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Thesis

THE THEATRE OF FRANÇOIS DE CUREL

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FRANCOIS DE CUREL- - THE MAN.

François de Curel, nobleman, engineer, hunter, psychologist, dramatist and poet, to whom nothing modern remains foreign, but who nevertheless "dans une âme d'aujourd'hui, garde la nostalgie du passé", is one of the most enigmatic figures of contemporary literature. He was born at Metz, June 10, 1854, of an ancient noble family that counts among its illustrious forbears, one Gauthier de Curel, whose exploits were sung in the Mémoirs of Joinville, as well as another who, some eighty years ago, composed the most fascinatingly titled cookery book, — "L'Art d'Irriter La Gueule," (which by the way, says François de Curel, promises far too much), and a third, Léonce de Curel, whose books on the hunt caused quite a ripple some sixty years back. On his mother's side his intellectual heredity was by no means negligeable.

However, François in his childhood did not promise to profit much from such a heritage. At the Jesuit College at Metz he did not in any way distinguish himself. His tastes for literature were secondary to his interests in science. And why not? He was the heir to the famous Wendel smelting establish-

ments, renowned throughout Europe for the important part they have played in the history of French metallurgy. After having received his two degrees at Nancy, he studied at L'Ecole Centrale des Arts et Manufactures, and then left for Germany in order to become more proficient with the German side of the industry. But, the old hatred between France and Germany quickly put an end to François' industrial ambitions. Being at the age when watching oneself live is a matter of vital interest, he did not regret the decision of the German government on his behalf; he returned to his castle and divided his time between violent exercise and reading. Being an avid reader he soon discovered and explored all of French contemporary literature. Racine and Corneille had been not only his gods, but the criterion by which all others were judged. Now he drank deep at Stendhal, and the psychologists.

Finally in 1885, he began to write, but not for the theater, as he had resolved never to do anything in that line. He felt himself gifted for psychological analysis, and the stage appeared as the last and worst medium of expression for the inspirations which were beginning to fill his mind.

He changed his mind quite radically upon reading the not too favorable criticism of Charles Maurras, but instead of producing farces as he had been advised, he shocked the world by the austere psychology of "L'Envers d'une Sainte." And he has always continued to surprise his select public every now and then with some play which smacks of originality, thought, psychology, and tragedy.

B. H. Clark, who had expected to find the author of "Les Fossiles" a serious and severe demi-mondaine aristocrat, found on the contrary a "short, thick set, ruddy complexioned, black-bearded man, 'whose merry smile and jolly ways' made him think of a brownie." He lives a very secluded life, dividing his time between his "hotel in Paris, and his castles in Lorraine". Perhaps it is due to this almost monastical seclusion that his works have been preserved from any trace of Parisianism.

The frivolity of contemporary society annoys him, and impresses him very unfavorably. He prefers the company of his huntsmen and followers, his dogs, to the prattle of the salons. Rather is he enamored

of the tall trees, the wild wind, the deep black forest in which he spends most of his time when he is not writing some play or other.

This enigmatic nobleman has been able to be true to his inspiration, because he does not have to write for a living, nor cater to the tastes of his audiences. The theater is but an avocation with him. That is why his career has been so exceptionally fascinating; his plays so strange, and his renown so small.

His work, although poor at times, compels one to admiration, for in every play, regardless of its value, Curel remains the disenchanted and pitiless observer, the ruthless ironist, the melancholy moralist, the enthusiastic orator, the bold thinker, an able and vigorous dramatist, capable of committing the greatest blunders..... He is a complex and arresting person, this French "amateur" of genius, whose plays have set the world thinking!

CUREL, THE DRAMATIST.

"Prenez un fait divers, mettez beaucoup de pensée autour et servez chaud. Vous aurez une bonne pièce qui plaira aux humbles et aux délicats, et qui sera complète puisqu'elle contiendra le mouvement--qui est l'essence du drame--et la philosophie, qui est sa noblesse."

"There you have, says François de Curel, my dramatic technique in a nutshell." Let us take the following incident:

A woman was arrested on a charge of murder. Great influence was brought to bear in the case, and the court and public were made to believe in her innocence. She was defended on the ground of insanity. After several years of confinement, she contrived to escape from the asylum where she had been incarcerated, and returned to her family.

In order that "L'Envers d'une Sainte" be the result of some reflection upon the preceding bit of newspaper gossip, no less than the meditative curiosity of a Montaigne coupled with the fougue of a Musset is necessary. Curel has proved to us that he possesses within him just such a hybrid soul, as well as the courage of his convictions.

Critics who have tried to catalogue his plays have found it rather impossible because of their diversity of theme, treatment, and inspiration; some are subtle and disquieting (La Danse devant le Miroir, Orage Mystique,) others are strange and terrible (Les Fossiles, L'Envers d'une Sainte, Terre Inhumaine),

while others are of a magnificence that attains sublimity. (La Nouvelle Idole). All are passionately sorrowful, and might easily have tempted a Gonzaille or a Sophocles.

The themes that attract Curel, are based on abnormal cases in the psychology of crime, heredity, or sex pathology. Though never morbid like the Goncourt and Henry Bataille, he disconcerts all but the very discriminating by his subtle analysis and his evasive nuances. That the pretty-pretty enigmas of sentiment are not for him, is quite evident by the absence of the love interest per se. When it does appear it is entirely stripped of romance and ready for the scientific laboratory. Yet, Curel is far from adopting the pseudo-scientific pose affected by Zola. True to his own inspiration and very little influenced by outside opinion, he seeks to express the constant diversity between his instinct and his intellect. He utterly failed to do this in his early work, "Le Sauvetage du Grand-duc," L'Eté des Fruits secs." These novels as well as a few short stories do not in any way suggest the playwright, except perhaps in discursiveness.

When Maurras' sarcastic: "Au théâtre, M. De Curel, Au théâtre . Awakened the dormant Muse, the

young "flâneur", regardless of literary schools, or of dramatic tradition, set about writing plays. He could not understand the "raison d'être" of the well-made-play, because it played havoc with the author's inspiration; neither could he see the advantage of using the stage as a pulpit--"Eclairer le peuple par ces moyens est une chimère." So, disciple of Stendhal, he wrote to please himself. The result was a new, daring, and interesting, type of drama, sensational from the psychological standpoint, but not popularly successful. Curel's is the "succès d'estime." No crowds flock to see his notorious plays, Why? "Because," says one critic, "he has left to others the facile exploitation of sex for its own sake, and applied his genius to unravelling problems. (1)-"Or again", says another, "he writes plays where nothing happens."(2)--"And", adds a third, "he refuses to solve the problems he raises".(3)

In fact, Curel does not defend nor does he argue ideas for themselves. He is primarily interested in the reactions they produce on generous but disheartened souls, whose characteristic is the inability to adhere to any certitude.

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(1) B. H. Clark, Contemporary French Dramatists.-- Ch.I
(2) Rene Doumic, Revue des Deux Mondes.
(3) Lucien Delille, "Etudes" (Revue Jesuite) 20 Décembre, 1913, p.-712

Curel's creation of a play is as strange as the themes they are built around. Seizing upon his inspiration "au Vol", he allows whatever characters his mind has conceived to evolve and develop upon its own lines, quite apart from his personal bias. He buries himself in his château of Lorraine, or in some other quiet spot, and in thirty days a play emerges. It is not always good, nor does Curel consider it a finished product. Believing like Boileau that there is no axiom truer then:

> "Vingt fois sur le métier, remettez votre ouvrage,
> Polissez-le, sans cesse, et le repolissez.
> Ajoutez quelquefois, et souvent effacez."

he writes and rewrites his plays stripping them more and more of unnecessary characters, literally cloistering his protagonists between four walls, where they are condemned to struggle with the passions that torture them. As a result, few playwrights have ever written more anguishing plays, and again, few still, have ever tried to play less upon our sensibilities. Julie, in "L'Envers d'une Sainte", does not seek to move us, not does Donnat, (La Nouvelle Idole), nor Anna de Grécourt, (L'Invitée).

Boileau, L'Art Poétique, Chant I

Trained by the discipline of the cloister, by the exigencies of honor, of science, or simply broken by distress and pride, they nevertheless exert an incessant constraint over their emotions. One is inclined to worry with these tyrants rather than be drawn to them; their suffering is more distressing than touching. Even when some overwhelming ordeal is at hand, or when a too vivid realization of guilt, or a crushing sense of responsability drives them to an avowal, the latent pride, the affected barrennsss robs these confessions of all their merit.

An infinite sadness emanates from the theater of Curel. His great characters, although brilliant, intelligent, proud haughty and ambitious, always end as dismal failures. What adds to the tragedy of the denouement is the "brusquerie " of the supreme words. The author obviously wishes to thrust aside, here , as in other situations the effects which might, in his opinion, weaken the conclusion. This apparent insistence, this absolute refusal of condescension to theatrical traditions and conventions may perhaps explain the coldness and the reticence of the public.

Austere, stark, and grim though it may be, the strange pathos of Curel is concentrated and possesses

a singular power. Disdainful of superficial emotions, this dramatic psychologist peers into the very depths of the human soul in order to endow his characters with the best, the worst, the starkest he can find there. However different his characters may seem exteriorly, they nevertheless have this trait in common,---intense cerebral activity; they think, and they live to the hilt, not only emotionally, but intellectually as well; and they dream, not idly, for out of their dreams they weave that ideal, around which they strive vainly to build life. Here lies the secret source of all their misery, and of all their mistakes; but in that also, lies all their nobility. Broken by life, completely disillusioned, they refuse to submit to reality. Superbly, diabolically proud, one and all, they seem cold and distant. It is because they disdain confidences-that solace of the weak.

Their passions may be ardent, their sensuality may seem destructive and sometimes revolting, but their sense of dignity is supreme. It is this sublime sense of honor (perverted and exaggerated though it may sometime seem) which enables the men and women of Curel's theater to reject the banal compromises of adultery, or the too easy pleasures of a simple love. It is first and foremost, a theater of Pride.

WOMEN IN THE THEATER OF CUREL

"Love is to man a thing apart; it is woman's whole existence."

Shakespeare's adage finds its most modern interpretation in Curel's love dramas. Here we find no "belle passion", no lyricism on women, and glorification of motherhood. The women are all "unpleasant from the conventional standpoint." They possess a self-control that contrasts unfavorably with the adorably feminine creations of Donnay and Porto-Riche, whose "amoureuses" appeal so irresistibly to the popular imagination. These women are ardent creatures caught in the whirlwind of some great passion. Time does not calm their impetuosity, abate their fury, nor cure their violence; some even reach an exaltation that is kindred to folly. In order to retain or conquer the men they love, young women and young girls accept the strangest situations, undertake the most audacious enterprises. Timidity, reserve, and modesty are cast to the winds. Régine, (La Danse d'avant le Miroir) runs to the apartment of her lover in the middle of the night. Françoise, (La Fiancée) enters knowingly into a marriage bargain which is nothing short of dishonouring.

Treason will, consequently, find them ruthless, Julie Renaudin, (L'Envers d'une Sainte) tries to kill her rival by throwing her into a ravine. Anna de Grécourt, would rather abandon her children and pass as unfaithful in her husband's eyes, than to put up with his vulgar and flagrant infidelities.

If the civilized women are so uncompromising, what scruples could be strong enough to prevail against the storm in the soul of a savage? (La Fille Sauvage).

Still, love does not necessarily have to be betrayed in Curel's plays in order to become deadly. It need only be completely developed and to carry its natural exigencies to their extreme limits; these intense women seek in emotions what the men find in ideas. They analyse, condemn, criticise, justify, while watching themselves in the act of living; suffering and tormenting themselves while exhibiting their writhing personalities before our eyes. They seem to possess an extraordinary power of dissimilation. Some dissemble before the budding of their love, lying in and out of every con-

ceivable situation. (L'Amour Brode), while others throw the dust of illusion into their own eyes in a vain effort to blind those they love. (L'Invitée). One and all are clothed in silence, savagely martyrising themselves in their blind headstrong struggle. Still, one cannot pity them for they lack tenderness. In despair, surrounded by their shattered dreams, they invariably take refuge in pride, and harden themselves to everything and everyone. Nevertheless, the sight of their stoïcism leaves a vivid impression. From all the sorrow and the deceptions that assail them, a lesson emerges; it is that life is something serious, that it is not given us for pleasure, and that it must always find us ready for sacrifice and effort.

By way of contrast the men in Curel's theatre are more "sympathique". Their passions, no less violent, no less criminal, are not so egotistical and consequently not so ruthless. They do not succumb to temptation so easily as the women, nor do they fall so low. However, it must be called to mind that they have also been idealized and endowed with

intellectual plenitude, in order that they might better personify the ideas for which they live. Always passionately loved, [illegible] able to love, but there is generally some obsession greater than love which dominates their whole existence. These disconcerting, strange, complicated characters, living their tumultuous lives in these strange plays where the natural and the impossible mingle, oblige us to reflect. They will go far in undoing the work of the boulevard theatres in proving that the French are not frivolous, but that they are a most serious and thinking people.

Nature, passions, ideas, are the triple love of Curel,--the love of a gentleman for whom literature is but a solitary and magnificent diversion.

L'ENVERS D'UNE SAINTE. (1)

"L'Envers d'une Sainte" is a purely intellectual duel between two women for the "memory" of a man both had loved. It was not until Antoine had recognized the value of the play and presented it at the Theatre Libre, that the critics perceived Sophocles, Corneille, Racine, Ibsen, Strindberg, and a score of others peeping through the lines.

Julie Renaudin returns to her mother's home after eighteen years of monastic life. She had taken the veil in an excess of despair over the defection of her lover, and in atonement for attempting to throw his "enceinte" wife, Jeanne, (her more succesful rival), into a ravine. Now that Henri is dead, there is no obstacle to her return.

She finds everything quite changed. She alone has remained stationary in conscious self-absorption. The cruel spirit of revenge which she had striven so long to crush, springs once more into life when she learns that Jeanne, in order to defend herself against the encroaching souvenir of the recluse, revealed the terrible secret to her husband. Despair seizes Julie when she fancies from something she has heard

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(1) L'Envers d'une Sainte, François de Curel; Edition Crès, 1921, Paris

that, as a result of the disclosure, Henri had ruthlessly torn her image from his heart. "The obverse side of the "saint" is now turned full upon us." She plots to take full revenge upon Joanne through her daughter, Christine. Under the guise of saintly purity, and in the name of religion, she tries to separate the young girl from her fiancé, Georges Pierrard. She succeeds in unearthing gallant episodes in Georges' life, which when related to Christine, almost drive her to renounce her lover and enter the convent. In the meantime, Julie discovers that the ideal lover of her youth has not failed her; Christine chances to tell her that Henri had always loved her, and that his last words, his last thoughts were of her. "The miracle is wrought...and the passion of vengeance is forever stilled." She arranges matters between the two lovers and returns to the convent.

Julie Renaudin has been compared to Hedda Gabler, to Doña Perfecta, but like Tartufe, whose feminine counterpart she is, she is entirely of French inspiration.

The other characters in the play are mere puppets compared to her. Christine is the ideal "jeune fille

bien élevée", innocent, guileless, and confiding. Jeanne, her mother, is a trifle too charitable, and too willing to give Julie the benefit of the doubt. It seems as though she were courting disaster in allowing Julie and Christine to be together so much. Kind, lovely, charming and cordial she is an excellent foil for Julie, who dominates the whole action. They pale into insignificance before this woman to whom love and life have been denied. Distraught and despairing, she returns to find a word of pity, a bit of sympathy, which will prove to her that eighteen years of sacrifice were not in vain. But, when she finds that her memory had become horrible to Henri, the whole futility of her seclusion overwhelms her. She drops the robe of the convent and the spiteful embittered woman is revealed to us. Starved, repressed, alone, she desires to wound as she herself has been wounded. The suffer- of Jeanne is as balm to her writhing soul. All the passion, all the intensity, all the worship, she had lavished on the memory of her idealized lover is converted to bitter hatred, and an unquenchable desire for vengeance blinds her to everything. She

is a pathetic figure, pursuing her shattered dream. It is "La Danse devant le Miroir" done to another tune. As Paul kills himself to leave a perfect image of himself in Régine eyes, so had Julie buried herself in a convent in order to impress Henri with the great unselfishness of her love. It is no wonder that the saint is transformed into a demon when she learns that Jeanne had broken "le cher et capricieux miroir", and that all had been an idle dream. She may seem violent and heartless, but Julie is essentially the woman, more sinned against than sinning.

In my opinion, Julie is not only Curel's greatest character, but one of the most remarkable women in literature. She resembles Medea, to an extraordinary degree. She is endowed with the same cold passionate fury that knows no obstacle. One often wonders just what such women might have become had they not been so mercilessly dealt with by life.

"L'Envers d'une Sainte", which is typical of Curel's method and choice of theme, is his best play. In no other has he succeeded more masterfully in exposing a man's love, the despair it engenders, and

the emptiness of the illusions it fosters. Strange enough, there are no over characters in the play. It is a rather unique "tour de force" having, as "Les Fossiles", an abstract idea for a protagonist. In the former, it is the memory of an unfaithful lover, while in the latter, it is a family name.

The dialogue of "L'Envers d'une Sainte" is austere, intellectual, and psychological. There is practically no exterior action, but the turmoil, the heartbreak, the disillusions, the hatred, which struggle for mastery in Julie's soul, are so vividly sketched that they seem tangible events. Thus, the whole sense of tragedy is heightened by an atmosphere of impending doom.

If only for this play, Curel deserves immortality.

LES FOSSILES.(1)

After having been compared to Ibsen for "L'Envers d'une Sainte", by no less a critic than Jules Lemaître, (2) the last thing Curel expected from Claretie, upon the presentation of "Les Fossiles", was a refusal on the ground that only plays fit for the ears of "les honnêtes gens" were admitted on the repertory of La Comédie Française. As this manuscript proved to be anything but what was expected, he advised Curel to look for another producer. So Curel went to Antoine, who presented it at the Théâtre Libre in 1892, where it was enthusiastically received, even by "l'oncle" Sarcey, who ceased to bear him a grudge.

The action of "Les Fossiles" opens and closes in the great, gloomy, gothic hall of a lonely castle in the Ardennes. From the first act, the wind moans and sighs, heightening the effect of impending disaster. It is a magnificently wild setting, worthy of sinister tragedy.

In this ancestral castle of the de Chantenelle, a valorous family is dying out. The old duke has

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1) Les Fossiles, François de Curel. Éditions Crès Paris, 1920.

(2) Historique des Fossiles. Éditions Crès, Paris 1920 pp. [illegible].

cloistered himself and his family in order to forget the world that will have none of him. He has a daughter Claire and a son Robert, who have both inherited their father's cult for the name they bear. Robert, the last of a long and noble line, is hopelessly afflicted with consumption. With him will disappear the name of Chantemelle, unless the son that has been born to his mistress, Hélène Vatrin, be legitimatized. This girl had spent some time at the castle as Claire's companion. Exquisitely beautiful, weak, and very young, she had not dared refuse the amorous advances of the old duke, nor had she desired to deny herself to Robert, her lover. So she had become the mistress of the two men, who were quite unaware of the situation. Of these loves a son is born. Who is the father? It little matters so long as there flows in the child's vein the blood of the de Chantemelle. The heir is found...and the secret is revealed. But these circumstances must be over-looked; the only important thing to do is to legitimatize the baby. To this necessity are sacrificed successively in a sort of heroic crime, the old duke, who orders his son to marry the woman they both had possessed; pure and

haughty Claire, who was not aware of the crime perpetrated under her very eyes; the duchess to whom the horrible truth is divulged, and finally Robert who practically kills himself after discovering the tragedy of his life.

The fourth act consists in the reading of Robert's will. It is his profession of faith. In it he explains the role to be played by nobility, and the impressions it must leave before it pass into oblivion. In giving directions for the education of the child that will pass in the eyes of the world as his son Henri, he says:

"Il faut que le futur duc de Chantelle soit élevé dans la conviction que son nom ne le dispense pas d'avoir une valeur personnelle. Qu'on ne néglige rien pour en faire un homme moderne au sens profond du mot. Qu'il aime son temps et en comprenne la grandeur. Nous nous perdons à éterniser des lois, très légitimes lorsque le sang versé par la Révolution fondait encore, mais qui ne serviront bientôt plus qu'à déguiser une tendance avilissante à l'égoïsme et à l'oisiveté. Sous le prétexte que la Révolution a guillotiné nos grands-parents d'abord si enthousiastes d'elle, ne soyons pas hostiles à toute amélioration sociale. Restons au contraire dans la tradition en payant de nos vies de généreuses erreurs; affirmant en cela le devoir d'une noblesse d'être une école de désintéressement, montrant le chemin à son siècle, audacieuse d'esprit et douce de coeur. Lorsque les malheureux et les faibles réclameront une large part du soleil, sachons marcher à leur tête avec le scepticisme de nous dire que nos propres troupes ne nous tireront pas dans le dos. Pour nous c'est un moyen de bien finir. Il ne sait le que la noblesse a fait son temps. On l'a trop recrutée par l'or, trop peu par le talent. Elle a toujours été [illegible]

aux hommes éminents que lui envoyait le peuple, à son tour le peuple lui est fermé. Avant qu'elle disparaisse, il faut que, par un pieux mensonge, ses derniers representants laissent la même impression de grandeur que les gigantesques fossiles qui font rêver aux ages disparus.

"Plus tard, quand l'héritier du nom sera un homme, j'exige que Claire lui conte comment je suis mort, comment ses grands-parents, sa tante, sa mère, se sont immolés, pour que lui, petit être chétif, garde un nom respecté. Il comprendra que ce nom, transmis par une monstruosité, doit etre porté avec une dignite surhumaine. Que Claire lui répète la parole qu'elle me disait hier:--Nos existences à tous finissent avec la tienne. Mais qu'importe? On a fauché toute la prairie pour sauver une petite fleur!"

Such is the powerful, disconcerting, strange and terrible tragedy, which reminds one of the pathetic destiny of the family of the Atrides. The characters are majestically robed in uncompromising pride, in a grandeur that sometimes appears superhuman. In fact, the Chantemelle all resemble one another. The old duke is perhaps the most human, the least Cornelian, but his tolerance is due to his anxiety about the disapperarance of his name.

Claire, pure, haughty, stern though she may be, seems to assume a role which appears a little exaggerated. Why must she sacrifice herself to Henri's future? One feels that she will make life utterly miserable for Hélène, as there will always be a rebuke lurking here in her eyes. She will never be able to understand Hélène's transgression, much less pardon it, for

she is too cold, too devoid of emotions. Her ivory-tower-existence in the castle of the Ardennes has given her a set of values which will make her austere and uncompromising. It is easy to understand the fanaticism with which she renounces love, marriage, and children of her own, but one inevitably fears for little Henri.

As for Hélène, although her crime has been a heinous one, she is by no means a depraved woman. Young, weak and alone, she had been unable to cope with the situation in which, she had found herself, andh had consequently yielded to what them had seemed the inevitable. Like Gina, in Ibsen's "Wild Duck", she remains passive before the tragedy of her life; suffering evils she herself had not created, expiating sins she had not been instrumental in committing, and wathching the parade of her life as the events march by her eyes, without ever wholly participating in them.

All these characters move about in an atmosphere of impending doom. Then, there is a passion, a brutality, a wild and sombre exaltation that impresses.

Honor, the perpetuation of a name, becomes a bloody god to whom all must be sacrificed....social conventions, modesty, and the most legitimate moral prejudices and repugnances.

"It is a splendid portrayal of the superb death agony of the effected soul of vanquished nobility", done by a nobleman, who knows his class well, and who is, nevertheless, sufficiently detached as an artist to make us feel the pathos of the situation.

L'INVITÉE (1)

L'Invitée is a most fascinating study of egoism. Hubert de Grécourt refuses to give up his mistress for the welfare of his daughters, who in turn, are only concerned with the material advantages attached to the presence of a mother, and Anna, the mother, who finds it well-nigh impossible to give up her freedom as an individual for the sake of her truant husband and her children.

Anna de Grécourt leaves her passionately loved husband, and her two baby daughters without a word of explanation upon hearing of his flagrant infidelities. Convinced of her unfaithfulness, he leads Thérèse and Alice to believe their mother insane. Anna returns to Vienna, where during fifteen years she tries to stifle, in a mad whirl of pleasure, all the emotions that had made her suffer so deeply. Young, beautiful and alone, her "Curelian" pride is the only obstacle to consolation and vengeance.

Just when she is about to declare her soul devoid of all emotions, she receives a message from Hubert--the girls are almost twenty years old, their future is disquieting, for without a mother, their education has in some respects been sadly neglected. Will she come and resume her duties? The appeal leaves her cold; she is no longer capable of love. However upon learning that the object of her husband's latest liaison is in the same house as her daughters, she decides to go.

What prompts her? It is not jealousy, as Hubert has lost all his charm for her. Would it be a re-awakened sense of responsibility, or mere curiosity? She insists that she is going but to amuse herself at ther husband's expense. The situation of finding herself as a guest, in the house where she is both wife and mother, has piquancy. So, she goes.

Hubert, who does not expect his wife early, makes his appearance in old clothes, and holding a huge fish that he had caught. He is now bald, stout, mediocre, and not at all the romantic figure he used to be. "Quel magot!" she thinks, "And that is the man I suffered so much for!" She bewilders him with her cold irony, her perfect self-possession, and her le elegant persiflage. She too has changed, but for the better.....Regrets assail him, but it is too late.

Anna realizes, when Hubert asks her to take the girls, that it is not merely to prfect their education. He is getting rid of a troublesome burden. Entirely under the domination of his mistress, he refuses to put up with the thinly veiled reproaches of his daughters. Realizing the great wrong she would be guilty of in allowing Thérèse and Alice to live any longer under such trying and abnormal comditions, Anna decidesto take them with her to Vienna, She does all this, "rien que par charité."

When Hubert bids his daughters good-by, it dawns on him that he is allowing his only resource of real happiness to slip through his fingers. Anna, because she has consented to resume herduties as a mother, will we trust, find solace and joy. However, her life has been utterly ruined...and, it is brought home to her husband, when in comparing their lives, she admits both have been, differently perhaps, but nevertheless quite wasted:

"You gave yourself up to your passions, andi in gratifying them you have not found happiness. I, on the contrary, have endeavored to amputate my heart, and the barrenness of soul in which I have lived has not made me happy." (1)

When Curel wrote this play, he had in mind the development of Julie Renaudin's character along different lines. Anna de Grécourt, passionately and intellectually Julie's equal, leaves her home, renouncing forever to the man she loves, and vowing to forget him. What the cloister could not accomplish, the world did. As "L'Envers d'une Sainte", is the result of eighteen years of seclusion.

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1) L'Invitée, François de Curel, Editions Crès, Paris 1921
Act V

"L'Invitée" is the effects of fifteen yars of vain and empty flirtations, on the one and same soul.

Anna forgets, but only by atrophying her heart. Julie, her more unfortunate sister, can never,never forget, as the cloister gives her the solitude necessary to keep alive the flame that has spent her life.

The play was very well received,when it was first presented in 1893. The theme was a new one. Never had the stage seen a mother won over to her children, not by sentimental mother-love, but simply by intelligence, and reaching the heights of devotion by the philosophical grandeur of her indifference.

Anna is incontestably a great character...and the play which Curel has set her in is a jewel of penetrating and melancholy charm, where one "sees with the eyes of forty, the passions, the follies and the sufferings of twenty."

L'AMOUR BRODE. (1)

After having knocked in vain at the door of every theater in Paris, Curel, "en désespoir de cause", sent three manuscripts to Antoine, who was at that time the guiding genius of the Théâtre Libre. "L'Envers d'une Sainte" and "La Figurante" were accepted, and played, but "Sauvé des Eaux" somehow never seemed to receive much attention nor consideration from the director. Believing the theme too rare to relegate to the waste-basket, Curel wrote and re-wrote it until the definitive version of "La Danse devant le Miroir" emerged clear, daring and amazing.

Before studying the perfected version of the theme, I should like to sketch briefly "L'Amour Brode", the first dramatization to be presented, (not too successfully).

It is a tragic "marivaudage" between two infinitely complicated souls, destined for each other by reason of their complications. On their effort to obtain proofs of love from one another, they only succeed in inflicting the most anguishing mental tortures. When they finally discover how irrevocably and totally they love, suicide prevents them from enjoying life together.

It would appear that Charles is the victim of a lack of

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(1) L'Amour Brode, Historique de La Danse devant le Miroir.

proportion between thought and action, between idealism and the will to face life as it is. He is a finished egotist, requiring of Gabrielle that she love him to distraction in order to overlook his poverty and his ruined life. He wants to be a hero. And when he is certain that his reflection in Gabrielle's eyes is more falttering than he could live up to, he shoots himself through the heart in order that the "cher et capricieux miroir" preserve a handsome picture of him, forever more.

Gabrielle accepts the situation because her egotism is fully satisfied by the proof that she was loved exclusively.

Unwittingly Curel has shown us by the inability of these two unfortunate beings to achieve, at least, partial understanding, that the base of ~~ture~~ true love is forgetfulness of self and a desire to live for the loved one. The gratification of one's ego is a condemnation to solitude.

I know of an Oriental legend where this is most picturesquely exposed:

"One day a young man knocked at the door of the home of his bethrothed

"Who is there?" asked a melodious voice.

"It is I."

"Alas," answered the beautiful voice, "this house can never lodge both You and Me."

One year later, the youth returned and knocked at the door once more.

"Who is there?" asked the lovely voice.

"It is You," answered the wise young man.

Then only, did the door open. (1)

"La Vie Créatrice", page 594. Dom Hebrard. Paris, Beauchesne.

(1) LA DANSE DEVANT LE MIROIR

"La Danse devant le Miroir" is merely "L'Amour Brode, remodelled. It has been stripped of several characters (the old uncle and the aunt), Gabrielle has been re-christened Régine; and it is a baptism of fire, endowing her with more intensity, more cruelty, and more charm. It is more than ever a "Spectacle dans un fauteuil", as the action, except for the tragic demouement is entirely interior. It is the psychological play "par Excellence."

The idea expressed by Curel to Adrien Schayé in an interview is this: (2)

"The author has wished to symbolize the solitude in which a lover finds himself before the woman he loves. He believes he sees her as she is; yet he sees only what she seeks to be for him. She has understood the ideal which he seeks in her. She loves him passionately, and therefore strives to resemble that ideal of him, in order to make herself more acceptable in his eyes, she casts aside her true personality and seeks to assume that which he wants. She plays a comedy and acts a pious lie. That is the woman's role. And the man thinks in the same way, because he loves her and believes that his passion should be equally shared with his partner. He too knows what she wishes him to be, and loses no time in appearing as such; he he masks himself in order to be more agreable to her. So well is this accomplished that each of the lovers posesses only a reflection of the other's desire, an appearance, a fiction and not a reality."

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(1) François de Curel, La Danse devant le Miroir, Editions Crès 1920

(2) B.H. Clark, Contmeporary French Dramatists. Chpt.I, page 17

Upon this abstraction has Curel built a tense and moving play. It is another conclusive proof that "on ne badine pas avec l'amour."

Gabrielle is completely enslaved to the romantic conception of love. Like Raina, in Shaw's "Arm and the Man", she must love a hero. When Gabrielle eventually loses her heart to Paul, her first preoccupation is to prove his mettle, to find out whether or not he is a hero. She allows him to believe that she has been seduced, and then begs him to save her honour by marrying, as she is expecting a child. Paul accepts the situation but is told by Règine's cousin that the whole affair is but a lie. As he cannot resist the temptation of appearing in a heroic light, neither can she foreg the thrill of torturing him to see just how much he can stand.

The two lovers desirous of seeing each other as they really are so fascinated by the reflection of their pretended heroism in the eyes of the beloved, that they play a dangerous comedy, which inevitabley comes to a tragic end.

The night of their wedding day, they want to clear up all the deceptions of the past, but their desire for love cannot overcome the "heroic-obsession" which has ruined life for them. So their first kiss is also their last. During a lucid interval, Paul realizes like Charles, his equally unfortunate brother

of "L'Amour Brode", that only suicide will leave the magnificent picture he has dreamed of, and for which he has tortured himself for weeks, in "le cher et capricieux miroir."

The whole play is done with the greatest imaginable skill and insight. It is a technical accomplishment, the like of which has rarely been seen before. And, what is better still, the play is marvellously real. However, it was not a success. "L'Amour Brode" played five times only; "La Danse devant le Miroir" which was presented at the "Nouvel Ambigu, in 1914, had fifty-five representations. "Ce n'est pas bien encourageant, says the author, mais il y a tout de même du progrès." (1)

Historique de "La Danse devant le Miroir", page 83
Editions Crès, [illegible] Paris, 1922.

LA FIGURANTE (1)

"La Figurante" was condemned from the very first, because "this conception of adultery is too unromantic to be widely successful."

Hélène de Monneville is madly in love with Henri Renneval, a young deputy with political ambitions. Their liaison has lasted successfully over five years, when they realize that Henri needs a wife, "pour convertir les mauvaises têtes, ramener les indécis, égayer ses dîners, organiser ses réceptions, réchauffer ses partisans et décider ses protecteurs." Hélène, who is married, is quite out of the question for this position. After some deliberation, they finally chose as a candidate, Françoise de Bonneval, a ward of Hélène's husband, because of her cold and calculating mind, because of her lack of "dot" and finally because of her excellent name and family connections. They little realize that Françoise is desperately and secretly in love with Henri.

The odious bargain is presented to her, and she accepts unflinchingly the role of figurehead which she is destined to play. She sees through the whole scheme, but undertakes to win the man she loves from her aunt. She promises to be nothing but

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(1) François de Curel, La Figurante, Editions Crès, Paris 1920

a business associate, expecting nothing but a vague friendship from the man whose name she will take.

Three months later, thanks to her intelligence, to her tact, to her suggestions, Françoise has become indispensable to Henri, who in turn becomes more and more aware of her charm, her wit, and her loveliness. Just as he is about to capitulate, Hélène de Monneville returns to Paris. She has been retained in the country, since the marriage, by her husband's feigned illness. There ensues a fierce struggle between these two women. Henri confesses his love for Françoise to Hélène, who, like Curel's other women, buries her grief in pride, and she returns to her husband, leaving the young couple free to be happy.

Notwithstanding the improbability of such a theme, Curel has succeeded in making "La Figurante" appear surprisingly real. It is beautifully written, replete with bizarre dramatic combinaions, scintillating with brilliant and biting dialogue, and intense of action. It is a "tranche de vie", revolting, but fascinating in its ugliness. The characters are strange, determined, not at all "sympathique", but very interesting.

To begin with, Théodore de Monneville, Hélène's husband, and the "génie bienfaisant" of the play, is perhaps just a little too "complaisant". His stoicism may be the result of a long life and of his bitter matrimonial venture, but he seems too passive be thoroughly convincing.

Henri Renneval is a cad. With him the means little matter, so long as the end is accomplished. He is as thoroughly enamored of a political career, as Michel Prinson (Le Coup d'Aile.) is of glory. But somehow, although he never never falls so low as Michel he is more despicable, less lovable, because of his pettiness, his smallness, and his unadulterated selfishness. One often wonders during the play why such a man should cause so great an emotional tragedy.....but, "de gustibus non est disputandum."

Hélène de Monneville is a cheat....a parasite. Of all the characters she is the least attractive. Conceited, grasping, unfair, selfish, petty, depraved, she can inspire nothing but contempt. At twenty-eight, "en désespoir de cause" she marries Theodore de Monneville, forty-two years her senior. She tells him on the night of their wedding day, that she will never love him, and shortly after becomes the mistress of Renneval, one of Théodore's friends. She cheats all her life, exacting everything and giving nothing in return. Her egoism and her blind confidence prompt her into pressing Françoise into a dishonourable marriage bargain, little realizing that it will prove her own ruin. Her one redeeming point is her great love for Henri...

The cold calculating mask that Françoise wears in the first act, covers a vibrant and ardent "Curelian" soul. Her deep love for Henri gives her infinite patience. Clever, intelligent,

charming and lovely her successful inclination for intrigue renders her invaluable to Henri. When rudely summoned to chose between his mistress and his wife, he finds himself irrevocably bound to Françoise. True enough, there is a great measure of egoism bound in that love, but as Théodore says so philosophically: "on ne s'inquiète pas de la source d'un sentiment quand on en sent la douceur." (1)

The fiercest moment of the play comes in the third act, when the two women clash. Here they lose all the veneer of civilization; they are two females fighting passionately for the beloved. Nothing they can imagine, nothing they can think, no word they can utter can be too harsh, too cruel, too lacerating. Henri pales before the fury of the attack. The spectacle is as new and horrible to him as it is to us. When the situation becomes too trying, Curel, in order to maintain the starkness of the scene allows Hélène to do her pleading off stage. The suspense is tremendous. When she returns, pale, contained, but utterly crushed, the audience knows that anything she might say would be in vain.

François de Curel. "La Figurante". Editions Crès, Paris 1922
Acte III, SceneI

After her departure, Françoise comes into her own, and receives the thanks of her uncle for the re-establishment of the integrity of his home.

The exposition of the action in the first act, is a particularly happy one. By means of a lover's quarrèl, the situation is exposed clearly, and without tirades. This play, although no one of Curel's best, runs a close second to "L'Invitèe". Like most of the plays of Curel, it is a psychological "tour de force."

LE REPAS DU LION

"Le Repas du Lion" was for a long time one of Curel's most discussed plays. Some insisted that its claim to greatness lay into the remarkably impartial examination of capitalism, labor, and the vandalism of modern industry, philanthropy, and the role of the Chruch in the settlement of these social questions; while others contended that there is no social import to the denouement, and that the play is merely a psychological trait.

Strange to say, both are right, for there are now two versions of "Le Repas du Lion". The first version is a psychological tragedy; the second is not a play, but a study of the situation of workingmen, and capitalists.

The first version which was given by the Théâtre Antoine in 1897, had four acts, and ended abruptly with the violent death of Jean de Sancy. The definitive version, which is comparatively weak, has four acts also. The first two were condensed, the third became the second, and an altogether a new fourth act was added. Here we find Jean de Miremont (the name was changed by request of the de Sancy family) a magnate, the director of the mining enterprises founded by his brother-in-law, Georges Broussard. It is the glorified modern happy

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(1) François de Curel, Le Repas du Lion, Paris Editions Crès, 1920

ending, where every character, even the most villainous undergoes a change of mind for the better, amends his ways, and becomes rich and famous.

Curel may have been successful in the re-writing of a few plays, but he did "Le Repas du Lion" a great wrong by adding that preposterous last act in which the characters, now some thirty years older, talk over the events of the preceding acts, and inform us of what has taken place in the interim of time elapsed since the last act. It seems an unfortunate after-thought, throwing the rest of the play out of kelter, and robbing it of all its dramatic force. Curel tries to justify himself in claiming that it is the only logical conclusion to the first three acts. I do not believe so, for strikers will not be satisfied in assassinating the capitalists, but will be equally desirous of shedding the blood of the traitor.

The playwright, who is an adept at the portrayal of failures, is not so interesting when his characters are eminently successful; and then, the play is too discursive.

Here is the synopsis of the first version:

The old count of Sancy lives on his vast domains with his daughter Louise and his son Jean, a boy of about fifteen. He is saved from imminent ruin by the discovery of iron-ore on his porperty. Georges Broussard, an enterprising young engineer, undertakes the exploitation of the mines. True enough, it means the destruction of the entire estate; but on the other hand, it assures the fortune of M. de Sancy.

One night someone opens the sluice-gates; the mines are flooded, and a drunken miner asleep in a shaft is drowned. Who is guilty? None other than Jean, who cannot consent to the destruction of his dear forest. Untamed, undisciplined, exalted and passionately fond of nature, he had not realized the possible consequence of his act. The game-keeper and L'abbé Paul who alone know the author of the mis-deed, swear to keep it secret. When the full horror of his crime comes to Jean, he swears to expiate it and consecrate his life to the cause of workmen.

In the third act, Jean, now some thirty years old, enters upon the scene intoxicated by his latest oratorical success. True to his vow he has devoted himself to the cause of the "submerged tenth," and is everywhere

recognized as the most brilliant labor speaker of the day. He is greeted by the enthusiastic congratulations of his sister and brother-in-law. They engage in a discussion which is the pith of the problem viewed by opposite sides. George, by sheer force of reason, dominates Jean's enthusiasm making him realize that vain, empty, inflamatory words will do nothing toward alleviating the suffering of those to whom he has devoted his life; that the greatest charity consists not in destruction, but in the production of life, and that the only way to serve humanity is to open fresh paths for human activity. He forces Jean to realize that there can never be any such thing as equality, since man cannot do otherwise than pursue his own interest. "Chaque fois qu'un homme de valeur se mele des affaires d'autrui, il y gagne."

Jean, the orator of the Cercles, the recognized champion of the working classes, owes all he is to those he defends. He has found influence, reputation, glory, and known intoxication of action and success because of his own advancement as well as theirs. It can't be otherwise. Furthermore, why should he protest? Is there not a benevolent egotism? "Travaillez, créez,

soyez un esprit, une force, meme égoiste, pourvu qu' elle soit féconde et la prospérité des autres découlera de la votre."

Jean, at last sees the light. For three weeks his tortured soul struggles between loyalty to himself and the faith he has pledged. When he realizes that it is only for his own ultimate good that he is carrying on his work, and not for the love of the working classes; Jean accepts the bitter truth. But as always in Curel's plays it is too late. His words have sown the seeds of revolt in the heart of Robert Charrier, the abbés brother, who, as foreman in the mines, exercises a most deplorable influence over the men.

When Jean makes his new profession of faith before the astounded workmen, who were prepared for anything but that, he is cursed as a renegade. His simile of the lion's feast and jackals' is the last straw. The strikers rise in a body, rush out, and murder George Broussard. To punish Jean, they set fire to his beloved forests. When Jean cries out his anguish, Robert, the blinded avenger of his fellows, howls with a ferocious joy "Bravo!" I did not think I should succeed so well."

The last incident of the play seems to leave no doubt whatever on the nature of the denouement.

When Jean is shot through the breast by Robert, he clings to the branch of a tree, and, looking a last time at the burning forest, murmurs, "adieu, petit Jean."

I fail to see the social import of such a climax. It marks less the ruin of two classes in a pitched battle, than the dire failure of an individual. The true subject is not the social and labor question, it is the odessey of a generous but unfortunate man, who, finding himself compelled to choose between two contradictory ideals, endeavors above every consideration to be true to himself and to the cause to which he had pledged his life; and who, in so doing, suffers, inflicts great sorrow, and dies in immense regret.

Like Donnat, (La Nouvelle Idole) Jean had wanted to die for an idea, and like him he does die before grasping its supreme significance.

How can anyone, familiar with the first version, tolerate the second, where, Jean, the dreamer, is metamorphosed into a self-sufficient, and thoroughly fatuous business man. Lest our illusions be shattered, he must, like all the great idealists of literature, die young. With all its imperfections, the first version is the only one worthy of Curel.

LA NOUVELLE IDOLE.(1)

Doctor Donnat is accused of inoculating his patients with cancer virus. Louise, his neglected wife, grasps the ensuing scandal as an excuse to seek divorce, as well as consolation. She goes for love and understanding to her husband's best friend, Maurice Cormier, a young psycho-analyst. To him she goes for affection, but stumbles into science. Shortly after her arrival, her husband is heard coming up the stairs. She hides in the next room, and overhears all the secret worries which are tormenting him. She also discovers that he has inoculated himself as a sort of reparation for having inoculated a young girl, Antoinette Milat, whom he erroneously believed condemned to death with tuberculosis.

Louise comes to her senses and returns to her husband, a wiser and less selfish woman. She prevails upon him to allow Antoinette to live with them, and swears love and fidelity to him....but it is too late. Donnat is doomed to an atrocious death. It is another sacrifice to the newest and most inexorable Idol.....Science.

When Curel wrote this play, he did not have in mind the satire of our restless, materialistic age, abandoning the superstition of religion for that of science. He

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(1) Nouvelle Idole, François de Curel, Editions Crès. Paris, 1921

did not plan a parellel between science and religion, but merely a study of the psychological reactions of Louise's mind upon discovering the tragedy of her husband's life. It was only after several revisions of that theme that Curel finally hit upon a man of Donnat's type for Louise's husband. He wanted a "gloriously dishonoured man" who could face the world with his head high. The problem which ran away with the play is only supposed to be a mere detail; the excuse Louise needed to leave her husband. This "detail" is in the second act, and is the reason for the discussion between Maurice and the Doctor. And it is the most beautiful lyric passage in all of Curel's plays. One needs but cite the passage of the water-lilies in order that the recalcitrants be thoroughly convinced:

> On voyait, sous une mince couche d'eau, des centaines de moutons a couture blanche, pareils a de petites tetes au bout de longs coups tendus, oh! mais tendus a se rompre! Tous les jours les jours les tiges s'allongeaient, ma mais s'effilaient en meme temps. Je voyais mes plantes a la limite de l'effort. Leur désir de vivre avait quelque chose d'héroique. Je disais au soleil qui les attirait: "Soleil, triompheras-tu?"....Eq puis je voyais l'eau qui ne diminuait pas assez vite et je tremblais: "Ils n'arrivent pas! Demain je les verrai morts sous la vase..."a la fin, le soleil a ~~triimph~~ triomphé. Avant mon depart, toutes les belles fleurs de cire s'étalaient sur l'eau. Voyez-vous mon petit, devant cela, je N8ai pu me ~~d~~défendre de refléCHir. Vous, moi, tous lescchercheurs, nous sommes de petites ~~c~~tetes noyés ~~s~~us un lac d'ignorance et nous tendons le cou avec une touchante unanimité vers une lumiere voulue. Sous quel soleil s'épanouirong nos intelligences lorsqu'elles arriverong au jour?.....Il faut qu'il y ait un soleil!.....(1)

1-François de Curel, La Nouvelle Idole, Act V Scene V. Editions Crès. Paris 1925

The play was hailed as a powerful tragedy, having as theme the right of man to take life on a small scale in the hope of saving it on a large scale. It is a proof that Curel is but a medium through which his characters live. The author had planned to give the play to Louise; the public "gave" it to her husband.

"La Nouvelle Idole", is a ~~grea~~ strange play, having three important characters, and each character dominating his respective act. In the first act, the action centers about Louise. She has not been happy with her husband, a renowned Parisian physician. True enough, she had had a great deal of sincere admiration for the man whose life and intelligence had been consecrated to the alleviation of human suffering. But now, he appears to her in the light of a monster, and assasin who, for experimental purposes has abused the confidence of his patients by secretly inoculating them with cancer virus. She is so revolted at such a thought, that she is almost radiant when she finally holds the key to her freedom; divorce will rid her of this horrible husband who in his preoccupation of others had neglected to diagnose her heart and mind. Poor Louise, ruthlessly sacrificed on the altar of the New Idol, she is really the most tragic figure of the play. Antoinette and Donnat have the sadistic satisfaction which help martyrs accept death with open

arms, while she is sacrificed for nothing, and what is still worse, to nothing. Theirs is the exaltation, hers, the ruined life.

Antoinette , the victim of Donnat's inoculation is a sweet young girl who is willing to give up her life to science when she learns the truth about her precarious condition. Had her cure been complete, she had planned to enter a nunnery, so it little matters to her whether she gives her life 'wholesale' or "retail', as she herself so naively puts it. She is the least appealing character of the play, as she is so very detached and "mievre". Julie's type of woman, or Louise, are more to my liking. Resignation would come to them only after a struggle; it would consequently be more interesting than that of Antoinette. Too much passiveness, even in a woman is not desirable.

Donnat, the man, the scientist, is as great a fanatic in science as other men have been in former times in matters of religion. In the second act, he transports the play from an emotional level to a psychological plane where abstract ideas assume so real and anguishing a humanity that they become tangible, and create a poignant tragedy. The love interest vanishes before the turmoil in Donnat's soul. Nothing had ever interested him beyond science. However, once inoculated

he is haunted by the nystery of the unknown, of the infinite, of the eternal. His proud and despairing mind refuses to admit definite death, and in a supreme effort he tried to solve the contradiction of his intellect which denies God, and his heart that craves the Infinite. For the first time he realizes the limitations of science, and it becomes clear to him as he studies Antoinette, that in spite of all his claims that New Idol can never replace the supernatural faith of groping, hoping, suffering mankind.

This struggle between religious faith and scientific knowledge which disturbs Jean de Miremont and Donnat must evidently prey upon Curel's mindm for in almost all his plays that same inner struggle between religion and reason may be detected, when it does not, as in the case of "La Nouvelle Idole" sweep every other dramatic element before it.

Curel has never reached greater heights than in the character study of Donnat. In "L'Envers d'eune Sainte" he has delineated Julie with hreater force, with more brutality, giving her more power, more starkness, but he never soars to the lyrical summits that he attains with Donnat. He seems to have put himself into Donnat, infused his own soul into his, his intellect into the mind of the scientist.

I have never read a play I enjoyed any more

thoroughly . It may be resumed roughly in this way: religion unites us to God through our emotions, while Science limits itself in its search for Truth to experimentation. In order to find solace, one must therefore turn to God through Faith, for Truth to Science, for Beauty to Love.

LA FILLE SAUVAGE. (1)

Abelaio, half-civilized king of the Amaras (an African Tribe), has slaughtered the army of his arch-enemy, king Koffy. Among the captives, there is a young French explorer, Paul Moncel. He attracts the attention of Totilio, Abelaio's prime minister who has spent some time in Europe. While the two men discuss the advantages of civilization, a few hunters find a wild creature in a bear cave. It is a mud and vermine covered girl of some sixteen years, a savage, unable to profer anything but grunts. The men are looking forward to the wild and barbarous tricks they will play on this queer being. They are bitterly disappointed, for the king, in a fit of generosity, gives her to Paul Moncel, who takes her to Europe, where he plans to study the effect of civilization on her.

He places her in the convent where his sister is the superior. Two years later, the savage, who by the way, is christened Marie, is totally transformed. She has learned how to speak, and how to check her emotional rushes. The miracle has been accomplished by religion. The next time we see Marie, she has been

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(1) François de Curel, La Fille Sauvage, Editions Crès, 1920

brought to Paul's home, where nothing in the way of intellectual advancement is denied her. She travels to every country in Europe, in order to study the customs and governments of various peoples. At twenty-four, she is a highly sophisticated woman, an atheist, and in love with Paul. When he finally decides that she is sufficiently prepared to return to her country to under-take its civilization, he tells her that she must marry Kigerik, the son of Abelaio. She rebels at the suggestion:

> "Ils ont pétri mon coeur des plus pures délicatesses! nourri mon esprit des plus nobles chefs-d'oeuvre! J'ai pleuré d'admiration devant les merveilles où palpite la sublime détresse humaine. Et à moi qui ne suis qu'émotion et tendresse, ils viennent dire: "Pétrifie-toi dans ton orgueil! Que tes chers espoirs dorment à jamais avec ta fierté pour linceul!" (1)

She realizes fully the greatness of the work mapped out for her. Neither does she want to refuse herself to virtue, nor to heroism. But she cannot bear the thought of being separated from Paul, whom she loves with all "Curelian" ardor. When she sees that he is obdurate, she sails to Africa, with Totilio, who is charmed at the beauty, the intelligence of Kigerik's thirteenth wife. Marie, as soom as she reaches the

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(1) François de Curel, La Fille Sauvage, Editions Crès, 1920. Act IV

shores of hernative land, sends back the excort of nuns that Mère Émilie, Paul's sister had provided for her. She demands nothing from the king, her husband, except the priviledge of ruling. In a few years the whole country is transformed. Schools, hospitals, mills, and shops, have replaced the barren wilderness of the first act. Marie is the tyrant over the people she has awakened. She tolerates nothing; the slightest infringement of the laws she has established is punished by instantaneous death. Christianity, and all that it engenders is strictly prohibited, under pain of death. There is but one person who has the courage to defy her; and that is the missionary who had contrived to escape, when she had sent her escort back to France. Her heart is filled with rabid hatred against this man who represents religion:

"Pendant des années (au couvent) je me suis sèvrée de tous les plaisirs, pour être digne du choeur des anges au milieu desquels je voyais déja ma place marquée...Et tout à coup, le réveil.....Plus de Dieu! Plus d'âme immortelle!...Devant la mort, L'homme de génie et le chien sont, j'allais dire égaux, mais non..... pas même!...Le chien meurt et ne sait pas qu'il meurt, tandis que notre dernier râle, sur le seuil du néant, est un cris d'épouvante. Ces idées empoisonnent ma vie!...Jusque dans les bras de mes amants, elles me déchirent. On ne se console pas d'avoir perdu l'éter-

nité..... on ne pardonne pas à ceux qui nous ont envoyés courir derrière la funeste beauté du divin mirage!....Vous, les prêtres, qui par vos impostures avez fait de moi une misérable égarée, je vous hais.....Comprenez à présent, mon Père, pourquoi votre tête est mise à prix!.....

Paul Moncel comes to visit his ward; he is amazed at the change that so little time has wrought in her. He pleads for the life of the priest whom her soldiers have captured in the bear-trap, where she herself had been found. But she is inexorable. Father Maximin is condemned to death, as a sacrifice to Marie's illusions. Barren of heart, disillusioned, disgusted with life and with herself, she goes on living, crushing all with her hatred, surrounded by fear and terror.

Although we might despise and dislike Marie, it is hard not to understand the motive for her radical change in the fifth act. Curel ~~at~~ claims that in this portrayal of Marie, he has endeavored to concentrate in one person, the various stages through which humanity has passed since the beginning of history. It seems rather the odessey of a woman in love, then the allegory of mankind, although traces of the latter can be

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(1) François de Curel, La Fille Sauvage, Editions Crès, 1920. Act V.

found clearly allthrough the play, but the impression received by that is not so strong as by that of the love impulse:

"Une autre fois vous annonciez que le culte des héros allait remplacer celui des idoles et cette nouvelle , survenant au cours d'une certaine nuit féconde en nobles emotions, me transportait au point que, prête à tomber à vos genoux je m'écriais:- Soyez mon grand homme, voulez-vous?(1)

"Autrefois je me sentais attirée..... Dispensez moi de dire par quoi....A présent j'aime! Mon maître, lorsque vous pensiez travailler à l'éducation d'une reine, vous formiez une amante!"(2)

In the first act, the savage girl represents according to the author, humanity in its first struggle. She, like primitive man, is little above the beast, unable to do anything beyond satisfying her hungers - both physical and sexual.

Her sojourn at the convent brings about the miracle that was wrought by religion in the Middle Ages. The idea of God, has displaced every other thing in Marie's life. She becomes a fanatic, praying for the whole world, and especially for Paul, whom she begins to love in a half mystical way. Then, as the cult of reason came to cast its light upon the Dark Ages, so does Marie's soul succumb to the charm of intellectuality and Science.

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(1) La Fille Sauvage, Acte IV, Scene II
(2) " " " " " " "

After having exhausted their possibilities, she turns to Paul for love; but he is obsessed by dreams and visions much greater than love. He is obdurate, she must marry Kigerik and fulfill her destiny. Then the rebel is turned full upon us:

"Je serais vraiment naïve si je sacrifiais mon bonheur à leur prospérité!"

"Pendant les années où j'ai vécu abimée en Dieu, j'appartenais tout entière à l'amour. J'étais l'épouse chérie du Christ. La Vierge Marie était ma mère adorée. Un ange gardien, la nuit veillait à mon chevet, le jour guidait mes pas, comme un grand frère. Mes actions venaient du coeur et recevaient l'accueil d'un divin coeur. Puis j'ai découvert qu'il n'y a pas de Dieu, mais aussitôt vous avez proposé à ma tendresse les grands hommes. Pour me les faire aimer, vous m'avez introduite dans l'intimité de leurs oeuvres. J'ai pleuré d'admiration devant les merveilles où palpite la sublime détresse humaine. Mais toujours, partout, musique, tableaux, drames, romans, m'ont représenté l'amour, ont exalté sa noblesse et son mystère, m'ont appris qu'il est seul capable d'arracher nos ames à la mortelle solitude. Et vous osez prétendre qu'une éducation qui, du commencement à la fin, m'a environnée d'une atmosphère embrasé d'amour, ne préparait pas une amante?" (1)

Heart-broken, she takes refuge in pride and finds consolation in power. All the fury of the woman scorned is sublimated; she returns to her country, and falls much lower than she was at first. She spares no-one, nor anything, and her reign becomes one of terror; she is more terrible than a barbarian, for her cruelty, her depravity, are born of a thinking mind, and no longer of the impulsive,

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(1) La Fille Sauvage, Act IV, Scene II

natural, satisfaction of savage instinct. If Paul had accepted to rule with her; if he had given her his love and companionship, she would have remained the charming creature of the third and fourth act. But, when he fails her there is no reason why she should strive to climb the hill, when the voice of the cuckoo in the valley sings so alluringly.

Marie, instead of demonstrating humanity in its slow struggle to a thinking and reasoning level is the proof of the power of love. What she becomes is not the result of her natural impulses, for nature rarely makes so low a creature turn to Science and Culture, like the plants to the sun. A great motivitating power is needed, and in Marie's case, that incentive was Paul.

"La Fille Sauvage" is a very fascinating play to read. It is essentially the "Spectacle dans un Fauteuil; fascintaing to read, but practically impossible to produce on the stage. I wonder whether Curel who is about the only playwright today to indulge in these fireside plays, will be redognized as Musset was, as the greatest dramatist of his century? As far as ideas are concerned, I am thoroughly convinced of it, although this play is so very "invraisemblable."

LE COUP D'AILE (1)

The plays opens with the noise of naval manoeuvers. The Pinson family and several guests are watching the spectacle from the piazza of their palatial home. In the midst of the hubub, M.Bernard Prinson, the father arrives. He is a deputy, and is quite elated with the brilliant and flattering oratorical success he has that day enjoyed at theChambre. There is but one cloud to mar the serenity of his life; his brother, Michel Prinson, renegade, traitor pariah, who has returned to France from Africa in complete disgrace, has chosen this moment to call upon them. Michel explains to Bernard that the stories concerning his rebellion are true. He has razed, he has burnt, he has slaughtered. But he is not happy, for he dreams idly. Will his brother give him the money necessary for the re-conquest of the empire he had once built for himself in the wilds of Africa, in order that he might offer them to France to regain his lost prestige? He is not moved by patriotism, but by an intense desire for another taste of the glory he had once known. Bernard refuses absolutely to have anything to do with

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(1) François de Curel, La Coup D'Aile, Editions Crès, Paris, 1922

schemes. Everybody gives him a cold reception, except a young girl whom Bernard has brought from ae convent in Paris, where she has spent most of her life. She is Michel's daughter, Hélène, whose mother he had abandoned eighteen years before. Both are unaware of their relationship, although they feel strangely drawn to one other. She finds in him a responsive chord.... she sees in him a rebel who can understand her turbulent soul wherein seethes a rabid hatred for the father who had so basely deserted her. Michel decides to adopt her. She would provide consolation and solace to his barren heart, and she would cheer his immense solitude. He hesitates, however in asking her to dedicate her life to his. In order to triumph over his doubts, Hélène decides to put an end to his uncertainty. She hides the regimental flag which had been kept in the house, and upon it's discovery in her room, although she expects to be sufficiently disgraced to be allowed to follow Michel, she is merely ignored.

Bernard then tells Michel that Hélène is his daughter; he is overjoyed. But when she learns that Michel is her father, Hélène refuses to go with him. Michel's fury breaks loose, and the two engage in a rather melodramatic scene, in which the father attempts to strangle her. After the emotional gale has subsided, they realize how irrevocably they are bound to

each other, and they plan anew to go away.

But, at the last moment, Herouard, the commander of the manoeuvres recognizes Michel Frinson as the "glorious renegade", and exhorts him to join the Foreign Legion, in order to seek rehabilitation. Michel cannot resist. So he leaves Hélène as soon as he finds her. She is to remain with her uncle, and he is to seek fresh paths to glory.

"Le Coup d'Aile is a magnificent study of a rebel, of a man living on the outskirts of society, who fights it tooth and nail, while seeking desperately for the loop-hole which will permit him to slip back into respectability. He wants rehabilitation with all his soul, but he does not want it by the dull and slow road of repentance. A "passionné" of glory he wil come back with the help of some wild scheme. Strange though it may seem, one cannot despise Michel, the pariah, although he is an odious sort of person. Perhaps it is because of his indomitable love of glory. To it he sacrifices all, blindly and unquestionably. In its quest his life has been ruined and his soul has been irreparably scarred, still he cannot withstand it's

call. It has become his religion, his idol. When it beckons he is ever ready to burn incense at it's altar, even though he feels in his heart of heart that it is all in vain...To him, glory is country, father, mother, wife, child and life. Before it all must bow; to it all must be ruthlessly sacrificed. What draws him to Hélène is not the re-awakening of hispaternal instinct, but rather the joy of finding a kindred soul wherein will bud again his appetites of glory and revolt, where will love again all his dreams. For, when glory summons Him back to the battle-fields, he does not hesitate to trample on Hélène 's love. It means the end of their short-lived dreams of peace and companionship.....but what of it? His mistress calls and her voice is seduction itself. He cannot resist, so he goes off to Africa...to the desert, to sweat, to thirst, to fight, maybe to die....but perhaps to glory.

Hélène is just another "Curelian woman." Ardent, revolted, thwarted in her affections, she only finds some one upon whom to pour all her heart but to have him denied her. Having loved and lost may be better than not having loved at all, but it is an experience frayed with

heartbreaking regrets, with a nostalgia which oftens makes one wonder whether the ecstasy is at all worth the anguish that inevitably follows in its wake; Michel goes out again in quest of his will o' the wisp, but Hélène remains alone, more alone perhaps than before, "pour danser avec les jeunes sous-lieutenants."

"Le Coup d'Aile is one of Curel's most popular plays, as it was construed rather as a study on patriotism than as an impartial analysis of glory. According to Gaillard de Champris (1) it might easily be called "L'Envers d'un Forban." It is eminently worthy of Curel, because of its force, its originality, the audacity of the theme, the high tension maintained from the beginning to the end, and above all for the gigantic mental and emotional stature of Hélène and Michel.

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(1) Le Theatre de M. de Curel, La Revue des Deux Mondes, Gaillard de Champris, January 1, 1918

L'AME EN FOLIE. (1)

To Francois Curel, great hunter enamored of immense forests, and attentive observer imbued with Darwinism, humanity is not isolated in nature, and civilized man is not isolated in humanity. The animal can be traced in primitive man, as primitive man can be traced in civilized man. Therefore everyone of us possesses within himself two distinct beings, the animal or the savage being, and the social being. War and love are the two elements which are most prone to destroy the equilibrium which civilization has partially succeeded in establishing. Later, Curel studies the effect of war in "Terre Inhumaine" and "La Viveuse et le Moribond" as he portrays the struggle of the love element in "L'Ame en Folie."

Blanche Riolle is the grumbling, sickly wife of a bourgeois scientist, Justin Riolle, author of a treatise on animal love, "L'Ame en Folie." They live quietly in the country until the day Michel Fleuret, a Parisian actor and dramatist, pays them a visit. He is very much in love with Justin's niece, Rosa Romance, a noted actress. She is the mistress of a social dramatist, and the attentions of Michel place her in a position that is exceeding-

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(1) Francois de Curel, L'Ame en Folie, Editions Cres, Paris, 1922

ly difficult. So, she runs away from Paris, but not without leaving her address. Blanche, who is about forty years old, falls violently in love with Michel, who, quite unaware of the emotional ravages he is about to cause, pours forth all his admiration on Rosa. The old psychologist himself is not insensible to the charms of his exquisite niece. It is a strange household, this one where everyone seems to be "en folie."

There is another character whom we have not yet mentioned.....the original invention so dear to Curel's heart. It is the Skeleton. Blanche's father, an artist, had used it as a model in his attic studio. Blanche had always been troubled by its annoying proximity. She begs to have it buried in "holy ground", but her petition is refused because of the strange nature of "the guest." It was a medley of odd bones gathered here and there, and strung up on a wire to resemble a real skeleton. After a great deal of casuistry, Justin succeeds in convincing the priest that this collection of bones is worthy of christian burial as those found on the battlefield.; so the skeleton is carried off. Blanche stays up in the attic in order to straighten up various things, while rummaging about, she picks up an encyclopedia and looks up the history of Lucretius and Messalina, two figures of antiquity which her father had painted. Just as she becomes absorbed in these stories, she has

a heart attack. The skeleton appears and mocks the foolish infatuation she has conveived for Michel, accusing her of carnal and bestial desires. He then relates the strange story of the various bones of his body, and finishes his horrible conversation by warning her of approaching death. When Rosa and Michel come up to the attic, they find the lifeless body of the unfortunate woman who was unable to survive the shock of the trick played upon her imagination. On her lap is the story of Messalina, the most impure woman of antiquity. Up to the very end, her life has been a struggle between "l'ange et la bete."

The origin of theincidents which give this play its tragic denouement is exposed in the second act. It is the most interesting part of the play, although it does appear exceedingly discursive. However, the nature of the conversation which takes place at the Riolle breakfast table is so new and of so astounding to most of us, that one forgets the length of it. None but the initiate could be acquainted with the facts which prompt Justin to discuss the difference between the element of love as seen in animals and in man. Civilized man has striven not to allow the soul to become the slave of the senses. He has reserved for himself the right of

accepting or rejecting passion; he has kept for himself the power to choose.... and therein lies the abyss of difference between man and animal. In the animal kingdom, the strongest only, woo and win a man, on the contrary does not impose his attentions; he becomes an admirer, a suitor. Woman chooses, and she is as capable of becoming enamored of the weakest of her suitors, as not... for, "Plus on a d'ame, plus on a le pouvoir d'etre insensé." For there is in us that spiritual energy which intervenes in contradicting laws of animalistic selection. This problem of love in relating itself to the mind evokes the problem of human values, and that of destiny. Science which has been incapable of solving the first enigma, has been equally unable to decide about the second. Is everything, consequently to be doubted? The futility of it all appals Justin:

> ....Si je quitte le foyer pour vagabonder dans la campagne, ce sont encore des lambeaux de ma vie qui restent aux buissons comme la laine des brebis. Encore la comparaison n'est-elle pas juste!...La laine que retiennent les épines n'est pas perdue, elle va garnir les nids des oiseaux!....Tandis que mes longues randonées ne laissent rien.....(1)

If Gurel's thought is expressed in this cry of anguish, this tragedy is obviously more than an exaltation of voluptuousness as sung by Lucretius, it is more than a study of the Freudian libido.

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"L'Ame en Folie " Éditions Cres, Paris 1922, page 318

This daring and powerful play is written in vigorous and poetic language. The subject is an exceedingly difficult one and Curel has treated it with great seriousness. It is regrettable that it is perfectly intelligible only after reading the preface. It is the only play of Curel that has this Shavian trait. Nevertheless it is eminently worth while and goes far in proving the intensity of the struggle which man must wage in order that "l'ange" may triumph over "la bete."

LA COMEDIE DU GENIE. (1)

As in "La Nouvelle Idole", Curel has studied the collpase of belief founded upon science; in "Le Repas de Lion" the deceptions and disillusions of social apostleship, in "La Comédie du Génie" he tries to analyse the impotence of disinterested art.

Felix Dagrenat is by vocation a man of letters, a dramatist. All is to him a subject of study. Every psychological case interests him, and consequently everything becomes matter for a psychological study. When he does finally write, it is for an elite. That elite is conspicuously absent when his first play is presented in the provincial town where his mother lives. His engagement to his boyhood sweetheart is broken, after the scandal following the discovery of a notorious Parisian actress playing the maid-servant in his house.

The second act takes place in Paris, seventeen years later. Felix is now one of the leading French dramatists, as well as the father of a sixteen year old boy Bernard, who is passionately fond of the theater. Some years later, Bernard writes a play, "L'Ange Déchu" which he sends to his father under a pseudonym. Felix recommends it without knowing it is his son's. So, it comes about that both

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(1) Francois de Curel, La Comedie du Genie, Editions Cres, 1924

both father and son will have their "première" on the same night.

The third act takes place in the promenoir" of a music-hall, where Félix is trying to kill time and avoid reporters while anxiously awaiting the results of his play. Bernard rushes in and tells him that although "La Comédie du Génie" is a masterpiece, it is a decided "flop".

"Seulement, ces gens ne savent a quoi se racrocher le génie.....Envoila un sujet pour eux! Moi, qui suis fait a leur image, je leur donne en pature "L'Ange Déchu." Cela ne vaut pas un clou, et les imbéciles sont capaoles de s'en regaler."...

Felix, shohas been up three whole nights, finally succumbs to fatigue and falls asleep after his son's departure. When he awakes he runs to the "Comedie Francaise", only to discover that his play was a failure.....a sublime and glorious failure, but nevertheless a dismal one. In utter dismay, he sits down, in the semi-obscurity if the playhouse and meditates a long while. He is finally aroused by a confused murmur of voices. He raises his head and sees himself environed by shadows. He studies them closely and sees all the great characters of literature assembled there. Among others, he recognizes Hamlet, Alceste, Medea, Juliette, Phèdre, Joan and El Cid. Don Juan who happens to be next to him, tells him the reason for the ~~unie~~ re-union:

"Ce sont les héros des pieces admirés par les hommes. Les siecles paseent, les royaumes sont detruits, les peu-
Les siecles passent, les

turits, les peuples sont aneantis, mais les personnages des grands chefs-d'oeuvre restent vivants. Ils forment une humanité idéale, plus jeune, plus passionnée, plus remplie de vibrante energie que l'humanite réele. Ils sont la véritable humanité! (1)

Felix wonders whether one of his characters will appear to join the immortal phalanx. Just then a young woman in modern dress makes her appearance. He rushes forward...alas! it is the heroine of L'Ange Déchu." In despair he asks Don Juan where he should go in search of genius, and strange to say, "El gran burlador" answers "To God". At this point a tug on the shoulder rouses Felix from a most extraordinary dream. It has given him a never-to-be forgotten lesson, and the reason for his failure. He now realizes that hisplays were condemned to a short life, because in his desire for immortality, he had overlooked the necessity of pleasing the public.

Some time later, while travelling in Switzerland he enters into a little convent chapel, Eberhardt, a monk, is explaining to a future ~~the-ritual~~ priest the ritual of the Mass, comparing it to drama, claiming that is is the greatest of all plays, because besides having all the elements which go in to make immortal masterpieces, it requires the audience as part of the actors.

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(1) "Comedie du Genie" Editions Cres, Paris 1924

Such is the unexpected and disconcerting end of this play. It is highly interesting as a study of a confident man, but as a play I do not like it. I am not very fond of shadows, ghosts, or any other type of supernatural visitors on the stage, so that I am a little prejudice against "La Comedie du Genie". It seems a little forced and artificial to me.

Felix Dagrenat, who has been compared to Curel, is a dissector of souls, a lover of sentimental complications who is totally absorbed in the study of human emotions. The whole secret of his personality is revealed in his confessions to Berhard: "Ce qui m'interesse ce sont moins les idées, que les orages qu' elles soulevent." (1) He is essentially the artist, living for and by his art, an individual for whom the conventions exist.....for him to ignore, but for the others to recognize and practice. This is quite obvious in the boldness with which he braves public opinion, in introducing Armande, the actress, in his home. What is till more eccentric and strange is his acquisition of a son. One day it dawns on him that paternity is the only thrill he has not experienced. He realizes that it would complete him, and would satisfy his ego. However, he considers marriage.

As too great an encumbrance to his liberty so, he merely offers himself the luxury of a child without the sanction of the sacrament. When later, Bernard discovers the adventure relating to his birth he connot refrain from commenting:

> "Tu t'es offert un gosse d'etude!..Que tu m'apparais de plus en plus epat ant!..Ce papa!!. Il confectionne un enfant pour assouplir sa menlalite!....."(1)

Like most persons of his type, Felix is not consistent with himself. He pretends to care onl for the applause of an elite.....but his resentment is without bounds when the greater public receives his plays with cold indifference. His disdain of the people, his affectation, and his colossal desire for popular success make him a rather unpleasant person. He is an unadulterated snob, a"poseur"...and not at all the hero, the superman nor the genius that he would have us believe; for men of genius are more simple, not so "faiseur d'embarras". They write under the impulse of their intellect, abandoning their work to destiny. Furthermore, the mark of a work of genius is that it always captivates both the mass and the elite, because the author has been able to put in relief an immortal trait of human nature. And Felix us too much concerned preparing his page for posterity to be much interested in others.

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(1) La Comedie du Genie, Editions Cres, 1920, p 1..6, Act 11, Tableau 11, Scene L.

"La Comedie du Genie" has one characteristic which sets it apart from the other plays of Curel. There are no doctoral dissertations, no gigantic personnages, no deep feelings, nolove element, and no devasting tragedy. The dialogue is brilliant and smart. They style is alert, luckd and elegant, The author has proceeded by tableaux, which eliminates the element of the improbable so prevalent in "La Fille Sauvage." The invention of the dream amay seem a ahppy one; I do not like it. The confession episode is regrettabel as it is a bit "outré" Pere Eberhart is more royal than the king, more Catholic than the Pope. But it is a good joke on the silly old duchess who certainly got more than the thrill she was seeking.

L'IVRESSE DU SAGE.(1)

Decidedly inferior, but very amusing is "L'Ivresse du Sage" Curel's only attempt at comedy.

A French magnate, Paul Sautereau, has a charming niece who believes her uncle to be poor. While at the Sorbonne she falls in love with her professor of philosophy.....the illustrious Parmelin. To win him, Hortense devotes herself to metaphysics. Although Parmelin recognizes her intelligence, he refuses to consider her as 'un bon parti' because of her lack of fortune. Paul, who is the philosopher's friend, invites him to his country estate for the week-end. There he meets Hortense, and learns that she is the niece of the richest man in France. When he is ascertained that she will one day inherit her uncle's colossal fortune matters alter considerably. He proposes to her and is accepted. In the meantime, Hortense, who had believed herself almost a pure intellect while at the university discovers one side of her nature that is not at all philosophical. She is all the more convinced, when her uncle's neighbor, a young baron, a gentleman-farmer, breaks into her life. Believing her interested in metaphysics he endeavors to get into her good graces by philosophizing upon everything he knows, specially upon his hunting experiences. Youth is easily won,

(1) L'Ivresse du Sage, François de Curel, Editions Crès, Paris, 1924.

and Hortense is quickly convinced that all cannot be found in text-books and lectures. She also realizes that she does not in any way love her 'cher maître'. Like Hercules pressed between virtue and vice, Hortense finds herself between action and thought, nature and philosophy. ..the breeder and the metaphysician...a picturesque and significant rivalry. Who will win? Hubert de Piolet kisses her violently and awakens her to the joys of emotional life. Her fiancé, the dialectician, pecks her non-commitantly on the forehead and leaves her cold. Love and thought have always been strangers. The philosopher realizes it and withdraws richer in wisdom. The experience has probably furnished him an answer to the problem which he had so often raised in his lecture-courses...."Pourquoi aime-t-on?"

Curel pokes gentle fun at philosophers in his study of Parmelin, who prides himself on being a thinker. His business is 'to probe the very depths of the impenetrable"; definition the author has rendered absurd in order to bring out the sublime and ridiculous of such a calling. Parmelin's intelligence is highly trained in the construction of ideas; on a paper he can go far, but in grips with reality a shadow suffices to deter him. He constantly treads the clouds, refusing to come down to earth. When a few friends bring him to a "maison pu-

blique" he pretends to study the souls of the women he encounters there...He is a snob, and not at all 'sympathique'. Hortense and Hubert, are on the other hand, two very delightful normal young people, who are excellent foils for the pseudo-wit and erudition of the philosopher.

The play was poorly received when it was given at La Comédie Française in 1922. True enough, it is a decided departure from "Les Fossiles", and "La Nouvelle Idole". It is a successful attempt at comedy, and follows in the trail of originality the playwright has blazed for himself. Just at the moment when comedy seems to be going down the grade, Curel, always an innovator has applied himself to the conception of a new gaiety, frivolous, and voluntarily audacious, but still of a high philosophical order. All the originality of the play, all its grace, and all its force lie mainly in the masterful blending of 'Goguenarde' philosophy, of the spirit of the joy of life, and of smiling metaphysics, where 'L'ange se moque de la bête', so very very cleverly.

Above all.....it must not be taken seriously!

TERRE INHUMAINE (1)

No author of consequence could afford to overlook an event so fertile in inspiration as the World War. For a long time Curel did not seem to find an adequate theme, but finally, in 1922 he gave us "Terre Inhumaine," known in English as "No Man's Land". It is Cornelian play, with desire and death as protagonists. Every word evokes the violence of war, contempt of life, the futility of everything that is not pleasure, and the fever of the carnage where nerves are taut and lusts are rampant.

The action of the play takes place in Lorraine. Madame Victoria, a seducing and exquisite German princess, comes with the greatest secrecy to the war zone to visit her husband. She is sent to the home of Madame Parisot by the German authorities. While her room is being prepared the two women engage in a conversation in which they are vividly sketched. Madame Victoria is a sentimental aristocrat, profoundly bored with herself and with the whole world. Madame Parisot, on the other hand is the perfect type of the Lorraine woman; solid, loyal, stubborn, stoical.

That night, Madame Parisot's son Paul, a French spy

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(1) François de Curel, "Terre Inhumaine," La Petite Illustration, March 1926.

comes to his native village on a mission. He cannot resist the temptation of visiting his mother whom he has not seen in three years. Madame Victoria sees him, and recognizes him from a picture in the family album. She decides to denounce him to the German authorities. Paul realizes that he has not only himself to guard against this inevitable denunciation, there is his mother's life, and "la patrie." There is but one thing for him to do, if he is to accomplish his mission.... and that is to kill the lovely princess. Having made up his mind, he goes up to her room; there he enters to kill, and remains to love, in which pursuit Victoria is a willing enough partner since she finds a reprieve as well as a thrill in his embraces.

The next morning, Paul admits the truth to his mother. He cannot do away with the princess. Madame Parisot, who is not blinded by Victoria's perfidious charms, assures her son that she has found a way of disposing of her. While Paul interviews his agent, she goes up to Madame Victoria's room and shoots her. Paul is then obliged to leave immediately for the front, and is forced to leave his mother to German justice.

This "modeste mélo" as the author himself calls "Terre Inhumaine" is not one of Curel's best plays, but it is intensely dramatic and very adapted to the times. It is vibrant with emotion, complex, sober, rapid, and stark. As a development of a psychological crisis, it is remarkable.

Superficially different though the characters may seem, they are nevertheless endowed with the same cold, positive, calculating patriotism. They do not go in for great words, nor do they give vent to their emotions by long tirades. Cruelty, heartlessness, and death are the exigencies of the situation, and they are accepted unflinchingly. Madame Parisot is the most interesting character of the play. Curel has masterfully exposed the struggle which she, as a mother, as a patriot, and as a human being, had to wage with herself. It is the distracted mother who shoulders all the responsibility of the crime perpetrated in her house. But if it is the patriot in her that prompted her to kill the German woman, it is also the honest peasant disgusted by the sensual distraction of the savage love of these two, who forgets everything in the satisfaction of their senses.

But "Terre Inhumaine" is first and foremost a brilliant study of patriotism, as understood by the world's most violent enemies. In this play, to the glory of French sentiment, appears clearly expressed for the

first time, the characteristics and points of contact upon which "the French and the Germans might meet and love, if the enemies of yesterday could only forget the past, in order to become the friends of tomorrow.

V LA VIVEUSE ET LE MORIBOND.

After "Terre Inhumaine" which reflected superbly the cold frenzy of war, Curel found his inspiration dor "La Viveuse et le Moribond" in the atmosphere of upheaval following the armistice.

The title is misleading, for "La Viveuse" is no more that which one might suppose, than is the moribund a man about to give up the ghost. Alice had been called 'la viveuse' because as a war-nurse, she had known better than any one else how to infuse life into her patients. As for Phillippe, the moribund, his health is excellent... ..he is merely a candidate to suicide.

Phillippe is overwhelmed with disgust for the miserable person he has become since the war, and decides to put an end to his miserable existence. He has lived life out. After much consideration he rejects his not banal idea of shooting himself under the Arch of Triumph, over the grave of the Unknown Soldier. His aesthetic sense prompts him to choose his family

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(1)La Viveuse et le Moribond, François de Curel, La Petite Illustration, 1925.

château as the scene of his death. Having made up his mind to leave this world, he is anxious to depart as gracefully as possible.

When he arrives at the castle, he finds the house full of guests. Odile de Puyval, fearing for the worst, has come to offer herself as an incentive to life.....but to no avail. Staying that night at the castle, is a young novice, accompanied by an old nun. They are on a tournet for alms. Deceived and embittered by life, Alice , the young novice, is about to take refuge from the world in a cloister, as Phillippe will in death. Common misfortune establishes a bond of sympathy between these two, who desire nothing more than an excuse to live. Alice undertakes Phillippe's mental and moral cure; and so well does it progress that before the end of the play, the moribund takes his benevolent nurse in his arms and imprints a kiss that is anything but spiritual upon her lips. So these two who had desired to seek forgetfulness in the solitude of the cloister and of the tomb, stop half-way, and compromise with marriage.

This play is by no means worthy of Curel. Besides a few clever lines it is pure drivel. The Characters are boring, unconvincing, and very artificial. It is a lamentable effort at a portrayal of what

the generation of the war has suffered. Alice, Phillippe, the nun, are puppets, who are on the stage merely to stir and provoke thought. But, we can see the strings that pull them, far too clearly, so they are annoying and irritating. The old nun, especially, with her rose-water counsels and her everlasting "bondieuseries" is prodigiously boring. Why must authors always fail in the portrayal of the good. Victor Hugo makes his Monseigneur Bienvenu an old doting "soft-soap", in sanctifying their characters, authors invariably destroy that spirit of "pep and punch" which is as prominent in the good as in, the evil or the interesting. Curel did not fail to make this nun a perfect nullity, as far as personality is concerned. In my estimation, Odile de Puyval is the most convincing person in the play, and that is not much of a compliment, at that. Alice is a little snob, perfectly matched to her moribund. It is a tremendous step down the grade for Curel, who seems never to have had a second time the fecund inspirations of 1892, the year of publication of "Les Fossiles," "L'Envers d'une Sainte," "La Figurante," and "L'Invitée."

ORAGE MYSTIQUE. (1)

French literature is undergoing a return to mysticism and credulity, and as a consequence the supernatural and the fantastic have become "à la mode" . Spurred by such plays as "Lilliom", and the "Adding Machine", (both of which were translated into French, and played in Paris), Curel, who had always delighted in treating modern complex problems decided to undertake the study of the subconscious. In "Orage Mystique" he takes us away from things terrestial into the realm of high imagination; but he nevertheless manges to keep his feet firmly rooted on earth.

Clotilde returns to her country home in the middle of the night from a visit to her lover, and finds the door locked, and herself compromised unless she can by some miracle, enter unnoticed. Her husband had returned earlier than expected from a business trip, and believing his wife asleep in her room, little realized that she is condemned to pass the night in the raging storm. Fortunately her physician, Dr Tubal, who is on his way to a confinement case, saves her from disgrace by getting her into the house, thanks to a trick "à la George Dandin".

(1) Orage Mystique, François de Curel, La Petite Illustration, December, 1927.

The second act takes place one year later. Clotilde, who died shortly after her nocturnal escapade is deeply mourned by her husband, who is nevertheless tortured by doubts as to her moral integrity. He is also obsessed by the memory of a promise which they had made each other during their honeymoon. The one to die first would appear to the survivor on the first anniversary of the funeral.

The scene for the third act is laid in the cemetery where Clotilde is buried. Robert, her husband, alone in the family vault awaits her. Finally she appears to him near a tree. She is dressed in her bridal gown, just as he wanted to see her. They converse for some time; she proves her innocence and commands him to resume the literary career he had abandonned at her suggestion.

That is all there is to the action. It is banal in its simplicity, replete with old tricks, still the presence of Dr Tubal, the 'raisonneur' elevates it to a plane that is far from ordinary. The thought-provoking discussions he has with Robert, make the whole play; in Robert, one finds the questioning gaping world, eager to beleive anything that will amuse and soothe its weary soul....while in Tubal we have Curel himself, who answers all questions

but who, as usual, solves nothing. And why should he?

Dr Tubal, who is in my opinion the protagonist of the play, represents sound sommons sense. He proves clearly to his friend that ghosts and spirits are but hallucinations projected by imagination, by memory, by desire and by the sub-conscious..... by that which is in us rather than by exterior phenomena. The greatest proof of that is that these supernatural visitors never betray the secret of the hereafter; they never have taught anything entirely new, nor have they ever said anything which was not already known,

And, in truth, all the previous explanations of the doctor are verified point for point in the last act. Every word that Clotilde utters, every counsel that she gives, even the declaration of her innocence are but the expression of her husband's dreams. But he will none the less believe that she appeared to him in her wedding gown, and that the dead are granted leave to wander upon earth in order to console those who mourn them.

Robert is just the type for such an adventure. He is a poet, given to over-introspection. In my o-

pinion the second act is by far the most intersting and the most beautifully written. It is in this act that Robert expects the coming of his dead love. He tells very simply the anguish, the terrors, and the strange hopes which fill his thoughts, while the doctor, his confidante, subtle adept of the most recent mental investigation, explains, analyses and dissects his presentiments with the implacable serenity of the savant. All this discussion is done around a tea-table, in a 'fumoir' where all is peace and quiet, except for the turmoil in Robert's soul.

This late dramatic effort of Curel which was given at Le Théâtre des Arts, in Paris, last December, is written with singular ability. It is a much needed comeback from "La Viveuse et Le Moribond", and "La Comédie du Génie" although it does not reach the great heights of "Les Fossiles", and "L'Envers d'une Sainte" Perhaps its greatest merit is that of actuality.

CONCLUSION.

The contemporary theater possesses a distinct characteristic from the old; whereas the latter had as its basis passion, the former is the expression of the intellect. Curel's theater is essentially modern in this respect, for in it we find the intellect converted into passion. The characters start from the rational and gradually descend until they secure the triumph of the irrational. It seems as though their intensity is the result of a slight mental disorder which makes them pursue an abnormal course in life and still do it according to the most lucid logic. The men are obsessed by one great idea and in order to realize it in its plenitude they trample upon everything; there is no obstacle too great to be surmounted, no sacrifice too crushing to undergo, no suffering too anguishing to inflict. Donnat, Michel Prison, Jean de Sancy (Miremont), Paul Moncel, are practically callous to the emotional tragedies they cause, - they are far too absorbed in the ideas which will eventually spell their ruin.

Louise Donnat, Hélène Prinson, Mariette, Marie, La Fille Sauvage, and most of the unfortunate women

of Curel's theater represent unrestrained instinct, the exact antithesis of the clear reason so evident in the men. Unlike the women of Shaw's theater, they are not symbols of a better state of things in the world; they are determined, and resist fate until they reach neurasthania; then, despairing, they readily hover between madness and hysteria. Julie Renaudin is nailed fluttering to a dream of an ideal lover she can never have. Gabrielle, and her other self, Régine, are tortured by a morbid jealousy which includes their very persons. Marie, La Fille Sauvage, creates herself a soul, a mind, an intellect in order to reach the man who has become her god, her all. To him she dedicates all her yearning, all her transformation, only to have his love denied her. Despicable though she becomes, one cannot deny that the following sighs evokes her for her all the tender souvenirs, all the anguishing deceptions she has suffered.

"Je pensais à un oiseau d'Europe." It is a heart-rending cry of melancholy, which in some way atones for

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(1) Maschere Nude, Pirandello, Ed. Bemporad, Firenze.

her excesses.

Like Pirandello's women, Ersilia, (Vestire gli Ignudi)(1) Silia, (Il Giuco delle Parti),[2] La Marchesa Matilde Spina (Enrico IV)[3] La Vita che ti Diedi), the hapless heroines of Curel not only feel, but they reason out their feelings and by reasoning they transfer them to a higher plane of complexity.

The lack of romance, the diabolical pride, the intellectuality as well as the lyrical outbursts of a Donnat are evident in every personnage, whether a "Fille Sauvage", and aristocrat like Claire de Chantemelle , or a finished egotist like Renneval. Like the Knight of the Sorrowful Countenance they are possessed of an extraordinay faith in their ideals; they easily dissolve all the exterior world and create another in accordance with the extravagant ideas with which their minds are filled. They invariably strive to see perfection and realization of dreams where nothing but disillusions and despair await. Like Don Quixote they insist on seeing giants where there are only windmills. But as everything is relative, it little matters whether Don Quixote raves and Sancho tells the truth, so long as the helmet of Mambrino is

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(1) Maschere Nude, Bemporad, Figlio, Firenze, 1928.
(2) " " " " " 1925

(3) " " " " " 1925.

as real to the old Knight as the barber's basin is to Sancho - so long as Régine sees the immortal hero where there is but an exalted egotist, or the de Chantemelle see the future glory for their family in its perpetuation by the means they were forced to adopt.....why should they be wrenched out of their dreams to face the cold world of reality that most of us must look upon day after day?

Perhaps it is in part to condone with the peculiarities of his characters that Curel places them in the strange atmosphere that pervades most of his plays . True enough, the themes , the pharacters, the situations are of a strangeness which is far from ordinary; and therein lies perhaps the greatest merit of Curel's theater. Most of his plays are discursive , too lengthy to play commodiously, and too filled with ideas to grasp well when presented.

In my estimation it is impossible to choose the best of his three great plays. It would be hard for me to say whether I prefer "L'Envers d'une Sainte" to "Les Fossiles" or to "La Nouvelle Idole", for all three are grandiose, startling, brilliant, and exquisitely written,

"La Figurante" stands apart as the play with the cleverst exposition I have ever read. "L'Invitée" is like its sister-play, "La Figurante", very improba-

ble, but distinctive and fascinatingly written. Then comes "Le Repas du Lion", followed by a period of decadence and sterility of inspiration that is surprising. All the later plays, except for "Le Coup D'Aile" and "Terre Inhumaine" are of a banality add an improbability to shock the most gullible of readers. "Orage Mystique", his latest, is obviously the product of senility. There is some vigor in the dialogue of the second act, but the rest is of the sob-sister type of literature that is hard to conciliate with his masterpieces of starkness and stoicism.

"Le Coup D'Aile" and "Terre Inhumaine" because of their treatment of the love and glory of patriotism are remarkable. Cornelian, stark, grand, they have been popular as the themes are very much at the 'portée' of the greater public. Then, there are no tirades, no gigantic characters to baffle or to startle the ordinary audience.

"La Comédie du Génie", "L'Ame En Folie", "Orage Mystique", with their supernatural visitors dissolving in and out of thin air, are too great a tax on the imagination to be thoroughly successful theatrically. Ghosts are hard to visualize

and to see them in the body on the stage always produces a slightly ridiculous and disappointing effect. David Pinski, in "Treasure" ruined an otherwise good play by having spirits walking about the graveyard in the last scene, and they are dressed in the conventional clothese of the inhabitants of the Hereafter. Why must playwrights of talent like Curel resort to the intervention of the supernatural? It seems to me that there are enough subjects to treat upon earth without dragging in other worlds of which we know nothing, in order to spoil what might perhaps be an excellent play. Strange to say, all Curel's "Supernatural" plays are his weakest.

However his influence has been great. It can be felt even in America, where we are reputed to be some forty years behind the literary parade. George Kelley has recently given "Behold the Bridegroom. which is very much on the type of "La Danse devant Le Miroir". But, if we owe anything to Curel we also are indebted to the great Antoine, whose Théâtre Libre permitted young authors to break away from the baneful furrow of the 'great Three'

in order to seek new paths, new mediums of dramatic expression.

François de Curel, possesses the science of Augier, the penetration of Dumas, fils, and the strakness and dramatic flair of Henri Becque; he is the first of his kind and will probably remain the only one, as his background, his education and his financial independence permit him to indulge in his whims and fancies, regardless of the public. Other writers after him will probably try to embroider upon the ideas he has exposed, they may be more successfully dramatically, but I doubt whether they will surpass him in delineating the nuances of strange passions, their aggressive subtilities, their greatnesses, their ecstacies, their greatnesses, their pettiness, their strangeness. So long as there will be a group interested in the human mind, in its sufferings, in its joys, in its anguishes, its hopes, and its deceptions, François de Curel will remain the magnificent innovator, the sower of thought a great lyrical writer, and a psychologist of no mean order, and "Les Fossiles", "La Nouvelle Idole"

and "L'Envers d'une Sainte" will remain long after we are gone as 'gigantic fossils' of our turbulent and restless age.

The End.

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LE REPAS DU LION, 4 acts, Théâtre Antoine, November 26, 1897.
LA NOUVELLE IDOLE. (1899) 3 acts.

LA FILLE SAUVAGE (1902) 5 acts, Théâtre Antoine, February 17, 1902.

LE COUP D'AILE, (1906) 3 acts, Théâtre Antione, January 10, 1906. Rehearsals stopped by Censure in 1915.

LA COMEDIE DU GENIE, 3 acts 8 tableaux, Théâtre des Arts, March 16, 1921.

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L'AME EN FOLIE, 3 acts, Théâtre des Arts, December 23, 1919. Reprise, Théâtre du Gymnase, February 1, 1922.

TERRE INHUMAINE, (1922) 3 acts Théâtre des Arts, 1922.

LA VIVEUSE ET LE MORIBOND, 3 acts, Théâtre des Arts, 1924.

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