and bird-song is depicted, but this is disturbed by the literal appearance of the powers of darkness. Two old wizards survey the scene as the Saint goes by; they

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1. P.B., p. 61.

mutter sinister incantations. All goes dark. However, Saint Patrick is undaunted. He defeats the powers of darkness with the sign of the cross:

"Mais l'Etranger, du doigt effleure sans effort  
Son front baissé, son sein, selon l'ordre et le nombre:  
Des quatre points qu'il touche un flot lumineux sort."

Here one can raise again the objection that the powers that the character exhibits are magical and, therefore, not extraordinary human qualities. However, perhaps we should see the scene more symbolically as a purely spiritual conquest by Saint Patrick. His moral goodness is described in some of the stanzas which follow his dramatic victory over the forces of evil - his kindness, his consolation of the suffering, the way in which the power of his personality has brought many to baptism. This is one of Leconte de Lisle's most favourable pictures of a representative of Christianity.

With the picture of the old bard of the title of the poem we are back to something very familiar <sup>is</sup> to the representatives of dying races. The man whom Saint Patrick has come to convert sits in his ruined castle, simply waiting for death. It is death which is on his mind, for he immediately reminds his visitor of his imminent death. This, of course, shocks Saint Patrick, who knows that the bard is far from conversion. He makes a sincere attempt to convert him to a gentler religion:

"Vois! le palais du fort croule au niveau des plaines:  
Le bras qui brandissait l'épée est desséché;  
L'humble croit en Celui par qui tombent ses chaînes."

To his credit, it can be said that he only uses a menacing vision of Hell when all else has had no effect, and even at this moment, we retain a dominant idea, established before, of a gentle Saint.

The old bard, however, is not to be persuaded by any means.



His ideal is the religion of his forefathers. He is a religious hero in the Auden sense too, because he adheres to his ideal come what may. He is stricken with grief at the desertion of the old faith by others, but he will remain true himself. He has that profound sense of the history of his race which was found to be characteristic of the representatives of dying races. He will not be separated from his forefathers. And with these words:

"Où mes pères sont-ils? - Où les païens sont tous!  
 Pour leur éternité, dans l'ardente torture  
 Dieu les a balayés du vent de son courroux! - "

which show that he too is conscious of the workings of history which destroys Man's religions, he falls upon his sword. He knows what defeat is, but he will not give in.

Les Paraboles de Dom Guy (1) is one of the few poems from the black and hideous picture Leconte de Lisle draws of the Middle Ages which presents a character who shows any recognition of the corruption of his own Church. Most of the poem is a depiction of this corruption - the Church which has become "un lieu de blasphème et non plus d'oraison". What is important from the point of view of the idea of heroism is the way in which Dom Guy is selected by God to see a vision of the evils of the time. This establishes his superiority over normal human beings who practise these evils or who are unconscious of them. He was already marked out from ordinary men if he was deemed suitable to be chosen in this way.

The poem ends with a call to action by Christ. Dom Guy has also been chosen to help to start a revival of the true Christian spirit. He is appalled at the task, afraid that his

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1. P.B., p. 323 and see Appendix.

humble powers will be insufficient. He tries to back down from the heroic rôle which is being thrust upon him, but the call of Jesus is strong:

"Sus! sus! La coupe est pleine et déborde. Debout,  
Les forts, les purs, les bons, car le monde est à bout!"

Les Parables de Dom Guy is set in the year 1411. L'Hôlocauste (1), set in the year 1619, shows that, according to Leconte de Lisle's view, no progress was made in the Christian Church. The poem is a description of a heretic being burnt at the stake.

At first we might be tempted to think of his position as pathetic rather than heroic, but his attitude, as it is revealed in the course of the poem, shows a tremendous fortitude. The first hint of his attitude is in the picture of him, tied to the stake, in the midst of the hooting crowd. He is unaffected, except to show scorn, "Dans sa gravité sombre et son mépris amer."

The fire - Leconte de Lisle describes the progress of the flames in gruesome detail - brings from him the cry of "Mon Dieu! Mon Dieu!". This from an atheist is clearly ironical. His torturers goad him with his utterance, but at the last he reasserts his superiority:

"Ce n'est qu'une façon de parler, vile brute."

Despite his atheism, the heretic appears a better man than those around him. His heroism lies in his martyrdom for what he sincerely believes to be right.

Another martyr is presented in the biblical poem, La Vigne de Naboth (2). When King Akhab puts before him the unreasonable demand for his vineyard, Naboth, not unnaturally, refuses.

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1. P.T., p. 52. 2. P.B., p. 22.

"C'est mon champ paternel...", he declares. This attitude links with the sense of the past seen in the heroes in the last section.

It is ironical that - in a similar way as Mouça-al-Kébyr is arraigned - so Naboth, in order to have him conveniently disposed of, is accused of blasphemy, for, like Mouça, he proves himself to be a man of extreme piety. His simple sincerity stands innocent before God:

"L'Eternel m'entend et me regarde,  
Je suis pur devant lui, n'aynt rien fait de tel."  
J'atteste le Très-Haut et me fie en sa grade."

Equally simply and innocently and without any hint of pride, he proclaims his own virtue. However, his words are taken as blasphemy by his accusers, and he is led away to be stoned - a martyr to his faith.

La Vigne de Naboth has another religious hero, but of a different kind. Instead of the quiet piety and passive nature of Naboth, Elie is aggressive and fierce in the service of his religion. His hideously unkempt and wild physical appearance reflect that his approach is more barbaric:

"Son crâne est comme un roc couvert d'herbe marine;  
Une sueur écume à ses cheveux pendants,  
Et le poil se hérissé autour de sa narine."

His appearance is caused by the hardships he has suffered and which he has borne with a superhuman fortitude. It is a blood-curdling sight and a force of personality which puts fear into the heart of Akhab. He delivers a great tirade, couched in the language of execration. Elie has been commanded by God:

"Dis-lui: Malheur, ô chef des dix prostituées,  
Akhab, fils de Hamri, le fourbe et le voleur!  
Les vengeances d'en haut se sont toutes ruées."

His diatribe numbers twenty-two tercets in all. It re-

duces Akhab to a whining, snivelling wretch, whose fear is genuine, even if the sincerity of his conversion to the religion of Jehovah may be doubted. Elie does in fact doubt it and makes an impressively dramatic exit, calling down torment on Akhab.

It is interesting to see figures in the same poem, who are both heroic in their superiority to those around them, but in very different ways. They show two of the main strands of heroism in Leconte de Lisle - positive, aggressive energy and passive, calm resignation. They are interesting too for their relations with God - in whose favour we can assume them both to stand - one as His prophet, the other as His representative in a humble, but no less important way.

#### The Hero and God - Resignation and Revolt

A useful introduction to Quaïn, the rebel hero, is to study briefly Leconte de Lisle's poem about Quaïn's father, Adam. In La Fin de L'Homme (1), the first man, who originally sinned and rebelled against God's will, is depicted in a mood of bitter resignation, which shows in his very physical appearance:

"L'irréparable chute et la misère et l'âge  
Avaient courbé son dos, rompu ses bras nerveux,  
Et sur sa tête basse argenté ses cheveux."

He is a man terribly conscious of what he has suffered, and - this is what makes the suffering worse - he is conscious of the Eden paradise which he and humanity have lost. As Canat points out (2), this is an Adam who realises humanity will never re-

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1. P.B., p. 353. 2. Canat, Le Sentiment de la Solitude morale, p. 16.

turn to Eden. Therefore, his realisation of this means that he is resigned, but it means also that he is bitter. However, he has sufficient awareness of his own guilt to stop this bitterness turning into a revolt which will conquer the resignation in him. In contrast, Quain will declare that through his own efforts humanity will gain its lost heritage. Now Adam repents and all he wishes for is death (which, ironically, was the punishment he received for his disobedience) -

"Et maintenant, Seigneur, vous par qui j'ai dû naître,  
Grâce! Je me repens du crime d'être né.....  
Seigneur, je suis vaincu, que je sois pardonné!  
Vous m'avez tant repris! Achevez, ô mon Maître!  
Prenez aussi le jour que vous m'avez donné. - "

There could be no greater contrast to the idea of submission and resignation than that embodied in the character of Quain (1).

Quain is not only one of the most outstanding figures in the poetry of Leconte de Lisle, he is also important for his connection with similar heroes of revolt in European literature, a tradition which goes right down to Camus in our own day. The basic figure is that of Satan - Milton's Satan in Paradise Lost, who was transformed by the Romantics into a great hero. William Blake sees Milton as Satan's unconscious advocate:

"The reason Milton wrote in fetters when he wrote of Angels and God, and at liberty when of Devils and Hell, is because he was a true Poet and of the Devil's party without knowing it!" (2)

Expressive of the Romantic idea of Satan is William

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1. Quain, P.B., p. 1. 2. Blake, The Marriage of Heaven and Hell, Poetry and Prose, p. 182.

Blake's painting, 'Satan rousing the Rebel Angels'. Here, the Devil is a figure of male power and beauty. He is 'le beau ténébreux', but he is also Lucifer, the bringer of light to the world. He becomes the friend of Man in a struggle against God, and he brings to Man's aid those powers he has at his disposal by virtue of his spiritual being. Thus, there is a link with the legend of Prometheus who stole fire from the gods to give to Man. Shelley, Ménard and Quinet all wrote poems about Prometheus. Goethe's Faust, Byron's Dōn Juan and his Cain (an important source for Leconte de Lisle) are part of the same tradition of revolt. All these heroes choose to rebel against what is the normal standard of good. Camus, talking of Romantic revolt in general, says that the Romantic rebel wishes to "commettre le mal par nostalgie d'un bien impossible" (1). This, fundamentally is the position of Quaïn who revolts against God because he has been deprived of the paradise of Eden when he feels he has committed no sin.

The poem is framed by the vision of Thogorma, "Le Voyant", who in the time of bondage of his people dreams of the revolt of Quaïn. He sees Hénokhia, city of the people of Quaïn. The mere sight of the fatal city chills the very being of the watcher:

"Et le Voyant sentit le poil de sa peau rude  
Se hérissier tout droit en face de cela,  
Car il connut, dans son esprit, que c'était là  
La Ville de l'angoisse et de la solitude,  
Sépulcre de Quaïn au pays d'Hévilá.....".

Thus, a feeling of awe and suspense is built up in the reader, in preparation for the presentation of Quaïn.

After the evocation of the city, Quaïn is described, ri-

sing from sleep. His rising is slow and painful, for he is weighed down "sous le poids de l'injure et l'affront", but when he is at last upon his feet, he has the stature of a giant. Leconte de Lisle calls him "le Géant". This is part of a deliberate<sup>s</sup> plan on Leconte de Lisle's part to increase the stature of his hero at the expense of God.

What Quaïn first says is an indication of Camus' general point, quoted earlier. Quaïn has an overwhelming sense of the lost paradise of Eden, even though it is a place of which he has no direct experience. The latter, perhaps, accounts for the extreme idealisation of the paradise. Quaïn's is the most intense of those evocations of the youthful vigour and the innocence of a new world, which are to be found throughout the poetry of Leconte de Lisle:

"..... Je revois l'innocence du monde.  
J'entends chanter encore aux vents harmonieux  
Les bois épanouis sous la gloire des cieux;  
La force et la beauté de la terre féconde  
En un rêve sublime habitent dans mes yeux."

His cry becomes more and more agonised with the full realisation of what he has lost:

"Eden! ô vision éblouissante et brève,  
Toi dont, avant les temps, j'étais déshérité!  
Eden, Eden! voici que mon coeur irrité  
Voit changer brusquement la forme de son rêve,  
Et le glaive flamboie à l'horizon quitté."

It is not an accident that the evocation of Eden, one of the most important features of Quaïn, should be placed at the centre of the poem. It shows that Quaïn has an ideal of harmony which is frustrated. Because<sup>e</sup> he has a concept of good which he has no chance of fulfilling, he is a rebel by force of circumstances and, therefore<sup>s</sup>, gains the reader's sympathy.

The innocence of Eden which Quaïn preserves in his heart

is directly connected with his complete lack of any sense of guilt:

"Quel mal ai-je fait? Que ne m'écrasait-il,  
Faible et nu sur le roc, quand je vis la lumière,  
Avant qu'un sang plus chaud brûlât mon coeur viril?"

Lack of a sense of wrong-doing intensifies his misery at the burden of suffering he has to bear. Nature bears a similar grief, as if in sympathy:

"Tout gémit, l'astre pleure et le mont se lamente,  
Un soupir douloureux s'exhale des forêts,  
Le désert va roulant sa plainte et ses regrets,  
La nuit sinistre, en proie au mal qui la tourmente,  
Rugit comme un lion sous l'étreinte des rets."

Quaïn's rebellion is a more positive form of lament, so that he comes to represent a creation which bewails its having done nothing to deserve its having been created.

This nature, although it laments, is submissive. Quaïn shows his difference from the inert clay around him (Nerval uses the symbol of cold clay to contrast with the fire of revolt). His cry is: "Je resterai debout!" He is determined to take up an active struggle for human justice:

"La soif de la justice, ô Khéroub, me dévore,  
Ecrase-moi, sinon, jamais je ne ploierai!"

He is taking on a struggle for humanity and creation which they are not prepared to take on themselves. Also, his thirst for justice implies an evil God. Quaïn envisages the Flood which will drown the world at God's command, and he launches into a diatribe against the jealous tyrant:

"Dieu de la foudre, Dieu des vents, Dieu des armées,  
Qui roule au désert les sables étouffants,  
Qui te plais aux sanglots d'agonie, et défends  
La pitié, Dieu qui fais aux mères affamées,  
Monstrueuses, manger la chair de leurs enfants!"

He sees how those who survive the Flood will be the vile,



wretchedly weak members of the race of clay who will be an easy prey to God's evil representatives on earth, the priests. This pessimistic vision of the future of humanity is lent authority by the fact that, in the opening stanzas of the poem, the Israelites are pictured in a shameful state of submission. But Quaïn will avenge all this. One day, he declares, the victim will refuse to submit. One day, the cities destroyed by the Flood will be rebuilt, and all this will be the justification of Quaïn: "Et ce sera mon jour!".

After Quaïn's words, Thogorma sees the Flood rising to envelope the world. At first, this would seem to mean the end of Quaïn's projected vengeance, but, although it shows God's presence and power and although it kills ordinary mortals, Quaïn rises above it. One can almost feel a shudder of dread at the description:

"Quand le plus haut des pics eut bavé son écume,  
Thogorma, fils d'Elam, d'épouvante blêmi,  
Vit Quaïn, le Vengeur, l'immortel Ennemi  
D'Iahvèh, qui marchait, sinistre, dans la brume,  
Vers l'Arche monstrueuse apparue à demi."

This, the spirit of revolt, lives on, unconquerable, superior even to the might of God.

In Leconte de Lisle's poems on the barbarian heroes, he seems less concerned with the particular kinds of deeds the characters perform (killing can provide just as much heroic material as not killing) and with condemnation and approval of these deeds according to narrow moral standards, than with the attitude of his characters.

One of the chief characteristics which runs through all the heroes of the Poèmes barbares is the great confidence with which they go about what they are doing. It is a supreme con-

fidence and assurance which lifts them above the ordinary man and which secures the success in whatever they wish to achieve that gives them superiority also.

Self-assurance in the individual implies a faith in him/herself as a human being and in human powers. So, Leconte de Lisle's idea of barbarian heroism is a very humanistic one, taken, as we have seen in Quain, to the extreme of revolt against God. If the idea can be generalised in any other way than this, it would be to say that the individual hero must live up to some personal ideal of which he has full consciousness and according to which his motives are clean.

CHAPTER VI: THE HEROES OF THE ANIMAL KINGDOM

As an introduction to the heroes of the animal world, it is important to see the background in Leconte de Lisle's own life and work and also the nineteenth-century scientific background. These will be indicated briefly.

We have already seen the relevance of character to scene, in the last chapter (1). Just as many of the poems on the barbarian heroes open with descriptions of the natural scenery, so do the poems about the animals. Leconte de Lisle takes a delight in the description of the natural scene. Some of his poems take this alone as their subject, slighter pieces such as Vilanelle (2) and Dans le ciel clair (3). In such poems as La Ravine Saint-Gilles and Le Bernica, the description of nature is taken as the starting point to the poet's personal exploration of his attitude to life (4).

These descriptions are some of the best in Leconte de Lisle, for they lack the rigid stylisation one finds in some of the Poèmes antiques, since they are based on personal experience. Jobit (5) explores extensively the major influence of the 'île natale', the tropical isle of Bourbon, on Leconte de Lisle's work. Also, Leconte de Lisle, when in Paris, spent many hours at the Jardins des Plantes and he studied the characteristics and the movements of the animals kept in captivity there.

Leconte de Lisle's interest in nature and in animals

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1. See Ditchy, Le Thème de la Mer etc. 2. P.T., p. 42.  
 3. P.T., p. 19. 4. See Chapter VII. 5. Jobit, L. de L. et le Mirage de l'île natale.

links him with two major features of the nineteenth-century French literature: First of all, the longing for the 'île natale' is an outstanding theme of Romantic writing. Baudelaire's La Vie antérieure describes his ideal of a sun-kissed tropical isle, where all is voluptuous, sensual delight. Gauguin travelled to Tahiti. A wider extension of this idea is the theme of the voyage - which Auden discusses in his The Enchafèd Flood, or the Romantic Iconography of the Sea - the poet as explorer seeking his ideal on the wide seas of freedom, as in Rimbaud's Le Bateau ivre. Perhaps something of a search for an ideal is present in Leconte de Lisle's preoccupation with his tropical island. The other feature of nineteenth-century French literature which connects with this aspect of Leconte de Lisle's work is the influence of scientific thought. The idea of the influence of 'ambiance' on Man, seeing him as an animal in the milieu of society, was a dominant one with Balzac who learnt it from the zoologists of his day, especially Lamarck.

As Merz points out, France has in the past done more than any other country to popularise the findings of science. Merz cites the works of Fontenelle, Voltaire and Buffon, who made science a subject of general interest (1). So, literary opinion was often receptive to scientific theories. This general kind of interest is similar to that which produced the speedy absorption of Darwinism in England, after the 'softening-up' process beforehand by such people as Lyell and Chambers (2).

In French literature, the study of Man as animal, as 'bête humaine', was taken to its greatest extremes by the de-

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1. Merz, Vol. I, Chap. 1, pp. 89-156. 2. Woodward, p. 571 ff.

terminist Emile Zola who, in his Rougon-Macquart cycle of novels, explores the workings of heredity and environment on Man. This is not to suggest that Leconte de Lisle was doing anything as elaborate as this in his study of animals, merely to suggest a link with a general interest in this sort of thing in the nineteenth century. Where he can be connected with Zola is in some poems where he equates Man and Beast, and it is interesting to reflect on whether equating Man with beast there decreases Man's heroic stature in the other poems. Leconte de Lisle's works do not form a structure closely knit enough to permit one to say that it does. One cannot be sure that what is explicit in one poem is necessarily implicit in another.

However, what is certain is that Leconte de Lisle's studies of the animal in his natural environment led him to an admiration - although this is not entirely untinged with repulsion - for the animal, and this is one of the reasons for which we can see the animals as heroes. Leconte de Lisle's admiration is for the sheer physical energy and beauty of animals in their natural state. It is an admiration which he cannot have for Man who has intellect and a moral sense. A savage energy which would be immoral in Man has nothing to do with civilised concepts of morality; it is supremely, unconsciously amoral. At least, this appears to be so in many of the poems. A discussion of the question of unconscious evil and the connections of the beasts with Man comes later in the chapter.

Le Jaguar (1) and La Panthère noire (2) are a good pair of poems with which to start a description of Leconte de Lisle's

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1. P.B., p. 207. 2. P.B., p. 197.

admiration for animal energy, for they typify so much of what Leconte de Lisle's vision of the animal world is. As Vianey points out (1), the two poems were originally published together in the Revue contemporaine, with Le Jaguar, describing the hunting beast seizing its prey, first, and La Panthère noire, describing the hunting beast dragging home what was its prey, second.

The jaguar has an almost hypnotic way of exercising its dominance over the ox which is its prey. "La peur le cloue en place.." and this fear renders the ox stupid before there has been any actual physical contact. Then there is the superb leap of the jaguar from where it has been lying in wait in the branches:

"Et le jaguar, du creux des branches entr'ouvertes,  
Se détend comme un arc et le saisit au cou."

One can vividly see the strange sensation of fear of some hostile presence change into the stark reality of feeling sharp claws drive themselves into the neck, and the presence of the jaguar on the ox's back is like a terrible domination. They plunge through the forest, made almost one flesh together:

"Ils passent, aux lueurs blafardes de la lune,  
L'un ivre, aveugle, en sang, l'autre à sa chair rivé."

The panther is shown at a late stage in hunting and killing. It has exercised its superiority over its prey, whose flesh has now partly been eaten. Leconte de Lisle makes the reader feel sensuously the moist, warm blood of the carcass which the panther drags through the forest:

"Elle traîne après elle un reste de sa chasse,  
Un quartier de beau cerf qu'elle a mangé la nuit;

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1. Vianey, Les P.B. de L. de L., p. 29.

Et sur la mousse en fleur une effroyable trace  
Rouge, et chaude encore, la suit."

This is horrifying, but it is a splendid physical spectacle in the same way as the flight of the eagle is awe-inspiring:

"Un instant immobile, il plane, épie et flaire."  
(La Chasse de l'Aigle - 1)

Even in sleep, a beast can reenact deeds of violence, so Leconte de Lisle imagines. Le Rêve du Jaguar (2) depicts the beast asleep. After a physical description of the jaguar, Leconte de Lisle enters into its mind to show that its very dreams are of the same stuff as its waking life:

"Il rêve qu'au milieu des plantations vertes,  
Il enfonce d'un bond ses ongles ruisselants  
Dans la chair des taureaux effarés et beuglants."

This shows a being completely dominated by its brute nature, so that its mind - or what mind it has - exists only as an extension of this. The lack of any mind/body dualism is significant, for the beast has a completely unified being which does not break up into different, conflicting parts.

Implicit in these animal poems is the fact that their heroes live up entirely to their potentialities. They are entirely animal, so there is an implicit contrast with Man who, as part mind and part body, is effecting an ignoble compromise. Certainly, Leconte de Lisle's poems have some connection with the neo-primitivist preference for a savage state rather than for civilisation. If Leconte de Lisle does not entirely approve of this state, he at least thinks it preferable to modern civilisation which he regards as corrupt, for nature is perfect in its own way. In Les Taureaux (3), he makes a con-

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1. P.T., p. 53. 2. P.B., p. 215. 3. P.B., p. 213.

trast between the animal and the representatives of humanity (although not of modern civilisation) which is definitely to the advantage of the animal. The splendour of the bulls' physique:

"..... aux poils lustrés, aux cornes hautes,  
A l'œil cave et sanglant, musculeux et bossus,"

makes seem pitiful:

"Deux nègres d'Antongil, maigres, les reins courbés,  
Les coudes aux genoux, les paumes aux mâchoires,  
Dans l'abêtissement d'un long rêve absorbés,".

Nature, it has been mentioned before, is perfect in its own way, and the animals seem to fit perfectly into their natural background. Le Sommeil du Condor (1) depicts a large, tremendously powerful bird against the background of the frozen peaks of the Andes mountains. It is a perfect setting for the condor, because the steep peaks which seem to climb upwards in the sky parallel the ascending movement of the bird, and also the harsh coldness of the region parallels the condor's attitude of frigid indifference:

"Le vaste Oiseau, tout plein d'une morne indolence,  
Regarde l'Amérique et l'espace en silence,  
Et le sombre soleil qui meure dans ses yeux froids."

The sun dies because it is setting, but it dies too because the bird's chilling look has no real, positive life - only neutrality.

The poem describes the ascending movements of the bird, which are not swift and graceful like those of the eagle, but are more cumbersome, having something of the solid rigidity of the mountains. In the final ascension, the bird shows its only sign of anything like emotion, which Leconte de Lisle conveys

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1. P.B., p. 192.



in a vivid descriptive touch:

"Il râle de plaisir, il agite sa plume,  
Il érige son cou musculeux et pelé,"

It is significant, though, that this croak of savage joy comes, paradoxically, when the bird enters a more rarified atmosphere.

"Dans un cri rauque il monte où n'atteint pas le vent."

It is as if there is an entry into an atmosphere of even greater indifference, for "il dort dans l'air glacé," - the condor is suspended in the air in such harmony with all around it as to be almost one with it. Leconte de Lisle finds this kind of sombre serenity extremely attractive. The condor has the power of rising above the earth - i.e. above ordinary joys and sorrows - in an ecstasy of (if this is not too much of a paradox) indifference.

A nature which appears to Man as harsh, cruel and hostile does not fight against the condor but is its ally. Even when there seems to be a struggle, it need not necessarily be so. In L'Albatros (1) there is a great evocation of the power of the wind and the waves. Through the elements glides the albatross. The scurrying wind leaves the bird untroubled, rather the bird bends it and the other elements to its own purpose. It is "le Roi de l'espace et des mers sans rivages", and possessed of complete self-assurance so that it proceeds at its own self-determined pace, "sans hâte ni retard". There is a hint of some kind of ideal (similar to the rêve which supports the elephants in their journey) -

"L'oeil dardé par delà le livide brouillard....".

But the overriding impression is one of supreme serenity:

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1. P.T., p. 75.

"Et, tranquille au milieu de l'épouvantement,  
Vient, passe, et disparaît majestueusement."

Apart from the idea of a superior indifference, there is another theme which runs through the animal poems of Leconte de Lisle. There is great savagery and cruelty in the animal world, but this is not necessarily evil when conceived as part of a grand harmony in which the forces of need make animals depend on one another for their livelihood. The theme is hunger. We have seen this as motivating the jaguar and the panther. The great beast pictured in Les Jungles (1) is dominated by the same need:

"Le frisson de la faim creuse son maigre flanc."

and in L'Aboma (2), moved by the same desire, the snake.

"..... va chercher sa proie accoutumée,  
Le taureau, le jaguar, ou l'homme, au fond des bois."

Man is seen as prey here, but he is seen as both killer and victim in Sacra fames (3). This is really Leconte de Lisle's most extreme view of nature. First of all, the usual kind of description of the setting and of the beast in its setting is given. Here the beast is the shark, the shark that goes about, totally unmoved by its rôle of destruction:

"Il laisse errer son oeil terne, impassible et lent."

Even though the shark appears horrible to human eyes, and although it goes about its task of destruction in a more savage way, its rôle in life is seen as little different from that of Man:

"Va, monstre! tu n'es pas autre que nous ne sommes,  
Plus hideux, plus féroce, ou plus désespéré.  
Console-toi! demain tu mangeras des hommes,  
Demain par l'homme aussi tu seras dévoré."

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1. P.B., p. 202. 2. P.T., p. 102. 3. P.T., p. 73.

Both Man and beast are caught in the web of the desire for food, which makes them need to kill. Because this desire is beyond their control, the poet can approve of the killing it produces:

"La faim sacré est un long meurtre légitime."

and the mitigating circumstances make for a kind of innocence. If all are guilty, the distinctions of guilt and innocence become meaningless and all are as much innocent as guilty. Of Man and beast, Leconte de Lisle declares:

"Devant ta face, ô Mort, sont tous deux innocents."

This is a very extreme and deterministic attitude to life, and although there is no need to doubt that Leconte de Lisle was sincere in writing it, it is not necessary to see it as a view absolute throughout his whole poetry. His poetry cannot be entirely systematised in this way. It is perhaps best to see this as Leconte de Lisle viewing a problem with great anguish rather than establishing any kind of law of nature.

Also, later, we shall see Leconte de Lisle equating Man and beast in a different way, making us see Man's position as analogous to that of the beast. The beast is then symbolic of the human hero who tries to exercise his dominance over the world around him. We have already seen beasts that are superior by means of physical energy and we can think of the warrior hero in this connection. Also, Leconte de Lisle's stóics and heroes who show superiority to death are like the condor and the albatross.

With such parallels between the qualities of human and animal heroes, it cannot be said that the way in which Man is equated with beast detracts from his heroic stature. There is nothing of the reaction of Bishop Wilberforce in England to Darwinism; he resented being associated with the ape, thinking

this below human dignity (1), for certain of the qualities of the animals are recommended to humanity.

Although certain qualities of the animals are admired, humanity may have scruples about admiring sheer physical violence. One of the functions of Sacra fames is to remind Man that he is just as savage and cruel as the beasts, so horror of the violence of animals alone is unrealistic. Also, in some poems, Leconte de Lisle establishes sympathy for the animals the terrible cravings of hunger or suffering in general. Le Corbeau (2) poses the question of unconscious evil. The crow was condemned to three hundred and seven-seventy years of fasting for attempting to eat the flesh of Christ on the cross. At the time of the poem, it has just been released from its fast and has come to a monastery where it begs the Abbé Sérapion for something to eat. The monk is highly suspicious of the sinister-looking crow, thinking it possibly an agent of the Devil or the Devil himself. Later, Sérapion is convinced this is not so, but he shows revulsion towards the crow and lack of sympathy, especially when he learns that it would have eaten the flesh of Christ if it had not been prevented.

Sérapion thinks the bird is evil, but the bird combats his argument by equating Man and beast. Both experience hunger:

"Homme ou corbeau, manger est doux quand on a faim."

and the crow reminds the Abbé that Man lusts for blood as much as the animal:

"Que l'homme a eu toujours soif de son propre sang,  
Comme moi le désir de sa chair vive ou morte."

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1. See Newsome, How soapy was Sam?, History Today, Vol. 13, 1963, pp. 624-32. 2. P.B., p. 261.

Anyway, it does not see how an animal can be blamed for following its natural instincts:

"Songez que n'étant rien qu'un peu de chair sans âme,  
Je ne puis mériter ni louange, ni blâme;"

The problem that Leconte de Lisle poses is not entirely answered, but sympathy is definitely slanted towards the crow. Also, when at the end of the poem, Sérapion gives the crow absolution, with the words "Donnez-lui.....le repos éternel!", it drops dead. Perhaps this is symbolic of the suppression of natural instincts by the Christian Church.

Sympathy for an animal that has suffered at the expense of humanity is seen, too, in L'Incantation du Loup (1). This poem and Le Corbeau show the superiority of the animal to the ordinary human being who lacks understanding of the animal's position. The wolf is dominated by the thought of Man who has killed its loved ones:

"Sa louve blanche, aux yeux flambants, et les petits  
Qu'elle abritait, la nuit, des poils chauds de son ventre,  
Gisent, morts, égorgés par l'homme, au fond de l'antre."

Its whole being is haunted by the vision of Man the murderer. As it stands, howling its anguish and revolt against its lot, the wolf takes on a sort of primeval quality, summing up the elemental being of the wolf in the same way as the Maoury chief represents the whole of his race:

"Il évoque, en hurlant, l'âme des anciens loups  
Qui dorment dans la lune éclatante et magique."

It is a small step from this picture of the gnawing anguish of the wolf to the picture of the "maigres chiens" in Les Hurleurs (2) where the light of the moon gives the décor the same

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1. P.T., p. 70. 2. P.B., p. 171.

sinister aspect as in L'Incantation du Loup. The central theme of hunger has not been left behind, for these hounds are possessed by some terrible longing which is as fierce as hunger but not physical. The poet asks himself the nature of this mysterious misery, proclaimed by beasts that take on an unworldly eeriness in the moonlight:

"Devant la lune errante aux livides clartés,  
 Quelle angoisse inconnue, aux bord des noires ondes,  
 Faisait pleurer une âme en vos formes immondes?  
 Pourquoi gémissiez-vous, spectres épouvantés?"

He cannot tell, but their plaintive howling touches a chord deep within him:

"Je ne sais; mais, ô chiens qui hurlez sur les plages,  
 Après tant de soleils qui ne reviendront plus,  
 J'entends toujours, du fond de mon passé confus,  
 Le cri désespéré de vos douleurs sauvages!"

The 'hurleurs' can be seen as the representatives of animate life - Man or beast - which revolts against an unhealthy, hostile world ("la plage aride, aux odeurs insalubres"). Theirs is the voice of protest. Environment is seen to be similarly hostile in Les Éléphants (1), but here the animal heroes, who are very humanised indeed, although they suffer, have an ideal to sustain them in their suffering.

Leconte de Lisle sets the scene in his usual manner. Nature is represented as hostile to very life itself. There is deathly silence, absence of life, "Nulle vie et nul bruit". The animals present are as if choked, stifled into stillness. But against this monotonous emptiness, oppressive with heat, there is some purposeful movement, which contrasts with the décor. There follows a description of the kind of power and

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1. P.B., p. 182.

energy which Leconte de Lisle admires throughout his poetry.

The elephants come with a steady motion:

"Ils viennent, soulevant la poussière, et l'on voit,  
Pour ne point dévier du chemin le plus droit,  
Sous leur pied large et sûr crouler au loin les dunes."

They are well organised, for they are led by a chief. This elephant is of great physical strength and magnificence:

"Celui qui tient la tête est un vieux chef. Son corps  
Est gercé comme un tronc que le temps ronge et mine;  
Sa tête est comme un roc, et l'arc de son échine  
Se voute puissamment à ses moindres efforts."

Because of its age, it is presumably wise and its physical magnificence gives the underlying impression of moral assurance.

The leader proceeds at a pace which reflects this:

"Sans ralentir jamais et sans hâter sa marche,  
Il guide au but certain ses compagnons poudreux."

Here is the complete self-confidence which is found in so many of Leconte de Lisle's heroes.

The other elephants have complete confidence in their leader, so they march "l'oeil clos". Their minds are turned towards their ideal:

"Ils rêvent en marchant du pays délaissé,  
Des forêts de figuiers ou s'abrita leur race."

This supports them, makes them oblivious to their great physical suffering which Leconte de Lisle describes in detail:

"..... Leur ventre bat et fume,  
Et leur sueur dans l'air embrasé monte en brume;  
Et bourdonnent autour mille insectes ardents."

Leconte de Lisle deliberately describes the elephants as "pleins de courage" and they also have the virtues of patience and discipline.

The elephants are so very humanised as to be obviously symbolic of the human condition. Leconte de Lisle feels that only

an ideal of harmony can sustain Man against the harsh cruelty of the world.

Two other poems describing the desert can be linked with this idea, L'Oasis (1) and Le Désert (2). In L'Oasis Man is seen together with the beasts at a desert watering-place. All are shown as equally dependent. This emphasises the suffering described in Les Eléphants. The dream of the Bedouin in Le Désert is the equivalent of their ideal:

"Il rêve qu'Al-Borak, le cheval glorieux,  
L'emporte en hennissant dans la hauteur des cieux."

Fairlie indicates how the symbolic nature of the poem, of "le désert du monde", was made explicit by eight lines which formed the conclusion up to and including the 1858 version. (3)

Therefore, one thing stands clear from Leconte de Lisle's animal and connected poems: life, whether animal or human, must preserve an ideal, but realise that perhaps the ideal will not necessarily come true in life. Also, Leconte de Lisle recommends an attitude to life, stoical serenity which has clearly been seen in Le Sommeil du Condor and L'Albatros. It is a concept of an attitude stated even more plainly in La Mort d'un Lion (4). The attitude exhibited here is very similar to that in Vigay's La Mort du Loup:

"Gémir, pleurer, prier, est également lâche.  
Fais énergiquement ta longue et lourde tâche  
Dans la voie où le sort a voulu t'appeler,  
Puis, après, comme moi, souffre et meurs sans parler..." (5).

The magnificent lion in Leconte de Lisle's poem, once a proud hunter, is put into captivity by Man. This caged misery

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1. P.B., p. 162. 2. P.B., p. 142. 3. Fairlie, p. 343 and see D.P.P. Notes et Variantes, p. 302. 4. P.B., 225. 5. Vigay, p. 74.



is symbolic of the condition of life on earth. In resistance to the conditions imposed upon him, the lion ceases to eat and drink. This is revolt through acceptance of death rather than bear an ignominious life, and Leconte de Lisle recommends this indifference to life:

"O coeur toujours en proie à la rébellion,  
 Qui tourne, haletant, dans la cage du monde,  
 Lâche, que ne fais-tu pas comme a fait ce lion?"

The twin ideas of the ideal and of serene indifference provide a good point of conclusion, for they are themes important throughout Leconte de Lisle's poetry and basic to his thought, as will be emphasised in the next and final chapter.

CHAPTER VI: CONCLUSION: LECONTE DE LISLE'S IDEA OF HEROISM  
AND ITS PLACE IN HIS PHILOSOPHY OF LIFE

It is clear from the introduction on the nature of heroism that individuality is the basis of heroism. What distinguishes one type of heroism from another, one author's vision of the hero from another's, are the means by which and the qualities with which the hero exercises his authority. Auden, for instance, gives three very general categories of heroic authority. With Leconte de Lisle, particular features of his individual heroes may be picked out - to a large extent these have been indicated by the sub-divisions of the previous chapters - and these will show his own concept of heroism.

In Leconte de Lisle's poetry, there are heroes of great physical strength. Hèraklès, endowed with great physical energy as a baby, is such a hero. The animal heroes, too, survive by means of their physical powers. There is emphasis on Rama's great strength in L'Arc de Civa. Also, Orestès and the Spanish heroes achieve vengeance and defend their honour by violence and might. All this is in the main heroic tradition of the past which associates heroism with physical superiority and courage. The popular concept of heroism connects it with courage too.

However, Leconte de Lisle's interest is more than merely this. In Hèraklès and Rama, as seen in the more detailed study of an earlier chapter, physical force has important connotations of moral force. Physical force gains more admiration when it is linked with moral force. Thus, the idea of mind/spirit over matter assumes importance. Valmiki can let the ants consume his still living body, Hjalmar can beckon the crow to tear out his heart: they achieve this kind of superiority of mind over body.

Similar spiritual ascendancy is displayed by Thyoné and Glaucé, the virgin-defenders of beauty. In that they are redeemer-son figures, Iôn and Çunacépa act rôles of moral force, too.

Martyrs, those who adhere unto death to a cause, whether it be to beauty, to learning, to a country, to a creed, such as Hypatie, Mouça-al-Kébyr and all the representatives of dying civilisations, carry an ideal of the mind. The animal poems, many of which have been shown to be symbolic of the human condition, continue the idea of a moral superiority, both to other beings and to existence itself. Leconte de Lisle's concept of heroism is strongly slanted to emphasise the moral attitude of Man to the world.

The characters who stand as heroes have the same kind of spiritual and intellectual awareness as is found in the personal poems of Leconte de Lisle. Neither kind of poem - heroic or personal - is concerned with mundane situations, but deals with Man face to face with existence and with death. This is not to say that Leconte de Lisle's characters are mere projections of his personality, for they stand as characters in their own right, but the similarity in attitude is there. It is only natural that Leconte de Lisle's personal views should influence his choice of heroes, however much he may have professed erudite, objective writing. These heroes possess the qualities which Leconte de Lisle admires and to which he reveals that he aspires in his personal poems. What makes the contrast between the two all the more interesting is the fact that Leconte de Lisle cannot always achieve those qualities he admires - most important, qualities of resignation, as in Le Calumet du Sachem, and (very closely connected) of superior indifference, as in La Mort de Valmiki, L'Albatros, and Le Sommeil du Condor.

What must be borne in mind when discussing the similarity between Leconte de Lisle's personal attitude and that of his heroes is the basic opposition in his work between civilisation and barbarism. It must be remembered that such poems as Les Montreurs and Aux Modernes are included in the Poèmes barbares. His own century is as much 'maudit' and 'barbare' as any other since the decline of Hellenic civilisation. His situation is analogous to those characters he depicts who are forced to live in a barbarous world, who cannot alter the world itself, but who can at least attain some kind of individual purity by their moral superiority to the world. Leconte de Lisle's idea of the hero is a deliberately anachronistic one: he definitely preferred the 'antique' to the 'barbare'. However, although he is trapped in a time just as barbarous as many preceding centuries, he still prefers the past in the barbarian era to the present. The heroes he depicts are the key to this preference, for they show the kind of attitude which he knows is not prevalent in his time. They possess an acute consciousness of their past and of its great value. Mouça-al-Kébyr looks back on his glorious deeds of the past. The last of the Maourys and the old Indian chief sum up the past existence of their respective races, evoking in their single existence and consciousness whole peoples that have passed away. The 'Barde de Temrah' similarly represents a race, a religion, as do the Runoña and the Druids. And Quaïn looks back with longing to a former time of which he has no experience - that of the lost paradise of Eden.

These examples of a preference for the past are clearly parallels of Leconte de Lisle's own situation. The heroic and the personal poems reflect upon one another, and if the poems cannot be fitted into an architecture, they do at least show a

definite pattern of thought.

One important feature of the background to Leconte de Lisle's thought - and a fitting background it is to the stories of the extermination of races and religions - is the idea of universal destruction. In Byron's Preface to his Cain (as we have seen, an important source for Leconte de Lisle's Quain), he writes:

"The reader will perceive that the author has partly adopted in this poem the notion of Cuvier, that the world had been destroyed several times before the creation of man." (1)

Putter refers to the theories of universal doom which were current in the nineteenth century: in Laplace: Exposition du Système du Monde, in Humboldt: The Cosmos, and in the work of Helmholtz. Humanity was thought to be trapped on a dying planet. (2)

This idea exercised a kind of fascination and at the same time a horror over Leconte de Lisle. In La Légende des Nornes (3) (whose ending is also mentioned in the Appendix, Christ as Hero), the world comes to violent destruction. Also, several poems entirely devoted to this idea show his preoccupation with it. La Dernière Vision (4) pictures the cold desolate waste after all life has disappeared, the snow which is a shroud for a dead planet:

"Un long silence pend de l'immobile nue.  
La neige, bossuant ses plis amoncelés,  
Linœul rigide, étreint les océans gelés.  
La face de la terre est absolument nue."

It is the silence, especially, which is so awesome, ~~almost~~ yet attractive too, because of its peace. The same kind of

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1. Byron, p. 521. 2. Putter, Pessimism 2, pp. 274-5.  
3. P.B., p. 48. 4. P.B., p. 246.

landscape, that of "un monde mort" is described in Paysage polaire (1).

It is significant that Leconte de Lisle chooses to end the Poèmes barbares with a vision of the destruction of the earth. Solvat seclum (2) prophesies that nothing, no living thing will be spared from extinction, and again the image of what will result is silence:

"Tu te tairas, ô voix sinistre des vivants!"

The voices of the living are but as execrations against the silence of death. So, although this silence is frightful, it is also fascinating because of its very purity which no living thing could possibly achieve. This purity is something to be envied. It is a purity parallel to the ideal of so many of Leconte de Lisle's heroes.

In Fiat Nox (3), Leconte de Lisle says:

"L'universelle mort ressemble au flux marin  
Tranquille ou furieux, n'ayant hâte ni trêve....".

The image of the impassivity of nature immediately calls to mind the state of being achieved by the condor and the albatross. Also, later in the same poem, the line, "L'angoisse et le bonheur sont le rêve d'un rêve" echoes the language of La Mâyâ and partially expresses the ideal of Valmiki. Universal extinction is seen as desirable because it will bring an end to Man's suffering:

"Regarde! Le flot monte et vient pour t'engloutir!  
Ton enfer va s'éteindre, et la noire marée  
Va te verser l'oubli de son ombre sacré."

Thus, death itself is welcomed. As we have seen, this can be linked with the idea of oblivion put forward in Leconte de

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1. P.B., p. 260. 2. P.B., p. 357. 3. P.B., p. 236.

Lisle's Indian poems.. (It is useless to question whether this link is consistent with all the technicalities of Indian philosophy. It is something which exists in the work of Leconte de Lisle, something which exists poetically, and that is all that matters.) Also, there is a connection with the idea of death in many of Leconte de Lisle's other poems.

Some heroes see the death of others - and sometimes that of themselves - as the only solution to their problems. This may be because of the law of necessity of nature, as with the beasts of prey. It may be because of an ideal of honour, as with the Spanish heroes and Hervor. Orestès is impelled by a desire for vengeance, Klytaimnestra by naked hate and a desire for power. Brunhild and Komor - their example is most significant - inescapably caught, inextricably in the trammels of conflicting love and personal honour, kill another and then themselves in order to satisfy their internal conflict. The great martyrs - Hypatie, the 'Barde de Temrah', Naboth, the Druids, - prefer to sacrifice their lives rather than their ideals.

Some heroes take no violent action, but wait patiently for death, almost willing death's destruction of the flesh, such is there superiority of mind over ordinary human fears. Belonging to this order are Valmiki, Viçvimatra in Çunacépa, the Red Indian chief of Le Calumet du Sachem, and Hialmar.

The idea of death as a solution obviously connects with Leconte de Lisle's personal desire for oblivion. He positively envies the peace of the dead:

"O lugubres troupeaux des morts, je vous envie," he says, and it is for "L'Irrévocable paix inconnue à la terre." (Aux Morts †)

In Le Dernier Souvenir (1), he dismisses life in a casual, off-hand manner and welcomes death in the same way:

"..... je suis bien mort. Tant mieux."

Such a casual reference is not usual. Leconte de Lisle seriously welcomes oblivion in a philosophical way:

"Le secret de la vie est dans les tombes closes:

.....  
Et le néant final des êtres et des choses  
Est l'unique raison de leur réalité."

(Le Secret de la Vie # 2)

What makes Leconte de Lisle say this is his situation - that of the idealist in a barbarian world. Terribly conscious that his ideal existed in the past, in the glories of Ancient Greece, and that it probably will never come into being again, he reviews his situation in Dies Irae (3), and concludes that if a return to the former state of glory does prove impossible then death is the best solution:

"Et toi, divine Mort, où tout rentre et s'efface,  
Accueille tes enfants dans ton sein étoilé;  
Affranchis-nous du tamps, du nombre et de l'espace,  
Et rends-nous le repos que la vie a troublé!"

Thus, a desire for death, springs, as with the martyrs and representatives of dying races and creeds, from a positive idealism. His aspiration to death is like that to a higher existence:

"Lumière, où donc es-tu? Peut-être dans la mort."  
(In Excelsis - 4)

The fact that the right kind of attitude to death is often taught by the animals as well as by the human heroes --Leconte de Lisle recommends:

"Sois comme un loup blessé qui se tait pour mourir,  
Et qui mord le couteau, de sa gueule qui saigne."

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1. P.B., p. 232. 2. P.T., p. 156. 3. P.A., p. 310. 4. P.B., p. 237.



in Le Vent froid de la Nuit (1) - turns our thoughts to the world of nature. Leconte de Lisle's background for his animal poems is also the scene of his personal confrontation with the very problems of existence.

Although fascinated with the idea of universal catastrophe, Leconte de Lisle preserves a faith in the continuity of natural processes. Death is a fundamental part of nature, but so is the resurgence of life. Nature is both destroyer and creator. In the nineteenth century, this idea was prominent in the writings of Pierre-Simon Ballanche. His <sup>idea</sup> idea of 'palingenesis' (2) is of a series of deaths and rebirths in the universe.

This cycle of creation, destruction and re-creation is evoked in La Forêt vierge and La Mort du Soleil (3). In the first of these poems, a very personalised forest is seen as weeping beneath the destructive blows of Man's axe. However, although the forest may be cut down, Man will turn his destructive force upon himself and the forest will live again:

"Mais tu pourras dormir, vengée et sans regret,  
Dans la profonde nuit où tout doit redescendre:  
Les larmes et le sang arroseront ta cendre,  
Et tu rejailliras de la nôtre, ô forêt!"

Man, it seems can receive permanent damage, whereas the forest cannot. The same idea occurs in La Mort du Soleil, where Man's emotional susceptibility is contrasted with the permanence of the sun:

"Meurs donc, tu renaîtras! L'Espérance en est sûre  
Mais qui rendra la vie et la flamme et la voix  
Au coeur qui s'est brisé pour la dernière fois?"

This sort of idea - that of the mutability of Man contrasted with the eternity of nature - is, of course, not new; it was a

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~~22x88xHuntxEpicx76xxx2x~~ 1. P.B., p. 244. 2. See Hunt, Epic, p. 76. 3. P.B., p. 185 and p. 239.

✓ preoccupation of Ronsard, as in his Chanson:

"Rochers, bien que soyez âgés  
De trois mille ans, vous ne changez  
Jamais ni d'état ni de forme,  
Mais toujours ma jeunesse fuit,  
Et la vieillesse qui me suit  
De jeune en vieillard me transforme." (1)

What is important is the attitude towards this contrast, once it has been recognised.

The difficulty is that intellectual recognition does not necessarily mean emotional acceptance. However, in certain poems, Leconte de Lisle achieves, or is very near, the ideal he sets himself. In La Ravine Saint-Gilles (2), he sees the indifference of nature:

"Au fond de tes fureurs, comme au fond de tes joies,  
Ta force est sans ivresse et sans emportement."

The secret of happiness, Leconte de Lisle knows, is to copy this indifference with:

"Un impassible coeur sourd aux rumeurs humaines."

This represents progress from intellectual recognition as far as intellectual acceptance, but the ideal is not entirely achieved, because emotional acceptance is not there: a ray of hope, the "espérance éternelle" in the human breast, makes absolute indifference impossible.

The effect of La Fontaine aux Lianes (3) is very similar. There is great sympathy for the individual who is trapped in nature, symbolised by the pool, as in a grave, and also there is awareness of the impassivity of nature, utterly oblivious of any kind of individual within itself:

"La nature se rit des souffrances humaines;

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1. Ronsard, p. 86. 2. P.B., p. 173. 3. P.B., p. 165.

Ne contemplant jamais que sa propre grandeur,  
 Elle dispense à tous ses forces souveraines  
 Et garde pour sa part le calme et la splendeur."

So, there again is no complete reconciliation of nature and the individual.

A more direct conflict of individual aspiration and the ideal of the harmony of the whole of creation comes in Ultra coelos(1). Nature does nothing to make us suffer, for it is indifferent whether we are happy or not. We have within ourselves the cause of our own suffering: it is desire which acts like a clarion call:

"Debout, marchez, courez, volez, plus loin, plus haut!"

- desire for the infinite. For the individual is not satisfied with the idea of extinction and wants eternal life; even, whipped on by the greatest excesses of desire, the individual can feel it almost within his grasp:

"Va! nous t'obéirons, voix profond et sonore,  
 Par qui, l'âme, d'un bond, brise le noir tombeau!"

The individual, the poet, however, cannot live under this illusion for long. He can see desire as vain. Yet, at the same time, the weakness to be tempted by it is unconquerable, and he is left in conflict, in a state of tormented bitterness:

"A de lointains soleils allons montrer nos chaînes,  
 Allons combattre encor, penser, aimer, souffrir;  
 Et, savourant l'horreur des tortures humaines,  
 Vivons, puisqu'on ne peut oublier ni mourir!"

One poem which shows the rare achievement of the kind of emotional serenity which releases the individual from the torments of desire is Le Bernica (2). Immediately the picture is more hopeful, for the first stanza - mainly a description of

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1. P.B., p. 217. 2. P.B., p. 204.

the gorge whose name is the title of the poem - ends with the words: "... on y peut oublier.". Leconte de Lisle goes on to depict the absolute harmony of nature. This time it is a harmony against which there is no contrasting dissonance. Here the individual manages to transcend his own individuality. The poet associates himself with nature and thus takes on her qualities - the purity and serenity of indifference, which no longer appear harsh when the individual is permeated in this way:

"Mais l'âme s'en pénètre; elle se plonge, entière,  
 Dans l'heureuse beauté de ce monde charmant;  
 Elle se sent oiseau, eau vive et lumière;  
 Elle revêt ta robe, ô pureté première!  
 Et se repose en Dieu silencieusement."

"The rest is silence...", as with the condor, the albatross, Valmiki and others who achieve this state.

But, as we have seen, such an achievement is rare and usually rests beyond the human grasp. This is what makes for Leconte de Lisle Man's tragic heroism. It is possible to recognize intellectually that impassive serenity is the ideal state. However, the hold of desire is so great that the reflecting consciousness cannot transcend itself, annul itself. The tragedy of the human condition is based in this. The heroism exists in those who are sufficiently courageous to rebel or in those few who have the even more abnormal ability to resolve the conflict by the suppression of desire. These are the attainments of many of Leconte de Lisle's heroes.

If Leconte de Lisle cannot achieve what his heroes do, if complete indifference while he awaits death is impossible, there remains the supreme serenity of art. To the individual being the world may appear as tumultuous conflict, chaos, but artistic creation is a pattern, a harmony, where the spiritual and physical phenomena of the world are reconciled. Art

does not suppress, but can, of its own self, satisfy the desire for eternity. As Gautier says in his poem, L'Art:

"Tout passe. - L'art robuste  
Seul a l'éternité.  
Le buste  
Survit à la cité." (1)

By appreciation of works of art, the individual can savour some taste of eternity. In this way, art can have a beneficial effect, an effect which is recounted in Les Larmes de L'Ours (2) where the Nordic bard charms into joy the bear, the birch-tree and the sea who were afflicted by sorrow:

"L'arbre frémit, baignée de rosée et d'aurore;  
Des rires éclatants coururent sur la Mer.

Et le grand Ours charmé se dressa sur ses pattes....".

One is reminded of the effect of Orphée's song upon his hearers in Khirôn.

The idea of the supreme power and harmony of art provides a fitting conclusion, for it points the link between Leconte de Lisle's own personal heroism, his devotion to his poetic task, and his preferred ideal, absolute beauty, as enshrined in Greek civilisation and its heroes.

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1. Emaux et Camées, p. 131. 2. P.B., p. 79.

APPENDIX: CHRIST AS HERO

The impression of Leconte de Lisle's attitude to Christianity glimpsed in the main chapters of this work is of hostility. Hypatie, Hypatie et Cyrille, Le Runoia, Le Massacre de Mona, Les Paraboles de Dom Guy and L'Holocauste all show Leconte de Lisle in opposition to the Christian Church. This is an impression which is strengthened by a reading of several other poems. In La Légende des Nornes, he deliberately alters the Christian ending of his source story from the Norse Eddas. (1) The original Christian ending of optimism he excises and he substitutes a vision of the end of the world. This is done as much from an anti-Christian outlook as from a historical sense that a Christian ending was an unsuitable appendage to a basically Scandinavian, pagan epic. La Vision de Snorr (2) depicts, with obvious irony, a credulous fool's belief in the pains of Hell.

Also, Les Ascètes, Les Deux Glaives, L'Agonie d'un Saint, La Mort du Moine, Cozzia et Borgia and Les Raisons du Saint-Père (3) (of which any detailed study is beyond the scope of this thesis) all build up the idea of a hellish medieval Catholicism, to which background works are Leconte de Lisle's Histoire populaire du Christianisme (1870) and the Histoire du Moyen Age (1876). In the former, Leconte de Lisle declares he considers Christianity "une influence déplorable sur les intelligences et sur les moeurs". (4)

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1. Vianey, Sources, p. 132 ff. 2. P.B., p. 56.  
 3. P.B., p. 298; P.B., p. 305; P.B., p. 316; D.P., p. 35; D.P., p. 47; D.P., p. 41. 4. Quoted by Flottes, Le Poète L. de L., p. 198.

There is no doubt of Leconte de Lisle's rejection of the Christian Church. He condemned its intolerance, narrowness and petty-minded strictness over the letter rather than the spirit of the law. (In Le Lévrier de Magnus, nuns who have been raped are sentenced to eternal damnation because their chastity has been broken.) A lack of any real contact with the true, original spirit of Christianity has led to corruption, selfishness and lust for power in the Church.

It is necessary to distinguish between Christ and Christianity or the Christian Church. This Leconte de Lisle does. He accepts the Christian Church for the sake of the original purity it represents, however imperfectly. He makes a vivid contrast between Christ and the Church in La Bête écarlate (1). Christ in the Garden of Gethsemane envisages the hell on earth which Man will make of the future and how his Church will be like some gross, diseased monster:

"Et tout son corps suait  
D'angoisse et de dégoût devant cette géhenne  
Effroyable, ces flots de sang et cette haine,  
Ces siècles de douleur, ces peuples abêtis,  
Et ce Monstre écarlate, et ces démons sortis  
Des gueules dont chacune en rugissant le nomme,  
Et cette éternité de tortures."

Dramatically, as a sign of the authenticity of the vision, Leconte de Lisle indicates the coming of the first betrayer:

"Et, non loin, hors des murs de Tsiôn haute et sombre,  
La torche de Judas étincela dans l'ombre!" (2)

Leconte de Lisle's idea of Christianity as a formal religion is almost entirely coloured by his anti-clericalism. It is not really possible to make out a case for the clerics

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1. P.T., p. 106. 2. This image is used by Vigny in Le Mont des Oliviers, p. 78. Christ's consciousness of the future corruption of his own Church is shown in Le Nazaréen and La Passion too.

as religious heroes, except for Dom Guy (1), even if we use the term 'religious' in Auden's special sense, for they are such grotesque figures and painted in such black colours as to almost appear ridiculous.

However, despite this loathing for the Christian Church and its representatives, there is genuine respect for Christ as a man, Christ as hero we can say. It is too extreme to say, as Canat does, that Leconte de Lisle hated all gods and especially Christ, even when this is limited to "sa première manière religieuse". (2) Elsenberg, on the other hand, although he defeats his own extreme wording by pointing out an exception, says that Leconte de Lisle never says a word that is not respectful to Christ (3). For a balanced view, it is necessary to recognise in Leconte de Lisle's work a general respect for Christ, with minor exceptions. There is the reference to the "vil Galélien" in Hypatie (although this may imply a general reference to Christianity here), (and there is the horrible picture of an avenging infant Christ in Le Runoña.

Leconte de Lisle has admiration for the humanised gods of the ancient world, who actively aid Man, such as "le Roi Khons, le divin Guérisseur" in Néféroù-Ra (4), so that it is natural that he should have respect for God become Man (although there is nothing strictly theological in his view). It is as Man that Christ is usually presented.

In La Fille de l'Emyr (5), Christ comes as a pale young lover to the Emyr's daughter. In the original, source story, it is related that the girl is rewarded with eternal life for

1. See Chapter VI, section on Religious Heroism and Martyrdom.

2. Canat, Le Sentiment de la Solitude morale, pp. 209-10.

3. Elsenberg, Sentiment religieux, p. 141.

4. P.B., p. 38      5. P.B., p. 151.



following Jesus, but Vianey thinks that she is tricked into the cruel death in life of a monastery. Souriau and Putter support this idea of a trick perpetrated by Christ (1). Fairlie, on the other hand, points out the lack of author intervention in the poem, and says it is left to the reader to decide whether the girl's sacrifice is worthwhile (2). I am inclined to agree with Fairlie. It seems certain that the girl will be granted eternal life:

"Et je te réserve, enfant, dans mes cieux,  
La vie éternelle après cette terre!"

but that she will have to pay dearly for it:

"Parmi les vivants morts....."

What is interesting apart from this critical disagreement (important since it reflects upon whether we can admire Christ in this poem) is the picture of Christ as a lover, as an attractive young man.

A rôle of male energy is assigned to Christ in Dom Guy's vision of him (in Les Parables de Dom Guy) -

"..... j'ai vu qu'il tirait de sa robe une corde  
Noueuse, mise en trois et dure comme il faut,  
Et qu'à grands coups de fouets il les chassait d'en haut...".

Jesus, man of action, drives the money-lenders from the Temple.

Christ is at his most impressive in Leconte de Lisle in the Crucifixion scenes. Here, the reader is induced to compassion and great admiration for nobility in pain. The crowd can recognise the crucified as more than an ordinary man and see an extraordinary beauty in him:

"Celui-là n'était point uniquement un homme,  
Car sa chevelure et toute sa chair

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1. Vianey, Sources, p. 149; Souriau, p. 188; Putter, Pessimism 2, p. 192. 2. Fairlie, pp. 344-6.

Rayonnait un feu doux, disséminé dans l'air,  
 Et qui baignait parfois des lueurs de l'opale  
 Ce cadavre si beau, si muet et si pâle."  
 (Le Corbeau)

Christ gains sympathy as a man especially in Le Nazaréen (1). He becomes the representative of Man crying 'de profundis' only to hear his despairing cries re-echo from a blank heaven:

"Mais dans le ciel muet de l'infâme colline  
 Nul n'ayant entendu ce lamentable cri,  
 Comme un dernier sanglot soulevait sa poitrine,  
 L'homme désespéré courba son front meurtri."

Leconte de Lisle may have been influenced by Alfred de Vigny's Le Mont des Oliviers (2) where Christ's call for help from God goes unanswered. Flottes suggests a general influence of Le Mont des Oliviers on Leconte de Lisle (3).

But Man, whom Jesus represents, will reject him. Christ's despairing vision of the future will come true, although the recognition of his individual nobility will survive in the poem:

"Tu n'avais pas menti!" and:

"Car tu sièges auprès de tes Egaux antiques,  
 Sous tes longs cheveux roux, dans ton ciel chaste et bleu;  
 Les âme, en essaims de colombes mystiques,  
 Vont boire la rosée à tes lèvres de Dieu!"

Leconte de Lisle here supports the idea of the divinity of Christ, but in the context of his other poetry, this means giving him no less, but no more recognition than other gods.

A more diffuse picture of Christ the Crucified is La Passion (4). Perhaps <sup>because</sup> it is so diffuse - consisting of a series of tableaux - it is far less dramatically effective than Le

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1. P.B., p. 302. 2. Vigny, p. 75. 3. Flottes, L'Influence d'Alfred de Vigny, p. 63. 4. D.P., p. 87.

Nazaréen, whose concentration gives the effect of greater intensity. Perhaps also, because the poem was written to order and out of a desire to please his mother (the 1857 and 1858 editions are dedicated to her) rather than for poetic truth, he approached the work with less than usual enthusiasm and this left its mark upon it. However, there are some noteworthy features and aspects typical of Leconte de Lisle. Great emphasis is placed on Christ's physical suffering:

"O Christ! tu vas enfin épuiser ton calice!  
Et ployé, chancelant sous l'arbre du supplice,  
Par l'ardeur du soleil et les sentiers pierreux,  
Tu vas suivre, pieds nus, ton chemin douloureux!"

The weight of the cross is a great physical burden too.

Apart from physical courage, Jesus has the inner strength, even in the time of his greatest suffering, to console the misery of others: 'Huitième Station. Jésus console les filles de Jérusalem.'

Consistent with Le Nazaréen and again, maybe, showing the influence of Vigny, Christ is represented as:

"Abandonné du monde et du ciel...." (1).

However, we can see Christ as a great heroic example. Simon le Cyrénéen takes pity on Christ and lends his strong frame to carry the cross, an act of courage in a crowd jeering at Jesus' failing strength:

"Ces insensés craignaient que le Sauveur mourût  
Et qu'il leur enlevât une part de leur joie!"

This act of physical strength is given a moral and spiritual

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1. Flottes, L'Influence d'Alfred de Vigny, p. 72, develops this idea so that he sees a kind of rebellion in Christ: "Leconte de Lisle ne fait pas du Christ un révolté, mais il lui refuse la résignation; Jésus n'accepte pas que la volonté de son père soit faite: il préfère mourir." This is an extreme view which the text does not support and which does not show an understanding of Christian doctrine.

significance:

"A quelle tâche auguste, à quelle oeuvre sublime  
Tu vins mêler ta force inculte et magnanime....".

Similar courage is shown by the woman, later to be Sainte Véronique, who takes it upon herself to wipe Christ's perspiring face. "Béni soit le transport de ton âme héroïque...", says Leconte de Lisle.

At the end, Leconte de Lisle continues to put forward his view of Christ as man. Christ shows an entirely human reaction to death:

".... enfin la mort l'effraie....".

This fear and his despair:

"Jésus, l'Agneau sans tâche et le Verbe incréé,  
Comme un fils de la femme a donc désespéré?"

make the moral and spiritual effort to face death all the greater and all the more glorious the final triumph of Redemption.

As mentioned previously, Leconte de Lisle's view of Christ must be seen in the context of all of his work. A poem which emphasises this context is La Paix des Dieux (1), where, as in Louis Ménard's Prométhée, a succession of gods is seen passing away, the last of them, Christ:

"Le blond Nazaréen, Christ, le fils de la Vierge,  
Qui pendait, tout sanglant, cloué sur sa croix."

No one religion is so important to Leconte de Lisle as to be eternal. However, it is perhaps possible to see "le dernier dieu" as symbolic of Christ:

"Le dernier, le plus cher des Dieux, l'antique Amour,  
Par qui tout vit, sans qui tout meurt, l'Homme et le monde."  
(Le Dernier Dieu - 2)

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1. D.P., p. 3. 2. P.T., p. 153.

BIBLIOGRAPHICAL NOTESCHAPTER I

Heroic Poetry by Sir Maurice Bowra and Heroic Song and Heroic Legend by Jan de Vries provided the starting point to this chapter. Of other secondary works, W.H. Auden's The Enchafèd Flood, or the Romantic Iconography of the Sea is a wide-ranging and stimulating account of the common Romantic theme of the voyage, the third section of which - Ishmael-Don Quixote - examines the rôle of the heroes on the voyage (pp. 83-126). Henry Gifford's The Hero of His Time is a useful study of the Russian novel in the nineteenth century. I am grateful to Mr. D.J. Haig for bringing the last two works to my attention.

For information on Nietzsche, I have mainly used Bertrand Russell's History of Western Philosophy (Book III, Chapter 25, pp. 728-39) and that useful handbook on nineteenth-century thought, The Age of Ideology, edited by Henry D. Aiken (Chapter X, Salvation without a Saviour, pp. 202-224, on Friedrich Nietzsche). Camus gives an interesting twentieth-century view of Romantic revolt in L'Homme révolté (with especial reference to pp. 67-75 of the Gallimard Edition, on La Révolte des Dandys).

My own knowledge of nineteenth-century literature provided some of the information for this chapter, especially my reading of the novels by Stendhal, Dostoyevsky and Tolstoy and Baudelaire's L'Art romantique (Chapter IX of Le Peintre de La Vie moderne backs up Camus' view of the Dandy with a contemporary account). Lastly, I have to express my thanks to Dr. E.J. Kearns for reminding of one of the most important views of heroism in the nineteenth century, that of Carlyle.

CHAPTER II

Most general works on Leconte de Lisle and on the Parnasse give some biographical details. Of these, the standard literary biographies are those by Estève and Flottes. That by Estève is a useful handbook, but the works by Flottes are less satisfactory, because, especially in his first book, there is too much pseudo-Freudian analysis without enough emphasis on the bare facts of the poet's life and their reference to his time.

Interesting contemporary views of Leconte de Lisle are those by Baudelaire, in an article originally contributed to the Revue fantaisiste in 1861, and by Anatole France, in M. Leconte de Lisle à l'Académie française; both are good antidotes to the extreme hostility of such contemporaries as Alexandre Dumas, fils. The accounts published by Calmettes, Tiercelin and Leblond at the turn of the century are suspect. They have not the value of contemporary views, nor do they have the quality of a historical study prepared at a distance from the subject. Much of what they say is based on hearsay and Leblond in particular is biased, since he bases his work on a socialist thesis and over-emphasises Leconte de Lisle's political writings at the expense of the poet's main preoccupations. However, something may be gained from these works if the reservations above are borne in mind.

Putter's study of the evolution of Leconte de Lisle's pessimism is the best recent view of the poet's life, for he concentrates on real facts and is not afraid to throw doubt on stories about his subject, which may seem attractive but which have no concrete evidence to back them up. An article by Putter, on Leconte de Lisle's abortive ambitions, helps to build up the impression of the poet's poverty during the 1850's, as

do the letters published by Bonnerot. Jones in his review of the Egli selection of Leconte de Lisle's poetry supplies a useful corrective to our letting our odium at Leblond's unobjective account blind us to the facts that he did indeed produce polemical writings. Jones, too, in his article on the Histoire du Moyen Age of 'Pierre Gosset', seems to establish beyond all doubt Leconte de Lisle's authorship. The articles by Foucque and Hérisson add further background.

Not all the possible biographical material has been used because niggling points of historical accuracy are beyond the scope of a chapter which is only a small aspect of a whole thesis. Lastly, it is necessary to mention the two works which have helped me to view the material I have used in the correct historical perspective: Cassagne's La Théorie de l'Art pour l'Art en France, a monument to French scholarship in the field of literary history, and Maurice Z. Shroder's Icarus, the Image of the Artist in French Romanticism.

### CHAPTER III

Leconte de Lisle's views on poetry and history are contained in his prefaces - to the Poèmes antiques (1852) and to the Poèmes et Poésies (1855), in his essays, Les Poètes contemporains, originally published in Le Nain jaune in 1864, in his article on Charles Baudelaire which first appeared in the Revue européenne in 1861 and in the Discours sur Victor Hugo (prononcé à l'Académie française, le 31 mars, 1887). (For the prefaces, page references are given to the 1927 Lemerre Edition of the Derniers Poèmes, pp. 205-23, and for the rest to the 1951 Edition of the Derniers Poèmes, pp. 237-309.

On Fourier, several works have useful sections. Faguet

in the 'deuxième série' of his Politiques et Moralistes du XIXe siècle, pp. 43-81, gives, through clear lack of personal enthusiasm, the least interesting account. The others are much better. Paul Janet describes in some detail Fourier's philosophy. Soltau sets forth a straight political account in his section on the political thought of the period. Hunt and Evans, in their studies of the <sup>la</sup> relationship of socialism and Romanticism in the 1830's and 1840's, link together well Leconte de Lisle's ideas and those of Fourierism (Hunt: Le Socialisme et le Romantisme en France, Chapitre XVIII, p. 265 ff.; Evans: Social Romanticism in France, p. 43 ff.), as does Flottes in Le Poète Leconte de Lisle, Chapitre IV, p. 37 ff. and Zyromski in the only article devoted to this subject. Woodward's volume of the Oxford History of England on this period provides a useful background of parallels and comparisons with France, as it does in later sections of the thesis.

Charlton's study of the <sup>la</sup> secular religions in France provides the information of the great French interest, in the nineteenth century, in the study of religions of the past (see sections VII, p. 155 and VIII, p. 180). In his monumental work on the French epic in the nineteenth century, Hunt connects the resurgence of the epic with the increase in the serious study of history and has special sections on Leconte de Lisle (XI, p. 325), on Quinet (VI, p. 101) and on Ménard (IX, part 4, p. 259). Faguet (pp. 175-227) has a section on Quinet. Quinet's Le Génie des Religions is Volume 6 in the standard OEuvres complètes. On Ménard, the chief source of reference is the definitive biography by Henri Peyre, and there is an article on his religious thought by A. Lytton Sells. Ménard's Poèmes et Rêveries d'un Païen mystique is the primary source I have used here. Flaubert's Salammô provides an interesting parallel



case to Leconte de Lisle's interest in the study of the past.

Charlton deals with Positivism as one of the chief secular religions, but his main treatment of the subject is his Positivist Thought in France during the Second Empire, 1852-1870. Perhaps the most valuable work as far as this part of the chapter is concerned is his article which examines Leconte de Lisle's ideas on poetry in relation to positivist thought. Certain books contain sections on Auguste Comte: Faguet (pp. 281-369); Chapter VI, The Father of Positivism, pp. 115-37 of the Age of Ideology; and Basil Willey devotes one of his Nineteenth Century Studies (pp. 187-201) to Comte. Acton's article in the 1951 volume of Philosophy is a good modern summary from a philosophical point of view. The relationship between literature and science and industry in nineteenth-century France is examined by Fusil, Grant and Nina Smith, the latter not very successfully, especially when she tries to establish a very tenuous 'accord de la science et de la poésie' in the work of Leconte de Lisle without really seeming to understand what he meant by 'science'. Reading such a poet as Whitman shows the huge gap between Leconte de Lisle and those who saw the conquest of the material universe as a sign of great spiritual progress too.

A basic handbook on the main movements in French literature is Phillipe Van Tieghem's Petite Histoire des Grandes Doctrines en France. The second section of Victor Cousin's Du Vrai, du Beau et du Bien shows the theories of one of the foremost aestheticians of the time of the Art for Art's sake movement, whose history has been written by Cassagne. Joanna Richardson's Théophile Gautier, His Life and Times is useful background too.

The basic general studies of Leconte de Lisle, mentioned for the most part in the notes to Chapter II, gave, of course, the lead to most of the lines I have followed in this chapter. Bertrand Russell's History of Western Philosophy (Book III, Part 2, especially Chapters XVIII: The Romantic Movement, p. 651, XXI: Currents of Thought in the Nineteenth Century, p. 691, XXIII: Byron, p. 716).

#### CHAPTER IV

The general studies of Leconte de Lisle all have sections on the Indian and Greek poems, but not one was as helpful as the more particular studies to be mentioned here. Perhaps the most basic volume is Vianey's work on the sources of Leconte de Lisle: Chapter I, p. 1 ff., on the Indian poems, and Chapter IX, p. 298 ff., on the Greek poems.

The indications of the sources in Vianey led me to some work on a comparison between some of the originals and the finished product by Leconte de Lisle. This was done with Ovid's Metamorphoses (Book VI of which tells the story of Niobé), the Penguin translation being used, and with Leconte de Lisle's own translations of Eschyle (1872) and of Euridipe (1887) - in these with the best results. Leconte de Lisle obviously knew his Greek originals very well, so it is safe to assume that any alterations from them were made very deliberately, especially since, in each case, his own versions appeared only a year after the translations - Les Erinnyes in 1873 and L'Apollonide in 1888. The alterations provide indications of the type of characters he was trying to draw. Apart from Leconte de Lisle's own version of the Greek dramatists, I have availed myself of the Penguin translations of Philip Vellacott, both of which have helpful introductions.

On the general background, the books on the nineteenth-century interest in history and religions, mentioned in the notes to Chapter III, were my main sources of information. Of these, Charlton's section, in his study of the secular religions in France, Indian Religions: Buddhism (p. 144 ff.), deserves special mention. Other general works were useful: on Indian philosophy, A.R. Chisholm has, in his Towards Hérodote: A Literary Genealogy, a chapter on Leconte de Lisle; or the Tragedy of the Cosmic Will (pp. 32-67); and on Greece, there are two works of literary history which detail the Hellenist movement - Canat's La Renaissance de la Grèce antique and Desonay's Le Rêve hellénique chez les Poètes parnassiens. A parallel to Leconte de Lisle's study of civilisation which was read with interest is Hérédia's Les Trophées whose sequence of sonnets takes the story of Man's history as far as the Middle Ages and the Renaissance.

Leconte de Lisle's Indian poems are studied by Falshaw and in two articles by Carcassonne. Carcassonne is the more valuable because he sees Leconte de Lisle's Indianism in the light of the nineteenth-century idea of the poet. Calmettes has an interesting description of the first reading of Bhagavat.

Calmettes' enthusiasm for Bhagavat is matched by that of Anatole France for L'Apollonide, in a review of the work now reprinted in La Vie littéraire. On the Greek poems there are articles by Ducros and Putter which, like Desonay's work, show a realisation of the fact that Leconte de Lisle's view of Ancient Greece was to a certain extent limited by his personality. Kramer's André Chénier et la Poésie parnassienne. Leconte de Lisle deserves to be mentioned in order to be condemned for taking a study of influences to ridiculous lengths in

in his juxtaposition of texts, from which he often draws quite ordinary phrases as evidence of an influence by Chénier on Leconte de Lisle. A general influence no doubt exists but it must not be over-exaggerated.

## CHAPTER V

The two basic volumes on the Poèmes barbares that I have used are Alison Fairlie's Leconte de Lisle's Poems on the Barbarian Races (with Putter, much the most useful book on Leconte de Lisle either in English or in French) and Joseph Vianey's Les Poèmes barbares de Leconte de Lisle. The general studies of Leconte de Lisle give, of course, sections on the Poèmes barbares.

On sources I have made use of Vianey's Les Sources de Leconte de Lisle, Chapters II, III, IV, V, VI, VII and VIII, - still the best work on sources if read with Fairlie as a corrective in some cases. Tolkien's edition of The Saga of King Heidrek the Wise has convenient parallel Icelandic and English texts of the Hialmar and Hervor stories. There are numerous articles on sources, not always of great value for a literary assessment of the poems. Quaïn in particular has provided a hunting-ground for scholars interested in sources: there are articles by Bernès, Descharmès, Messac, Jourda, Putter. In a similar field, Edmond Estève deals with Le Byronisme de Leconte de Lisle.

Brenan's The Literature of the Spanish People provided a useful background to Leconte de Lisle's poems with Spanish settings. My reading of such writers as Byron (Don Juan, Cain, Heaven and Earth), Shelley (Prometheus Unbound), Blake (The Marriage of Heaven and Hell), Quinet (Prométhée), Ménard (Pro-

méthée délivré) and Camus (L'Homme révolté) was also good background.

## CHAPTER VI

Vianey in his study of the Poèmes barbares has a useful chapter on Les Barbares de la Jungle et des Pampas (Chapter 2, pp. 20-35) and Estève's Leconte de Lisle et la Nature, Chapter 6, pp. 118-39, in his Leconte de Lisle, l'homme et l'oeuvre is good too. The other general works give some little treatment to this aspect of Leconte de Lisle's work.

The background of the natural scene is interestingly treated in two works (which have wider reference than just to the animal poems) - Jobit's Leconte de Lisle et l'Ile natale and Ditchy's Le Thème de la Mer chez les Poètes parnassiens - Leconte de Lisle et Hérédia.

On the scientific background I first used the works by Fusil and Nina Smith, but more helpful were: A History of European Thought in the Nineteenth Century by Merz (Vol. I, Chapter 1, on The Scientific Spirit in France and Vol. II, Chapter 8, On the Morphological View of Nature) and Forerunners of Darwin, 1745-1859 by Glass, Temkin and Straus. I am grateful to Dr. D.M. Knight for pointing out these works to me. For purposes of comparison, I viewed Darwinism in England, using Michael Banton's centenary symposium, Darwinism and the Study of Society, Woodward's The Age of Reform and an article by David Newsome on Bishop Wilberforce.

My reading of Rimbaud, Baudelaire and Auden was useful literary background.

CHAPTER VII

In a concluding chapter, all the books that have been read in connection with the whole work have, of course, some influence on what is written. My greatest debt is to Putter's The Pessimism of Leconte de Lisle. Chisholm's chapter, Leconte de Lisle; or the Tragedy of the Cosmic Will in his Towards Hérodiade was helpful on Leconte de Lisle's thought in general too.

Hunt, in his study of the nineteenth-century, French epic, has a useful section on Ballanche (p. 74 ff.).

My reading of Byron, Gautier and Ronsard formed a good background.

APPENDIX

Most of the general studies have something on Leconte de Lisle's treatment of Christ and the Christian Church, and especially good is Putter (Pessimism, Vol. 2). Of more specialised books, Elsenberg's Le Sentiment religieux chez Leconte de Lisle and Pierre Flottes' L'Influence d'Alfred de Vigny sur Leconte de Lisle have been of most use to me, and my reading of Louis Ménard and Alfred de Vigny provided a background.

ALPHABETICAL BIBLIOGRAPHY

The most useful books and special parts of books from among those listed below are detailed in the Bibliographical Notes. The dates of the books are of the particular reprints I have used. All English books are published in London and French books in Paris unless otherwise stated. Where there are several works by one author, these have usually been given in order of publication. I employ the following abbreviations for the most frequently used journals:

C.L.: Comparative Literature, F.S.: French Studies, M. de F.: Mercure de France, M.L.N.: Modern Language Notes, M.L.Q.: Modern Language Quarterly, M.L.R.: Modern Language Review, R.D.M.: Revue des Deux Mondes, R.H.L.F.: Revue d'Histoire littéraire de la France, R.L.C.: Revue de Littérature comparée.

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