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Themes and Dramatic Forms in the Plays of Armand Salacrou

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Juris Silenieks

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in the
Plays of Armand Salacrou*

new series no. 35

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october, 1967

**THEMES AND DRAMATIC FORMS IN
THE PLAYS OF ARMAND SALACROU**

Juris Silenieks

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Forms in the Plays
of Armand Salacrou

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Introduction

ARMAND SALACROU is generally recognized to be one of the outstanding French playwrights whose literary careers began between the two World Wars. Salacrou has written about thirty plays. Many of them have been produced at the leading theatrical centers in Europe, and some have earned success and fame for the author on African and Asian stages. Unlike the other distinguished dramatists of his generation such as Giraudoux, Anouilh, Sartre, and Cocteau, Salacrou's name has remained almost unknown to the theater audiences in this country. A number of his plays have been published in Italian, Spanish, German, Russian, and Japanese translations, but there are no publications in English as yet.

As in the works of his contemporaries—Sartre, Camus, Giraudoux, Anouilh—the major preoccupation of Salacrou is man and his place in the universe. Adumbrating Surrealist moods, Salacrou's first plays are almost totally introspective. They introduce the main themes that with varying intensity are found in his subsequent work. Virtually all of Salacrou's plays inquire into the purpose of man's existence, into man's relationship to himself, to God, and to his past. These themes are interwoven with other problems of a metaphysical nature such as determinism and free will, and at times they reflect the author's search for faith and transcendental values of human existence. Salacrou's preoccupation with universal issues has not changed fundamentally in the course of more than forty years. This persistence of themes has led to some degree of repetition but also has lent unity to Salacrou's theater.

In form and mood, Salacrou's work presents a striking variety. In an unpredictable sequence, Salacrou has produced Surrealist dream plays, realistic character sketches, plays with distortions of reality in the Expressionist manner, hybrids of boulevard theater and naturalism, farces, vaudevilles, a psychodrama, and an approximation of the Brechtian epic theater. The principal purpose of this study is to examine the relationship between the conceptual

content and the various dramatic modes and forms of expression in Salacrou's plays.

To date, a number of books and articles on the theater of Salacrou have appeared. Van den Esch, in his book *Armand Salacrou, dramaturge de l'angoisse*, discusses with authority and perspicacity the themes and aesthetic ideas of Salacrou, but his work does not go beyond Salacrou's prewar plays. Serge Radine's *Anouilh, Lenormand, Salacrou, trois dramaturges à la recherche de leur vérité* presents an excellent analysis of the philosophical content of Salacrou's plays. Pierre-Henri Simon, in his *Théâtre et destin*, investigates Salacrou's ideas and religious themes. Paul-Louis Mignon's *Salacrou* is a comprehensive analysis, with ample biographical and bibliographical material. All these major critical works and the multitude of shorter studies neglect to treat, beyond cursory remarks, the highly interesting relationship between form and content in Salacrou's plays. The present study is an attempt to satisfy that need for a more detailed analysis.

To some degree, Salacrou's work defies neat pigeonholing and labeling. A chronological approach, in regard to the form, is not very revealing. Certain favorite philosophical themes are constantly touched upon, from the first dramatic works to his last play to date. But along with this subjective content, which remains constant, Salacrou's work shows important shifts of emphasis and focus directly related to his personal experiences or to changes in the political and intellectual ambiance. Salacrou's literary début, subjective and introspective, has little social or psychological bearing. But as the author, dissatisfied with the lack of success, begins to experiment with different aesthetic molds, objective realities take on more relief. His plays become more and more impregnated with the preoccupations of a moralist who contemplates the social scene with growing concern. First the social criticism is presented as a somewhat extraneous matter; later the subjective philosophical content becomes vignettes to the social and moral themes. The political realities and their changes in time have also contributed their share to Salacrou's theater. The prewar rise of dictatorships is first only symbolically alluded to in one of his plays written shortly before the war. The problems of freedom that Frenchmen faced under the Occupation are thinly veiled under historical disguise in a vaudeville. Salacrou's best play, *Les Nuits de la colère*, is based on an actual tragedy of a Resistance saboteur. Other plays, dating from the postwar period, offer the author's comment on the intellectual *Zeitgeist*, i.e., Existentialism. A later period of Salacrou's

work shows the author's satirizing attitudes toward his own obsessions. With these developments and shifts, with this varying relation between the subjective content and the impact from the outside, Salacrou's work can best be evaluated by being placed in the context of the political events and changes in the intellectual atmosphere that have influenced these thematic evolutions.

Because of the ever present personality of the author, biographical details corroborate what is found in his work and help explain certain themes and ideas. Compared to Jean Anouilh, who, in answer to a request for biographical details, had declared: "Je n'ai pas de biographie, et j'en suis très content,"¹ Salacrou has volunteered a wealth of information about himself. He has published a book of memoirs, *Les Idées de la nuit*. His plays are accompanied by notes and postscripts which contain bits of news of autobiographical interest, his own criticism, or reviews by critics. Quite obligingly he has cut out the work for his interpreters by describing his most important childhood experiences, his youthful fervor, his early aspirations and hopes. And yet there appears to be an instinctive desire on the part of the author to surround himself with anonymity. All these memoirs and notes disclose what is directly related to his work. Beyond that, Salacrou seems to resent any invasion into his privacy. "A vouloir expliquer l'œuvre par l'homme, on défigure l'œuvre."² In this study, primarily concerned with Salacrou's work, biographical data important and relevant to the analysis of his work are given along with the discussions of the plays. No doubt the author's life, presented in this manner, has little continuity. But the work and the personality behind it will attain, it is hoped, more cohesion.

1 / The Genesis of a Dramatist

ARMAND SALACROU's work is a kind of travelogue of his Odyssey, where, among his conclusions about man's presence on the earth, the author records also his personal experiences. It is through art that Salacrou seeks to communicate and clarify his search for an explanation of man's predicament. It is through art that the young man of sixteen attempted to allay his anguish and to escape his solitude in the fraternal community of his fellow men. The points of origin of the themes that persist in Salacrou's plays can be plotted along the path of his childhood and youth. "J'ai traversé ma vie, enveloppé dans le souvenir de mon enfance, et combien de mes actions, incompréhensibles à mes proches n'ont été que des cadeaux que faisait en passant l'homme que je suis devenu à l'enfant que j'ai été, cet enfant qui m'a toute ma vie accompagné avec tant de surprises et de déchirement."³

Armand Salacrou was born on August 9, 1899, in Rouen. When he was three years old his parents moved to Le Havre. Le Havre has remained for Salacrou the city of his dearest childhood memories. Among his early impressions, Salacrou recalls an awareness of death that suddenly seized the little boy one evening as he was contemplating hortensias in the rain. "C'est là où j'ai eu le sentiment de la mort, non pas de ma mort personnelle, mais de la mort en général, Et j'ai trouvé cela absolument révoltant, et je n'en suis jamais revenu; d'ailleurs, si je n'avais pas eu cette révolte devant la mort, je crois que j'aurais fait une carrière politique."⁴ This theme of a child's cognizance of death and his own existence appears in many of Salacrou's plays. Another experience to which Salacrou attaches lasting significance was the discovery of the theater. One day he accompanied his parents to the Grand Théâtre of Le Havre to see a performance of Gounod's *Faust*. "Je revois encore la salle noire et cette immense ouverture sur un monde inconnu, où le diable surgissait dans un éclair devant mes yeux d'enfant. Je fus ébloui par l'amour, par la mort, par cette possibilité mystérieuse de recommencer sa vie quand on s'était trompé. . . . Je ne dis pas que mon

destin se soit noué ce jour-là. . . . On m'avait jeté dans un autre monde, j'avais vécu un admirable cauchemar. On m'avait ouvert une porte mystérieuse. . . . Mais aujourd'hui encore, il m'est difficile d'admettre qu'une œuvre théâtrale puisse être autre chose qu'une méditation dramatique sur la condition humaine."⁵

Salacrou was born into a Catholic family, but he lost his faith early on reading *Le Catéchisme républicain*. It was a book of large format, filled with naïve lithographs, explaining the universe and its origin in terms of popularized and simplified versions of mechanistic theories. This scientific atheism expressed by the book was sufficient to satisfy the boy's mind. "À dix ans, j'acceptais avec une mystique qui me trouble encore, cette idée de la Mort en trou noir, éternelle. Je savais que le soleil disparaîtrait un jour, comment pouvais-je espérer durer."⁶ When the time of his first communion came, he refused to take it.

These are the childhood experiences and attitudes that Salacrou describes with particular emphasis, no doubt, in order to facilitate the work for the interpreters and critics of his theater, and perhaps to discourage any attempt to invade his privacy. In the light of his subsequent work, it becomes evident that a fascination for the theater, the awareness of one's own existence, the ever present shadow of death, the loss of faith are the most frequent themes in his plays. Many of his characters evoke memories of similar childhood experiences. Of course the perspective is quite distorted if childhood is described solely in terms of its importance for mature age.

At the time of his entrance into the lycée in 1910, another event occurred which oriented Salacrou in his political and social preferences. This was the Durand trial. During a dockworkers' strike, a strikebreaker was killed in a drunken brawl. A few days later Jules Durand, the secretary of the Longshoremen's Union, was arrested. Salacrou's father, member of the Municipal Council of Le Havre, and his friends suspected a plot on the part of the industrialists. Durand was sentenced to death, later pardoned, and in 1918 declared innocent. But the waiting for the execution had so much affected his mind that Durand ended his life in an insane asylum in 1926. "Je crois que toute ma vie d'homme fut marquée par cette terrible 'erreur' judiciaire, vécue dans mon enfance. Je ne pouvais pas l'oublier. Cette expérience que je fis, de la méchanceté et de la bonté des hommes, me servit toujours, presque inconsciemment, d'étalon pour mesurer tous les événements dont je devais être le témoin dans la suite de ma vie." (VIII, 259)

Through his father, a Radical Socialist, Armand became ac-

quainted with workers among whom he particularly likes to recall "my great friend Allan," a crane operator. A close friendship developed between this dockworker and the boy. After school, Armand would visit him on the dock and Allan would talk to him of universal fraternity and happiness of all people. But their visions of a happy future for mankind were cut short by the sudden turn of political events. It was the eve of World War I.

When the war broke out, Salacrou's lycée was transformed into a hospital. The young boys watched transports of wounded soldiers arrive. The war, which was devastating Europe, appeared to Salacrou as an absurd and monstrous accident. With his idealism, moral probity, and austerity, Salacrou found himself a stranger among his schoolmates who, with their duplicity and complacency, loathed him. Encouraged by his history professor, he founded a group called Les Jeunesses Socialistes in 1916. It was not so much political realities that interested the young socialist. He longed to allay his anguish, to escape his solitude in a moment of exalted friendship. "Je rêvais d'un monde fraternel où les hommes, au lieu de se battre et de se mépriser, se tendraient la main pour se consoler de vivre, c'est-à-dire dans mon jargon du temps, pour s'aider à attendre la mort. Le dernier quart d'heure des condamnés à la noyade du *Titanic* chantant des cantiques, dans la nuit glacée, avec un grand calme, sans révolte, solidaires, peut-être heureux parce qu'ils acceptaient enfin leur destin, m'obsédait et c'était dans cette attitude que je voulais vivre avec mes contemporains tous les quarts d'heure de ma vie."⁷

One afternoon, in the summer of 1916, Salacrou went to the station of Le Havre. There in a corner he noticed an old Arab squatting, shivering with cold. The sight of the forgotten exile, alone in his misery among indifferent people, moved the young man. The same day Salacrou described this silent encounter. The short story, "L'Eternelle chanson des gueux," was submitted to *L'Humanité*. After a long period of waiting, Salacrou finally saw his name in print for the first time. He wrote another short story and even composed a novel in the fashion of Romain Rolland's *Jean Christophe*, but both manuscripts were rejected. Salacrou's first literary model was Flaubert. No doubt Flaubert's self-imposed sequestration at Croisset, away from the contemptible bourgeois society, his refusal to be known, to please, his aesthetic asceticism, were objects of emulation for the young man who himself practiced a rather austere way of life, full of idealism, ethically intransigent, away from his complacent schoolmates. But the young man

also longed to communicate and to seek friends. "A vingt ans, je croyais écrire poussé par ce seul besoin de chercher et de trouver des amis. Ecrire pour être aimé. Fuir une solitude. Pour s'oublier. . . . Pourquoi précisément l'écriture? Avec, au surplus, cette volonté de me montrer, dans mes essais littéraires, digne, non seulement de mes jeunes amis vivants rencontrés chaque jour en fin d'après-midi, mais également de mes grands amis morts—et aussi de ceux qui allaient naître!"⁸

Having finished the lycée, Salacrou planned to devote himself to the arts and literature in spite of his father's wish that he continue the pharmacist line in the family. One of Salacrou's uncles, a music professor in Paris, wanted him to enter the Conservatory of Paris. His father, however, insisted on more practical pursuits, and only by agreeing to take up medicine was Salacrou allowed to settle in Paris. Having finished the required courses, he served as *externe* at the Saint-Antoine hospital under Dr. Béchère, a famous surgeon of the time. Although his professional interests were only perfunctory, the personal experiences with the suffering of the cancer patients left a deep imprint on his personality. "En vérité sur ces deux ans d'hôpital, s'est construite toute ma vie d'homme. Trente-cinq années ont passé sans effacer les yeux affolés de cette petite vérolée de vingt ans ni le regard terrible de ce cancéreux abandonné avec ses coups de marteau dans la tête, dans la tête jusqu'à la mort. En ces deux années d'hôpital j'ai appris à vivre avec lucidité, avec calme,—et sans lâcheté car je sens encore dans ma main la main gantée du Patron, cette main qu'il avait brûlée en essayant de guérir, en essayant de comprendre."⁹

At the end of the day, after finishing his professional duties at the hospital, Salacrou frequented the Café d'Harcourt where he learned for the first time the names of Apollinaire, Oscar Wilde, Cocteau. He met Robert Desnos and they became close friends, eager to participate in the literary revolt initiated by Dada. A compelling sense of honesty and sincerity precipitated a crisis that put an end to his medical studies. After the Armistice, his fellow students were preparing for the examinations "tandis que je fréquentais les cafés où l'on découvrait la poésie. Une crise de conscience éclata: 'Un jour, médecin, je serai impuissant devant un malade parce que tous les soirs je lisais Mallarmé au lieu de préparer l'internat?'"¹⁰ Salacrou returned to Le Havre and announced, to the great consternation of his parents, that he would now take up philosophy instead of medicine.

In the summer of 1920, with the newly received *licence de philos-*

ophie, Salacrou spent his vacation in Florence. He was so fascinated by the city and its art that he forgot to continue his trip as he had planned. He became interested in the life and personality of Savonarola from reading Gobineau's *La Renaissance*, and he started to write a play. The results, however, did not satisfy him, and the project remained unfinished, in his drawer, for almost twenty years. Upon his return from Florence, Salacrou applied for a position with *L'Humanité*. Not asked to prove his membership with the Socialist Party, he was hired. Salacrou was in charge of reporting theater news and party meeting schedules. For a while he was assigned to cover a strike in Roubaix-Tourcoing. At the time of the great split of the Socialist Party during the Congress of Tours, Salacrou joined the Communist faction. He was impressed and flattered when he could dine in the best restaurants with his Communist bosses. With his report on the strike, Salacrou had earned about 3,000 francs. When the sight of the miserable, famished strikers became unbearable, he roamed through museums and parks to divert himself. He had abandoned his medical studies when he felt that he was not fully and sincerely committed to the task; now another crisis precipitated his break with the Communist Party. "Oui, il y a une conscience de classe, et seul m'animait un désir de justice. Je n'étais pas réellement un des grévistes affamés; je regardais; je ne m'étais pas jeté parmi eux et je ne m'étais pas fait ouvrier comme eux, avec eux." (VI, 198–199) From Moscow came new directives for strict party discipline. Other interests came to the fore. Having received his diploma of *Etudes supérieures de philosophie*, Salacrou was preparing for a *licence en droit*. He had married a girl from Le Havre. Salacrou resigned from his post at *L'Humanité*. "Non seulement je ne pouvais pas, mais je ne voulais pas oublier mes problèmes individuels. Pour mon repos et mon bonheur, je le regrette encore: le socialisme militant m'offrait une possibilité de vivre dans le monde, de m'accrocher à l'existence. Sans joie, avec déchirement, je quittais le parti comme on abandonne une grande espérance." (VI, 199)

Thirty years later, Salacrou diagnosed very lucidly his short-lived adherence to Communism. "Aujourd'hui, je le reconnais: j'étais ce qu'on appelle un intellectuel petit bourgeois individualiste, qui pensait à ses propres problèmes, et ne savait pas se donner, les yeux fermés, *perinde ac cadaver*, à la cause." (VI, 198) Having witnessed so keenly the injustice of society, having seen the misery of workers, the suffering of the war victims, Salacrou, with all the naïveté of an honest but somewhat unpolitical mind, pinned his

hopes on Communism as a solution for the acute social, economic, and political problems. Communism had the appeal of altruism and martyrdom, of a kind of religious belief in the possibility of a happier future through self-abnegation and sacrifice. On a subjective level, Salacrou longed to seek comfort from solitude, from personal anxieties, in identification with a group, in commitment to a cause. There is also in Salacrou a kind of Romantic belief, a nostalgic vision, in the intrinsic purity of childhood. To preserve this purity, he felt he had to remain true to his early idealism. He resented the pressure and tutelage from Moscow. The centrifugal forces of hatred for intellectual conformity and spiritual inertia won over the attraction of relief from personal anxieties in self-effacing submission to authority. Salacrou quit the party with regret, as an unknown opportunity missed which could have changed his life. "Après cette expérience manquée, je me promis que, par fidélité à ma jeunesse, jamais je n'appartiendrais à un autre parti. Je tins parole: je ne dis pas que ce fut toujours sans regret." (VI, 199)

About the same time, Salacrou gravitated toward the Surrealist movement. But when André Breton assumed leadership, he dissociated himself from official involvement in the movement. Twenty-five years later, overtures were made to Salacrou inviting him to a closer association with the group of writers around Jean-Paul Sartre. Again, Salacrou preferred to stay aloof. Even his administrative posts with the French government and the United Nations were short-lived.

Salacrou's autobiographical references to these years indicate other reorientations and new discoveries of utmost importance in his life and work. The confident acceptance of a materialistic explanation of the world and man was worn threadbare through doubts and inquiries. The studies at the Sorbonne only aggravated the malaise of the intransigent young man who was no longer content to be a link in the chain "du singe au surhomme. . . . Et je ne me contentais plus d'Être pour Être. Alors, je compris la nécessité de Dieu, sans pouvoir croire à Dieu."¹¹ Another experience from his student years throws its shadow on many of Salacrou's plays. By accident he had come across a passage in Tacitus where the chronicler relates the fate of the courtier Sejanus and his family under Emperor Tiberius. Having fallen into disgrace, Sejanus was condemned to death. His son and daughter were thrown into prison. His son suspected what was in store for him, but the young girl did not understand her crime, begged for pardon, promising that she would never do it, whatever it was, again. Since the customs of

the time forbade the execution of a virgin, the executioner raped her before she was strangled and her body thrown to the Gemonies. This account of Tacitus, says Salacrou, "accompagna toute ma vie, comme les prières que les croyants récitent matin et soir. . . . Tibère a d'autres crimes sur la conscience et qui peuvent trouver un sens dans une perspective historique—mais la petite fille? Cette petite fille violée s'est dressée toute ma vie, devant moi, comme le démon de l'absurde, et n'a cessé de m'interroger . . . 'Avec quelles paroles, dans les cris de mon cachot, peut-on expliquer ma vie et ma mort?' . . . J'attends toujours une réponse à ce hurlement de terreur. . . . L'absurdité de sa vie dénonce l'absurdité de la nôtre. Cette mort sans espoir est notre mort." (VI, 205–207) Even in one of his last plays, *Boulevard Durand*, written some forty years later, Salacrou is trying to find an answer which would give meaning to the desperate cries of that young girl raped in the darkness of a dungeon.

In the meantime, as these new quests and doubts were gradually maturing and transforming his youthful ideas, as he realized his failure to integrate himself into a political movement, Salacrou came into closer contact with the seething intellectual atmosphere of the time. Salacrou felt the need for a more mature commitment than the callow pranks à la Dada which he sought together with Desnos. And Dadaism was already on the wane. New tendencies began to assert themselves. Having cleared the air, Dadaism was reborn in a changed form in the Surrealist movement. Salacrou frequented the cénacles that had formed around writers and painters associated with the Surrealist movement. Through his friend André Masson he became acquainted with Michel Leiris, Antonin Artaud, and the last-ditch Dadaist Tristan Tzara. Breton's leadership was openly consecrated by his assumption of the direction of *La Révolution Surréaliste*. The names of Salacrou's best friends appeared in the first *Manifeste du Surréalisme*. His own signature, however, was not there. His vow not to belong to another party, be it even a literary group, must have kept him away from the official Surrealist group. Yet Salacrou's early work reflects some of the Surrealist tendencies and interests.

In 1923, as he was preparing his *licence en droit*, Salacrou spent his afternoons in the café Olympia. Listening to an orchestra, Salacrou let his imagination flow freely. "Je m'accrochais à la première idée qui se présentait et d'images en images, je continuais, en suivant le rythme de l'orchestre, mais sans abandonner une apparence de dialogue. Je m'entraînais, avec une manière d'écriture automatique,

à l'exercice d'une sorte d'antithéâtre de l'époque."¹² In these plays, intended to be read rather than acted, Salacrou conjures up weird images and fantastic forms that pass by in a continuous flow. Creation of these plays for reading ended by a sinister turn of chance. Tristan Tzara succeeded in having them published in a Belgian magazine. In an interview Salacrou gave to an evening paper, he had declared his intention to initiate a poetic theater. "Une coquille déforma cette belle affirmation et je lus que j'avais décidé de consacrer ma vie à la construction d'un théâtre politique. J'étais navré."¹³

It was in the summer of 1923 that Salacrou composed his first play, *Le Casseur d'assiettes*, and submitted the manuscript to Charles Dullin, the director-producer at the Atelier theater. When the picture dealer, Henry Kahnweiler, asked to publish the play, Salacrou got his manuscript from Dullin and found a marginal comment reading: "Intéressant—à relire." A hundred copies of the play were printed, with lithographs by Juan Gris. It was broadcast some twenty years later, and its première took place another ten years later at Leiden in 1954.

Although *Le Casseur d'assiettes* met with scant notice from professional critics, it caught the attention of another director-producer, Lugné-Poe, who gave Salacrou his chance in 1925 with his next play, *Tour à terre*. Originally a one act play, it was divided into three acts by inserting the word "Rideau" to satisfy Lugné-Poe's request for a full length play. The play, misunderstood by critics and spectators, closed after eleven performances. In 1925 Salacrou wrote his next play, *Le Pont de l'Europe*. It was not produced until 1927 and had only two performances. Pierre Veber's review in *Petit Journal* sums up the consensus of the critics after the première: "Ce qui m'a surpris, c'est que l'auteur fait preuve d'un certain sens dramatique. Sachons gré à M. Salacrou d'avoir tenté le grandiose, mais supplions-le de ne plus recommencer." (I, 204)

In October 1925 Salacrou had taken a position with a film company with the vague desire of learning the tricks of the film director's trade. During the dreary months spent in the drudgery of his work, Salacrou lost interest in his literary pursuits, but while vacationing in Caux he managed to complete the composition of his next play, *Patchouli*. Having sent the finished manuscript to the director-producer, Louis Jouvét, at the Athénée theater, Salacrou returned to his work. A friend of his had submitted a copy of the play to Charles Dullin also and he at once agreed to stage it. That evening, celebrating the play's acceptance by Dullin, Salacrou was

congratulated by Jouvet, who also had decided to produce it. But it was Dullin who held on to the play, and with fair auguries it was presented January 22, 1930. Dullin had offered Salacrou employment at the Atelier as a sort of editor. This regular employment, by no means a sinecure, supplemented by an initially meager income from an advertising agency, placed Salacrou on the road to artistic independence. On the eve of the dress rehearsal Dullin had promised Salacrou that he would produce his next five plays. Salacrou had also gained the confidence of Jouvet whose enthusiasm for *Patchouli* was tinged with envy for Dullin. But the première was a complete failure. The public showed itself intolerant and hostile and treated the play with ribaldry and contempt. Dullin fought tooth and nail with advertisements in the papers declaring: "Je crois à Patchouli. Charles Dullin." He engaged several young writers to counterattack the unfavorable reviews. The battle raged with considerable acrimony on both sides. The play was finally dropped after thirty unsuccessful performances.

The beginning of Salacrou's career in the theater was not encouraging. In his private life Salacrou had gained material independence and prosperity through his increasingly successful advertising agency, but he was gnawed by grave doubts about the validity of his aesthetic convictions, especially after the failure of *Patchouli*. Thus, his next two plays, *Atlas-Hôtel* and *Les Frénétiques*, indicate a reorientation in the author's aesthetic credo, a distinct departure from the dramatic modes and techniques that characterize his first four plays.

2 / *Apprenticeship Years of Surrealist Inspiration*

SALACROU'S FIRST four plays, *Le Casseur d'assiettes*, *Tour à terre*, *Le Pont de l'Europe*, and *Patchouli*, form a distinct group in his theater. They constitute an important prefiguration of the themes that are to thread the fabric of Salacrou's subsequent work. The protagonist of these plays is the invariably disenchanted young man, anonymous or named Pierre, Jérôme, or Patchouli, in search of another world more genuine and spontaneous than the shoddy reality that has been revealed to him. In mood, these plays, notably the first, reflect the incoherent atmosphere that characterizes many of the Surrealist experiments in the exploration of man's subjective states. They are couched in a form that more often destroys than reaches the purported aesthetic aim. These plays belong to Salacrou's apprenticeship years, marked by a flagrant disregard for rules and dramatic necessities. Of course, they do not form a thoroughly homogenous group, for the last two of these four plays already gravitate toward more conventional theatrical forms. Thus, *Le Casseur d'assiettes*, the starting point in chronological sequence, is also the most untheatrical play in Salacrou's work.

The action of *Le Casseur d'assiettes* is supposed to take place in the wings of a music hall stage. Chorus girls, clowns, and jugglers appear and disappear with disconcerting swiftness. A young man stumbles onto the stage. Jeered and ridiculed, he feels lost in the jumble of the phantasmagorical procession of people that surround him. He encounters another entertainer, a man who gets his pay for breaking dishes and playing with them "comme Dieu avec les mondes." (I, 32) The young man has taken upon himself the task of unraveling the mysteries of life. He turns to a man who appears playing his musical instruments with a maddening din, like a divinity. He interrogates the dishbreaker, but when the latter explains that he breaks china "comme Dieu vous brise," the young man declares: "Je veux un Dieu bon ou je n'en veux pas." (I, 33) A fireman appears commenting on Genesis: "Dieu a fait le monde et

s'est reposé le septième jour. . . . Il fallait un Dieu pour créer le monde, il fallait le sommeil de Dieu pour qu'y naisse le malheur." (I, 33) "C'est simple," exclaims the young man, "il faut éveiller Dieu." (I, 33) He exhorts everyone to look for God and awaken him. But darkness suddenly descends swallowing up the last echoing shout, "Dieu!"

The young man, whom Salacrou does not care to name, has the function of representing the universal man in his unending quest for the grail of self-knowledge, purity, justice, and meaning in life. But the quest of this young man, forlorn and wretched, is disoriented; the values sought after appear ambiguous and confused. His distress is predicated on his disgust for the world as it has been revealed to him. The world his intellect and reason have taught him is a world of desolate determinism. The young man can only hopelessly and desperately wait for the miraculous intercession of a divine agent, who alone could impart meaning to the naked facts of his contingent existence. This metaphysical quest dwarfs other values into insignificance. The ossified forms of conventions, the banality of the everyday scene can only cause a feeling of irrepressible disgust. Exhausted and disillusioned of life before having really lived it, the young man seeks to quench his thirst for the Absolute in his struggle with God. But since God has refused to reveal the mystery of life, the presence of evil, suffering, and injustice renders the possibility of the existence of a just God unthinkable. The young man challenges and insults God as his equal. He defiantly asks: "Comment veux-tu que Dieu puisse juger un homme? Pour juger un homme, il faut être un homme, et, si Dieu est homme, il n'est plus Dieu." (I, 31) To Salacrou's heroes, a world without a creator would appear more sensible than a universe governed by a Demiurge. This ambiguity of the disease which attacks the soul, caught in the need for God in the absence of God, is the dramatic nucleus in many of Salacrou's plays.

The young man's disgust and despair with life proceeds also from a tormenting sense of his own reality. Cut off from experiencing life as it is by his cerebral dream of what life should be, the young man is inevitably doomed to contemplate the absurdity of his existence. This sense of absurdity rises at the contact point of thought and action. When in response to an imperious inner call to grandeur and heroism the young man only finds the vacuity of a shoddy world, a horrible thought flashes through his mind: "Nous ne sommes que les créations d'un cauchemar divin." (I, 33) The possibility that his own reality is that of an apparition in a

divine nightmare is horrifying and humiliating. But the young man, incarcerated in a kind of solipsism, has no reference point outside his subjective shell to disprove his unreality. Life is but a circus arena, a music hall, and God is either nonexistent or absent from his creation. Thus, unable to assert to himself his own reality, the young man keeps reenacting his absurd role from which there is no escape.

Tour à terre moves along the same thematic patterns. The setting of the play is a seamen's dive. Pierre, an erstwhile sculptor, now a dishwasher in the tavern, has sought refuge among prostitutes and sailors from his obsession for Isabelle. This extravagant creature drives her admirers to perpetrate crimes and spectacular pranks for sheer entertainment and gratification of her whims. To amuse her, Pierre had once derailed a train, and many people had perished in the wreck. With a cohort of her faithful followers, Isabelle arrives at the tavern to retrieve her lost admirer. But Pierre refuses to rejoin her. A policeman comes to arrest him for the derailment. Catherine, a servant in the tavern, attempts to persuade Pierre to escape. As Pierre lets himself be led away, she stabs the policeman. While Catherine and a sailor try to dispose of the "useless corpse," Pierre, his hands still handcuffed, disappears in the dark.

In many respects, Pierre is an older brother of the young man. The same disillusionment with life, the same instinctive pessimism render his human existence unbearable. Never content with the acceptance of man as the one and only value, Pierre insists that a superior order be revealed by which man's existence on the earth can be fully accounted for. It is the same refusal to accept a world which does not correspond to his idea of what it should be. Thought translated into action bears the intolerable mark of imperfection in the world that does not mirror the ambitions of the exalted young man.

Out of despair at his powerlessness to match his aspirations with actions, Pierre swings to the opposite extreme, annihilating his own will and recklessly submitting himself to the whimsies of Isabelle. Isabelle, a vaguely defined personage, appears as a statuesque incarnation of a mixture of symbols. As the apparent embodiment of certain features of femininity, Isabelle flaunts a never satisfied voluptuousness. The archangel of subversion, she makes her suitors engage in constant flouting of authority. But above all, Isabelle is the incarnation of universal absurdity, "qui vous aide tous à passer le temps." (I, 75) It is Pierre's last desperate attempt to

allay his sense of futility and absurdity by plunging headlong into the very midst of the vagaries that life in her entourage can offer him. For a while, Pierre seems to have found equilibrium and purpose in chimeras and purposelessness. But this temptation of self-annihilation by cringing submission to authority can only be ephemeral. The experiment leaves Pierre in deep contemplation of the total disintegration of his life.

Pierre possesses a kind of expansive personality that tends to go beyond the human sphere and to open itself up to an awesome cosmic awareness. A Pascalian anguish enhances the feeling of loneliness in the face of an indifferent and immense macrocosm that dwarfs humans into insignificance. It is a universe that moves silently along a path of infinity, imperturbably perpetuating itself according to its mechanical laws. Pierre has vainly sought to place his aspirations, his will, within the context of this self-sufficient, well regulated machine.

Under the overpowering impact of exaltation and intransigence, Pierre's personality is ground into fragments of contradiction. A certain attraction to intellectual anarchy, denying faith and morality, declaring the valuelessness and absurdity of life, runs up against a nostalgic desire for faith and truth, against a sense of divine imminence. In the midst of his utter despair, nihilism, and moral destitution, Pierre still nourishes a gleam of hope that through a divine imprudence the secrets of life will be unlocked, that one day love will surprise and overpower him. Though never realized, these hopes still tempt Pierre's mind.

Pierre's personality is in a constant state of dialogue and oscillation, and he himself is unable to define it, to understand his acts, and to assume responsibility for them. When the policeman comes to arrest him for the derailment of the train, Pierre insists that the culprit should have been apprehended six months ago, at the time of the crime. It is difficult for him now to identify his present self with that wild man in Isabelle's entourage. In a kind of Pirandellian continual state of flux, the self is developing through the flow of time, modified by new impressions from current experiences, ruminating on the past, projecting itself into the future. Subject to constant change in time, the self is ever outside our grasp. This is also the main problem that Jérôme, the protagonist in *Le Pont de l'Europe*, faces.

Le Pont de l'Europe continues to develop other previously treated themes which now appear in more complex forms. It is

still a work of apprenticeship where vestiges of Surrealist ideas intermingle with Salacrou's most romantic elements. A small European kingdom had accepted as king, according to prophecy, a penniless French student who had one day wandered on foot into its capital. Installed in power, Jérôme, now the omnipotent ruler, marries the late king's daughter and reigns over his small kingdom with the arbitrariness of an erratic, unpredictable sovereign. Jérôme is surrounded by his four court jesters who each represent what he might have become under different circumstances: sub-prefect, academician, concierge, and minister. Jérôme is constantly turning toward his past in search of his true personality. Jérôme's rule is abruptly ended by a revolution during which his queen and son perish, and he himself is forced to flee back to Paris. The small country is again left prey to the intrigues of the high priest who had instigated Jérôme's enthronement.

In this tenuous anecdotal frame the spectator's attention is focused on Jérôme's attempt to recapture his past passions, his dead loves. In order to reconstruct what would have happened had he followed his true inclinations, Jérôme has asked a theatrical company consisting of an actor, actress, and a dancer to come to his palace and to stage his autobiographical play. In his student days Jérôme had been hopelessly in love with the dancer who had not even known him. To his surprise, he finds out that the actress is a former acquaintance who had desperately loved him though her love had not been reciprocated. And superimposed upon this preposterous triangle is the actor's passion for the dancer.

Jérôme is haunted by the limitations that the necessity of choice in life imposes. He would have liked to follow all his inclinations, but once having chosen one, he excludes all other possibilities. It is like standing on a footbridge called the Bridge of Europe, over the multitude of tracks of the Saint-Lazare station in Paris, and selecting tracks to an unknown destination. To decide on something is to impoverish one's being. Jérôme is more filled with regrets for what he has not chosen than determined to pursue what he has chosen. It is his temptation to return to the past junctions and to explore where the other tracks could have led him. For Jérôme, life is only a gradual depletion of his insatiable desire to expand and to embrace all the possibilities that have been presented to him. In his desperate attempt to reach a richer existence, Jérôme turns to art.

As Jérôme's play is being performed it becomes clear that Jérôme hopes to reach, in one rapturous artistic experience, the intensity of feeling that life itself had failed to give him. The play-

within-a-play structure accentuates the Pirandellian quest for the demarcation lines of art and life. Since Jérôme's play is autobiographical as far as he, the actress, and the dancer are concerned, the transitions from the outer play to the inner play and vice versa are sometimes imperceptible and confused. The characters live on twin levels of existence which fuse and overlap because they impersonate themselves. The script at times becomes unnecessary and actual conversations intermingle with the play's speeches. The inner play even transcends its sphere and affects the reality of the outer play. Through the performance of Jérôme's play, the actor understands that he has ruined his life by his passion for the dancer. Playing the role of Judas, he identifies himself so closely with the character he portrays that, with a feeling of guilt for his own life, he hangs himself. A cardboard prop dagger accentuates the subtle interplay of life and art. At one moment Jérôme, carried away by his exaltation, grabs it to stab the dancer. But, ashamed, he immediately realizes that it is just a theatrical prop that cannot affect life. The same dagger, however, when needed to cut the rope to release the actor, cannot save his life. Jérôme, at the beginning of the performance, asks: "Can one truly live one day one's role?" The actor dies in it, but Jérôme fails to live it.

Retrospective as he is, Jérôme is haunted by the image of his past which has been left incomplete, indefinite, and not fully lived. As a poor student once having timidly admired the famous Spanish dancer Mercédès Carcinta, Jérôme is anxious to awaken this old inclination and to transform it into an exalted, passionate love. In the empty royal theater, in order to reserve the spectacle for himself alone, Jérôme orders Carcinta to dance. Then, as if to fear the passing of this exalted moment, he makes her remain motionless. "Je suis là en face de moi-même." (I, 141) His past invades his present with such a force of illusion that for a brief moment he experiences a kind of extratemporality. Suffused by overpowering emotions, Jérôme, with an exalted shout, "Aime!" rushes upon the dancer to stab her, as if to assure perpetuation of this climax in the eternity of death. She snatches the cardboard prop away from him. Although quite flattered to become the mistress of the king, Carcinta can only lukewarmly respond to Jérôme's exaltation. And he sadly concludes: "C'était un vieux compte que je voulais régler. J'ai compris que je ne t'avais pas aimée, autrefois, comme je le pensais." (I, 143)

Having failed to reach a sustained resuscitation of his passion for the dancer, Jérôme plunges into another experience of his past.

The actress turns out to be the little girl whom he had briefly met in a street and had soon forgotten. But this unexpected second encounter is also a failure. He realizes that he is too frail to engender truly eternal emotions, and anything less than that does not interest him. By writing his play, Jérôme has attempted to give his personality the fixed mold that only artistic characters possess in the eternity of art. Having abdicated life, he hopes to enhance his passions and emotions by transforming them into art. But art cannot give the sustained state of exaltation that Jérôme is seeking.

Jérôme, the king, the absolute arbiter of his subjects, is the same disoriented spiritual outcast as are Pierre, the dishwasher, and the anonymous young man. The human is only a galling fetter to him. At times unregenerate, at times merely atheistic, he never ceases to expect a divine revelation from God in whom he does not seriously believe, but whose necessity hovers imperiously over his mind. Like Pierre, Jérôme is also endowed with a cosmic awareness, longing to escape his role, to identify himself with the universe and to dissolve himself in its infinitude. Longing to detach himself from his human existence, Jérôme would like to view, from above, with a cosmic indifference, the insignificant ant-hill bustle of the world and his own plight. He suffers from the feeling of being chained to the earth to play his role in the tragic farce of the humans.

A false dénouement is suggested toward the end of the play. When, the morning after the performance, the queen finds Jérôme exhausted and lonely, slumping in a chair on the stage, it becomes clear that Jérôme's descent into his past to find emotional repletion has ended in failure. Although he had succeeded in deflating his past illusions, art itself proved to be only an inadequate substitute for life. He realizes that gathering the shards of his life can only be a fruitless pastime. "Il n'est de salut possible que dans la recherche de ton salut impossible." (I, 172) He becomes aware that the warm and solicitous love of the queen can bring him back to life from the desolate cold of his self-imposed solitude. But their plans to start life anew are cut short by the external political events that have caught up with them. Life has taken revenge on her renegade. The embers of unrest that Jérôme had judged trifling have been fanned into a successful revolution that takes its toll: his queen and his son. At the moment of his possible regeneration to life and reality, Jérôme is crushed never to trust life again. The four court jesters, each of whom represents an unfulfilled aspiration of his existence, are now joined by another companion of their kind on their way to exile and doom.

The three adventures of the young men have ended in failure: Jérôme founders in his attempt to resuscitate his past in order to live the present in a sublime state of intense feeling; handcuffed, Pierre disappears in the dark, leaving behind him the corpse of a policeman whose murder has been as useless as Pierre's own life; the shouts of the anonymous young man, "Let's awaken God," arouse no one; Patchouli will make one last effort to make his life meaningful through love.

Patchouli is preparing his doctoral dissertation on the Second Empire. He is so completely immersed in his research that life, as he sees it in the smug bourgeois environment of his family, is dull against the splendor and excitement that memoirs of the past offer him. Patchouli is fascinated by a certain countess Borelli, who had consistently refused the advances of a young nobleman of her time. Like the bandy-legged king, Jérôme, Patchouli is haunted by the limitations of his existence. Life is but a series of choices, and to choose is the condition of existence and action, yet each choice that is made is also an elimination of a multitude of unknown possibilities. Of all possible choices, Patchouli had sorted out love as the metaphysical axis, because love can make a life "ouverte sur l'inconnu." (I, 232)

As the play unfolds disillusion is piled upon disillusion, and at the end Patchouli faces an empty life, void of meaning and depleted of hope. Patchouli's fascination for the countess quickly subsides when he meets her in real life. She has become a decrepit, grotesque cocotte. Patchouli discovers the fatuity, gaudiness, and lack of sincerity in the comedy that she and her suitor prince played. Patchouli rejects the love his mistress offers him and flees his home. In a squalid café, Patchouli, no longer interested in history and in the affairs of his family, leads a life of misery and of complete moral degradation. He rebuffs her mother's pleas to return home. Cured of his illusions about love, he has turned to painting in his futile hope of provoking the unknown to reveal itself to him. Finally he is hired by a film company to play a daredevil scene in a lion cage, but even braving death does not provoke the exaltation Patchouli is seeking. Refusing fantastic offers from the film company, he disappears, cast out to an unknown fate. Finding nothing in love and life that corresponds to his exacting ideas, Patchouli can only dejectedly conclude: "Quelle expérience manquée."

Patchouli concludes Salacrou's apprenticeship years. The balance

of this preparatory period was not encouraging for the young author. If some critics sensed an original poetic talent and a sincere desire to create a serious theater, they all, in unison, deplored the lack of artistry and craftsmanship. Salacrou's early plays are marked by an incongruity between form and content. The non-realistic form of these plays creates an alienating outer shell which prevents the deeply emotional content from establishing contact with the spectator. Wondering whether it is a strange parody, as the style usually suggests, or a truly emotional situation, the spectator keeps himself at a distance in order not to be trapped by a theatrical fraud. But he must be induced to become an accomplice, as Salacrou will later insist, to insure success.

The extravagant locale—imaginary countries with feudal traditions, cabarets and hangouts, the stage of a music hall with its squalor of life, the film studios bustling with rapacious businessmen—does not produce a feeling of immediacy. The setting does not complement the intensity of the inner conflicts of the characters. It rather fades into an almost burlesque backdrop which jars against the mood and the dramatic intent of the plays. In the chronological sequence of these four plays the milieu, however, tends to become more realistically portrayed. In *Le Casseur d'assiette* the setting has its importance as a symbolic representation of the chaotic, purposeless world. All manifestations of environment are grotesquely misshaped. The play fails to evoke this supposedly tragic incompatibility of the intense inner reality of the hero with the cruel unreality of the objective world. The young man with his metaphysical cerebration appears as affected as the shoddy world whose victim he is supposed to be. The spectator must abandon his own perspective and see the world through the eyes of the protagonist. This, however, could be very difficult, for it takes a highly imaginative mind to adopt the eccentric attitudes of the protagonist. In *Le Pont de l'Europe*, one of the themes is the conflict of life versus art. The representation of the setting is of great importance to create the illusion of reality. But the play is wrapped in a murky atmosphere of unreality and symbolism. Without the indispensable suggestion of reality, the conflict remains verbal and abstract. With *Patchouli* it is possible to notice a tendency to adopt certain conventional forms with touches of popular bourgeois naturalism and traits of the boulevard theater. Indeed, the setting of the first act may suggest a typical bedroom farce. Of course, *Patchouli* is not a concession on the part of the author to approach the lowest denominator of Parisian theater goers, but the flouting of theatrical traditions

does not display that air of flagrancy that, to a certain extent, characterized Salacrou's first three plays.

The plots of these plays contain very little external action. They are all more or less dialogued philosophical inquiries, static and forensic. Long intellectual discussions on the meaning of love and life, with a tendency to overindulge in verbal slight-of-hand, generate little action. Inner conflicts or clashes between different attitudes are not translated into external movements, but quite often merely into violent gestures of inconsequence. Everything seems to occur in a turgid atmosphere of nightmarish incoherence. Of course, *Patchouli* tells a story and suggests a more definite social and psychological context than *Le Casseur d'assiettes* where there is no logical sequence of action and really no plot to speak of. But all these four plays, with their exploration of subjective states of mind, neglect external manifestations of life.

Typical of the age of Expressionism and Surrealism, Salacrou's characters are psychologically flat and angular. The author pays little heed to verisimilitude and psychological probability. Drawn in heavy lines to emphasize the categories they stand for, the characters are vehicles of ideas or personifications of obsessions. None of the characters is real enough to come alive in the spectator's mind. With all his suffering and mental anguish that could very well characterize a noble soul, the hero remains distant and coldly intellectual. His suffering evokes little pity and his ecstasy appears to flow from sheer prolixity. He only reveals and discusses his inner problems, relates everything to himself, and regards antagonists and friends as mere mirrors of himself or visions of his extravagant mind. For the most part, minor personages are restricted to roles of choric functions, or they may offset with their vulgarity, frivolity, or villainousness the loftiness of the protagonist. Infrequently, they simply supplement the setting.

All in all, Salacrou, with these four plays, displays his genuine intent to create a serious theater. The plays indicate the awkward inadequacy of artistry of the beginner who is searching for the proper medium of expression. *Le Casseur d'assiettes* was written as a kind of Surrealist exercise in automatic writing, exploring the uncertain state between dream and wake. With the following plays Salacrou veers off from the Surrealist course of interest and investigation. Yet the theater for him remains closely bound up with his subjective states of mind.

Before the première of *Tour à terre* Salacrou published an

"Interview de l'auteur par lui-même" where the author and the characters of his first four plays ramble on about various subjects. Salacrou asserts the sovereignty of the author whose sole responsibility rests on his sincerity to his own ideas. Since the public also has the right to demand satisfaction of its tastes, so much the worse, if the two, the author and his public, never meet. The author is invariably incarcerated in himself, and the characters are only facets of the more complex personality of their creator. But once having come into existence, projected through the subjective prism of the author's personality, the characters gain independence and self-sufficiency. To artistic creation is relegated the role of a Goethean process of "Werthercatharsis," whereby the author rids himself of his obsessions. He reminds one of the characters: "N'est-il pas suffisant que tu te sois tué un soir devant moi, pour m'épargner, qui sait, un suicide inutile?" (I, 42)

Before the première of *Le Pont de l'Europe*, the critics received copies of another dialogued preface. Written at Schönbrunn, the preface is dated July 1926. It constitutes the most important enunciation of Salacrou's early aesthetic ideas. The tone of the preface is quite violent at times, reflecting perhaps the bitterness of the author after his failure with *Tour à terre*. It appears that Salacrou's disappointment was not due to the fact that the play had only eleven performances. He seems to be more affected by the lack of reaction to it. The preface represents a renewed effort on the part of the author to communicate what the theater means to him. It reveals also that certain reformer's zeal to make a clean slate for the future by sweeping away all the triviality that he sees in the contemporary productions. The author deplores the indifference with which the Parisian playgoer receives new ideas and young authors. He denounces the critics, these perfunctory mercenaries, sluggish and unsympathetic, who are always out of step with more progressive ideas. In this atmosphere of staleness authors turn out plays in series, utilizing the old recipes and adding some spicy reference to the contemporary scene. Authorship is reduced to the level of a lucrative trade. With a flourish, Salacrou peremptorily declared: "Le théâtre n'est pas en décadence; il est mort. Ce qui trompe, c'est que quelque chose qui l'imité se joue encore sur les scènes fréquentées. Le théâtre meurt d'être trop et mal aimé. . . . Il n'est pas attaqué de l'extérieur par le ciné ou le music-hall, il est rongé, moisi, pourri de l'intérieur."¹⁴ Salacrou's prime concern seems to be to detach his own work from any specific context of observed life, from any utilitarian considerations one might derive

from a work of art. He dismisses with disdain those who attempt to make literature a study of human nature. For him, his characters are only contemplations of his own subjective states. A play creates its own sphere of existence, self-sufficient and self-contained, independent of, or sometimes only accidentally coinciding with, the outer forms of reality. It also creates its own laws, according to which its poetic truth and reality can be judged.

Salacrou's palette for the panoramic view of the French theater in the twenties contains almost exclusively dark tones. The tableau is too visibly tinged with the author's personal anxieties and cannot be considered an attempt to give an objective account of the period. Below the surface of poetic rhetoric, the preface echoes the disquietude of an intransigent youth in search of a metaphysical axis. The mechanistic determinism became inadequate to account for his own existence. The search for faith ended with the discovery of God's nonexistence. Thus, the meaning of the theater for the young playwright who saw himself so poignantly at odds with the rest of the theatrical world had deep metaphysical ramifications: "Il ne faut chercher dans mes pièces que ce que j'y cherche moi-même: un moyen de surprendre une imprudence divine."¹⁵ It is in the theater that he hoped to find his personal salvation.

As Salacrou came to recognize it, the theater cannot be a purely subjective and individual enterprise. A play leaving the hands of its author is still incomplete, for the final phase of creation takes place on stage, and the play's artistic reality is consecrated by the public. In his youthful intransigence to follow only the dictates of his most sincere inner convictions, the young author produced plays that met with indifference and ribaldry. Unfettered by the scenic necessities and the discipline that dramatic conventions impose, he had also written plays for reading. But these plays for reading could not give the excitement of the premières, the gratifying feeling that others complete what he had started, the tantalizing sensation of the ever present searching eye of the spectator. Salacrou's temperament forced him to resolve the dilemma he was facing. He felt he had to find a public. New hopes rose with the prospect of collaborating with Jouvet. Although in the end it turned out to be an unsuccessful adventure, writing for Jouvet gave him a new impetus, oriented the two plays that date from this period in a distinct direction.

3 / *The Jouvet Temptation*

IN SPITE of the failure that his first plays encountered before Paris audiences, Salacrou was highly regarded by the avant-garde metteurs en scène. Jouvet, who had missed his chance to stage *Patchouli*, was promised by the author and Dullin that the next play would be awarded to his company. Salacrou's association with Jouvet marks another distinct period in his career in the theater.

Salacrou wrote two plays, *Atlas-Hôtel* and *Les Frénétiques*, that were inspired to some degree by the tone of the great director's productions. Paradoxically, the two plays Salacrou wrote specially for Jouvet were produced by Dullin. Salacrou hoped to reach a larger public through Jouvet's company. But Jouvet was doubtful about Salacrou's appeal to his audiences. The first draft of *Atlas-Hôtel* was written in 1928, but after the failure of *Patchouli* in 1930, Salacrou took himself to a provincial town to rewrite the play for Jouvet.

In the postscript to *Atlas-Hôtel*, reminiscing about the genesis of the two plays, Salacrou admits that the task of writing for a particular company, although flattering, intimidated him. The work did not spring from an "inner necessity"; the characters were no longer "reflections of my soul," as he had insisted in the preface to *Tour à Terre*, but borrowings from his personal observations when he was working for a film company. In an African desert Salacrou had encountered the prototype for the hero in *Atlas-Hôtel*. The man had told him about the construction of his peculiar hotel in the middle of the desert and its destruction by a storm, and then they had spent the evening together in the tent of a Caïd. Although, while actually writing the play, Salacrou did not consult the notes he had taken during the interview with the strange innkeeper, he later discovered that he had incorporated into his play, verbatim, many of these statements.

Having read the finished manuscript, Jouvet was quite pleased with it. Yet he was hesitant to start rehearsals before the author

himself explained, justified, or defended passages which Jouvét thought faulty. When Jouvét pointed out certain deficiencies of a particular scene, Salacrou wholeheartedly agreed, and after several meetings Salacrou convinced Jouvét that his play was unfit for production. Jouvét dropped the project. And so it was Charles Dullin, to the tardy regrets of Jouvét, who staged the play after all.

In the postscript to *Les Frénétiques*, Salacrou admits that while working on the play he kept wishing that it could be performed by Jouvét's famous quintet. After the first reading of the play, Jouvét was quite eager to stage it. But then he was cautioned that everyone would recognize in Lourdalec, the protagonist, an influential Parisian personality. Jouvét had advised Mme Salacrou to ask her husband to make his hero a wholesale sardine dealer. But Salacrou remained adamant. Thus the play was again staged by Dullin, and the attempted collaboration came to naught.

The focal point of the story in *Atlas-Hôtel* is its central character Auguste, the owner, designer, and constructor of the curious, half-finished hotel rising suddenly out of the desert sands. A hotel without a roof, without glass in the carved window frames, with a fig tree growing out of the yet-to-be casino floor. The play is a kind of psychological study of a visionary. The plot of the play develops with the usual improbabilities of Salacrou's plays. A film company looking for scenic views happens to visit Auguste's hotel. This chance meeting brings together the millionaire novelist and director of a huge industrial concern, Albany, and Augustine, Auguste's devoted wife. Augustine was formerly Albany's wife, before he abandoned her. Albany, playing on Augustine's pity for his suffering and solitude, attempts to wheedle her away from the desert and her eccentric husband. Feeling qualms about leaving Auguste, Augustine is also tempted by the memories of her past married life with Albany to recommence what was so abruptly broken off by Albany's sudden departure. Auguste, unaware of his wife's dilemma, spends the evening with a film operator, Toto, in the tent of a neighboring Caïd. Carried away by his visions of displacing the center of the motion picture industry from Hollywood to his famous hotel, Auguste even buys the adjacent mountain from the Caïd with the money which he, right on the spot, borrows from Toto. The Caïd turns the money over to Auguste, who is his purveyor of drinks. When, the next day, Albany comes to negotiate the purchase of the hotel, Auguste finds himself cornered by Albany's intrigues with the police and his creditors. Augustine sud-

denly feels pity for her husband and helps him stave off Albany's threats. A storm breaks out sweeping away Auguste's half-finished and imagined projects. At the end Albany is won over, seeing so much magnanimity, determination, and purity, and he promises to rebuild the hotel and reinstall Auguste in his imaginary empire.

The entire plot revolves around the character of Auguste and the confrontation of the business world of Auguste with that of Albany. A kind of business prophet and poet, Auguste subsists entirely on his visions, which give him a deeper sense of reality than the bare walls of his thirty-four unfinished hotel rooms or the endless days of plodding, carting away soil for his hotel. His visions are explosions of a torrential energy which expends itself on unrealizable projects to amass money. For him, all things derive their meaning from their business potentiality, but the practicality of his visionary enterprises concerns him little. While dreaming of displacing the business axis of the world, Auguste has to cut up his telephone wire to make forks for his guests. Looking at a glass of water, he conceives a great plan for another Vichy mineral water plant. But Auguste's quixotism does not verge on sheer madness. Below the surface of what may look like a buffoonish, chimerical spirit, there is a tragic undertow. He is another Don Quixote, pilgrim of the absolute. Auguste, the poet, pure in heart, is always tempted by the impossible, by the exertion of superhuman efforts. When he is crushed under the brutal force of Albany's machinations, with changing perspectives, what may have appeared as eccentric visions turns into lofty aspirations of a noble soul.

Albany has also been a poet. Having amassed a fortune with his best sellers, now he only signs the pages which his hirelings turn out for him. Through unscrupulous publicity stunts Albany has become a millionaire, for whom everything under the sun, including the enthusiasm of his youth, is venal. He hopes that his money will buy him back the happiness, purity, and love that he threw away in order to be successful. The hardened businessman's conversion over to Auguste's idealism appears almost as an ironic twist by the author. Exacting compromises and concessions, life is but a gradual falling away from the once sacred ideals of the untainted youth. At the crossroads of their unknown futures, Salacrou's heroes face an inevitable sinking into the corruptness of the world, or they perish with a flourish in a futile revolt. In Salacrou's universe contrition has no redeeming effect. Everything in this world seems to be doomed to defeat, and even God himself must realize that his creation is a failure. To accept failure as an inevitable human pre-

dicament is a sign of grandeur. Auguste must accept his failure in his visionary empire, for, if there one day rises a new Atlas-Hôtel, it will not be his. Albany must realize that one's past, congealed in its irreversibility, is not amendable. A rebirth to a new life, a return to youthful purity, can only be an ironic intimation of a vain hope.

A new facet of Salacrou's talent becomes evident from this play. An attentive observer of comic elements in human behavior, Salacrou makes humor flicker throughout the play. The three thousand francs change hands so rapidly from Toto to Auguste to the Caïd, back to Auguste, and then almost into the pocket of Albany, that it is almost impossible to determine who is the loser and who has gained what in exchange for what. The clash between the two extreme types of businessmen, between the impractical, amusing eccentricities of Auguste and the brutal cynicism of Albany, emits sparks of humor, though sometimes ferocious and mixed with tragic undertones. Amusing situations arise when oriental sophistication and nomadic cunning, raciness, and indolence hobnob with European busyness and greed. Lucien Dubech's remark surprised even the author himself: "Serait-ce donc que M. Salacrou, comme tous les pessimistes raisonnables, serait né auteur comique?" (II, 102)

Like *Atlas-Hôtel*, *Les Frénétiques* is constructed on a central figure around which orbit the other characters deriving their meaning and sphere of action from this figure. It is the frenzied world of the movie industry mogul, Lourdalec, with his ruthless struggle for primacy in business and total autocracy over his empire. The opening scene of the play could have come from a saccharine operetta: a newly-wed couple sings a sentimental duet in the romantic décor of a restaurant arbor. Max Morand, the famous director for the Lourdalec film industry, and his bride have fled the wedding festivities in order to get away from their relatives and friends. With the knowledge of a man of the world, Max vows to himself to guard his wife in perpetual sequestration against the malignities and stains of life. He longs to rediscover in the image of his wife's purity the idealism of his own youth. This idyllic scene is suddenly disrupted by the fanfaronade of his intruding boss, the powerful Lourdalec himself, accompanied by his wife Elisabeth, a movie star, and by his kowtowing secretary. After a loud aside to his secretary about the psychological advantages a solicitous boss may gain over his subordinates, Lourdalec bestows upon Max a Légion d'Honneur. For it is important that his name and picture, together with Max's, appear the next day in the newspapers as a reminder of the victory

gained over his political opponents. When Lourdalec and his clamorous entourage have left, the arbor is invaded by guests and employees of the restaurant, all seeking to wheedle from Max a promise of a role in his future films. In a surge of rage Max is ready to throw them out, when all of a sudden the sentimental bridegroom is transformed into a talent-seeking film director. Noticing the photogenic features of the waiter, Max invites him to sign a contract the next day. After six months the waiter will be a film celebrity under the name of an exiled Russian prince, Radyski.

Six months later Elisabeth has succeeded in convincing Max's wife, Jacqueline, that Max could not subsist on their petty conjugal happiness. Elisabeth suggests deceit and jealousy as the most effective means of maintaining her husband's faithfulness, and thus Jacqueline will become a film star. Lourdalec is suspicious of Elisabeth's machinations; but, curious to know her ulterior motives, he consents, over Max's pleas against it, to engage Jacqueline in the next film. From a cabin Max and Elisabeth watch film strips of a love scene between Jacqueline and Radyski. Max reproaches her for having dragged Jacqueline into the frenetic world of his profession. Elisabeth's design becomes clear: ten years ago in Hollywood it was Max who had lightheartedly flirted with other women, callously disregarding Elisabeth's feelings. Their former love affair is portrayed in a flashback scene played on the back of the stage, while the present recedes into the dark. When the action returns to the present, Max is already infused with jealousy and despair. Directing a scene, between a cuckold husband and his faithless mistress, played by Radyski and his wife, Max is no longer capable of distinguishing art from life. For him the story in the film is identical to his own life. Lourdalec, having found out Elisabeth's motives, expels her, and the once-celebrated actress is obliged to leave the studio in a streetcar. She is quickly followed by Max who refuses to direct the film and is thrown out by Lourdalec. Jacqueline becomes Lourdalec's tenth wife.

The play ends with a dismal failure for everybody. Max can only follow in the footsteps of a Pierre, or a Patchouli to the anonymous desolation of a wretched being who cannot even profit from his experience. Elisabeth, another outcast, is unable to reap the fruits of her vengeance, for her life, too, is wrecked. And even Lourdalec, at the height of his power, is left alone, more than ever chained to his ambitions and obsessions. Victims of an ineluctable and hopeless fate, they remain enclosed in their individual suffering like a tortoise in its shell. They suffer alone because they have not been able to

communicate to others what they want other people to share with them. Max's inconsiderate philanderings had destroyed Elisabeth's love. Jacqueline had failed to understand Max. When Lourdalec and Elisabeth, after years of their cynically calculated symbiosis, discover that they may have sympathy and understanding for each other, when they discover that neither is too insensible to repress his feelings with impunity, it is too late. Lourdalec cannot afford to retract his orders for fear that this indecision and sympathy be interpreted as a sign of weakness.

The imposing stature of Lourdalec looms large throughout the play. With contemptuous and cynical gestures he rules over his empire, crushes mercilessly his enemies and even his friends when they turn out to be useless. The advantages and drawbacks of his marriage with Elisabeth were as coldly weighed as any other business proposition, and their marital relations are based on profitable business partnership. Every move, every word, whether a gesture of charity, friendship, or wrath, is calculated to enhance his superiority, to increase his political and economic power. But the price of his success and power is the indomitable solitude which envelops those who deny themselves. He can only do what increases his power and prestige. In Elisabeth he had hoped to find a being who could understand him. During their final meeting, when Elisabeth is already expelled from his house, for a moment Lourdalec falters on the brink of indecision. Underneath this cold, calculated inhumanity and brutality there are deeply human touches of the barely visible misery of this obsessed man who is also lucid enough to perceive the nothingness of all his efforts. Unlike the other rebellious heroes who succumb to anxiety and despair, Lourdalec finds his self-justification in violence, in a certain satanic malevolence that insure to him his own existence.

Max's family resemblance to the young man in *Le Casseur d'assiettes* is quite evident: the same preoccupation with the conundrums of human existence; the same expectation of a mantic intercession that will deliver him from his metaphysical obsessions; the same exaltation and temptation to regain the Paradise lost. Max is willing to stake his entire life and the meaning of it on the purity of love. If the young man's waiting for a miracle dissipated in utter futility, Max seems to be on the way of discovery that the miracle has appeared in the image of his wife's innocent youth. If the young man and his like never succeeded in escaping the absurd role they felt to be playing, Max, through a mysterious transfer of personality and identification, hopes to become another, to be reborn into the

purity of his wife. But miracles do not happen in Salacrou's universe. When Elizabeth's insinuations of Jacqueline's infidelity have overpowered the sensitive man, he is completely unable to control his feelings. While directing the scene where the cuckold discovers his mistress's adultery, art and life become so indistinguishable for him that he seeks the answer to his burning question in the film. Max, dissatisfied with the mechanical and uncertain gestures with which Radyski portrays his part, only has to give vent to his feelings to demonstrate a fully convincing scene. When Jacqueline, in her role as the faithless woman, gives a superb expression of fear and shame, the illusion of authenticity is so heightened that Max interprets the scene as Jacqueline's inadvertent admission of her guilt. The rehearsal ends in bedlam, as Max, carried away by the illusion, punches Radyski. When the Klieg lights fade out, Max's jealousy has also subsided, and in a desperate attempt to mend his marriage he asks Jacqueline to flee with him. But she rebuffs him, and Max receives a note from one of his informants that affirms what the mirror of art had suggested. His last hope of finding life meaningful is shattered. Like Pierre, Jérôme, and Patchouli, Max disappears into the darkness.

Les Frénétiques shows Salacrou's first experiments with scenic time. The technical innovation consists in the flashback scene that takes the spectator ten years back, to Hollywood at the time of Elisabeth's liaison with Max. Placing this flashback scene in the middle of the third tableau, Salacrou has gained certain advantages over a merely chronological arrangement of events where the flashback scene, as the opening tableau, would have only served as an exposition to delineate Elisabeth's relationship with Max. But situated as it is, before the climactic moment when Max discovers Jacqueline's infidelity, in addition to its expository values the scene promotes the plot by preluding the theme of faithlessness and by arousing Max's regret and disgust with his own behavior in Hollywood. Max is thus conditioned to be susceptible of jealousy.

This is Salacrou's earliest attempt to transcend the logical limitations of chronological time and to treat time according to the poetic necessities of the play, independently of the laws of objective reality. The experiment is quite successful because the organic unity of the play seems to be enhanced by the rearrangement of the sequence of events. This flashback scene is not only a technical device to facilitate a skillful arrangement of a narrative. Salacrou's heroes constantly pry into their past in order to define its relationship to the present and to their own personalities. Pierre had sought

refuge from the image of his past among sailors and prostitutes as a dishwasher in a bar. Jérôme's case is more perplexing. Rueful over a past not lived with intense emotion, he is also incapable of dispelling that sense of irreality with which he lives his present. Suspended between an incomplete past and an unreal present, Jérôme, however, is more attracted by the enigma of his past than by the precariousness of his present. But life takes its revengeful toll. Emerging from his unsuccessful plunge into the past, Jérôme faces a destroyed existence. When Max has reviewed his past, he helplessly asks: "Que puis-je faire, aujourd'hui?" Elisabeth's answer enunciates one of the basic themes of Salacrou's plays: "Rien. Le passé, voilà le véritable enfer, on n'en sort jamais." (II, 167) The past can rarely bring a moment of felicity and yet there is no escape from it. No merciful oblivion can liquidate these poignant recollections which Elisabeth and Max are destined to drag along forever.

This constantly retrospective state of Salacrou's characters has a kind of metaphysical implication. In search of the truth and the absolute, they distrust the fleeting moments of the present, while their past, congealed in their minds, never amendable, exists outside the contingencies to which they are subject. Even God is incapable of altering an iota of that which is indelibly imprinted in their consciousness. Thus, it is through these painful recollections that Salacrou's protagonists assert their own reality, constant and inalterable—absolute. And the author, so often placing his dramatic situations in this twilight of past and present, creates an atmosphere of immutability, of completeness where everyday expedients are of no avail and masks fall off as useless props.

If the thematic affinities of *Atlas-Hôtel* and *Les Frénétiques* with Salacrou's previous plays are easily recognizable, the structure of these two plays reveals significant differences. Salacrou himself makes an interesting distinction: he calls his early lucubrations "plays condemned by critics," whereas *Atlas-Hôtel* and *Les Frénétiques* receive the somewhat denigrating designation "commissioned plays." As the notes added to the two plays indicate, the author more or less consciously tailored them to fit his image of Jovet and his famous actors. Most critics quite justly call this period Salacrou's experiments with realism. But it is realism in a restricted sense. If the characters of Salacrou's early plays move in a vague and quite irrelevant social and economic context, *Atlas-Hôtel* and *Les Frénétiques* present a definite environment which is indispensable for the specific location of the characters and for the delineation

tion of their sphere of action in a material world. It can even be said that the environment reveals itself as a source of conflict. The business world with its cutthroat competition becomes a determinative factor for the characters of Lourdalec and Albany. It is a conditioning element and a reality to be reckoned with by the other characters. But the author makes no attempt to present environment faithfully and in its minutest details. Throughout both plays environment is caricatured, distorted, and concentrated in its most spectacular manifestations, neglected in its more commonplace aspects. The décor of the first tableau in *Les Frénétiques* is mawkishly idyllic; the studio scenes, set in maddening hubbub, are wantonly exaggerated almost beyond recognition. The local color in *Atlas-Hôtel*, with touches of popular orientalism, is highly stylized. It can hardly be said that the rules of realistic credibility are closely observed.

In spite of some absorbing ideas Salacrou's early plays threaten to fall apart because of their haphazard dramaturgy. *Atlas-Hôtel* and *Les Frénétiques* have a more compact dramaturgical form. Instead of the diffuse atmosphere of the early plays where action spreads aimlessly, these two plays deal with a series of closely related events that follow a logical sequence and obey psychological necessities. Although attention is primarily focused on the analysis of a character, the business visionary and the fanatic in his struggle for power, these spectacular traits are revealed through successive confrontations of quite closely knit situations. The two plays have features of the drama of intrigue. Coincidences, improbabilities, violations of the rules of plausibility, are employed unscrupulously to set the plot in motion. It is hardly credible that Albany would meet his estranged wife in the middle of a desert. Jacqueline's naïve acceptance of Elisabeth's advice to fall into the arms of the fake Russian prince is also unbelievable. But after the initial propulsion, the action flows logically. There are also extraneous devices, such as the storm in *Atlas-Hôtel*, which precipitates the dénouement. Of course, dramaturgical compactness in these two plays must be understood as a relative term. The action is not pared down to exploitation of a psychological crisis or a climactic point. It still sprawls over a considerable period of time as in *Les Frénétiques* or roams without much restraint from place to place for the sake of colorful setting in *Atlas-Hôtel*. But compared to Salacrou's first plays, the action is set in a more concrete environment and moves in a definite direction.

If Salacrou's early plays favored a flat presentation of meta-

physical ideas and psychic states, psychological motivations in *Atlas-Hôtel* and *Les Frénétiques* are more closely observed. The two central figures, Auguste and Lourdalec, are relatively static and remain psychologically identical from the exposition to the dénouement. But their monolithic stature gains relief in the precipitous changes of situation and amidst the psychic swirls of those who surround them. Elisabeth and Max cascade down to their destruction while Lourdalec continues his solitary ascent toward power and domination. Auguste remains the impractical business visionary even in his dismal failures. To be sure, a minute clinical analysis of these eccentrics is not Salacrou's objective, yet these characters are more like living people than the other early heroes.

Salacrou's temporary observance of some of the rules of realistic dramaturgy did not produce noticeable stylistic changes. His penchant for poetic dialogue was not inhibited by closer psychological observation and tighter dramatic structures. The characters express themselves in imperturbably literary language, in the same poetic language of the stage, which, although respectful of accepted usages, is not a transcription of the everyday idiom. The language of the different characters varies a little, but always within the confines of a certain stage prose. Even the illiterate utterances of the natives preserve some poetic qualities. This poetic dialogue is virtually the strongest link that connects *Les Frénétiques* with *Une Femme libre*, Salacrou's next play.

Atlas-Hôtel, compared to the unqualified failures of Salacrou's early plays, was almost a success. Jouvet liked *Les Frénétiques* and would have staged the play, had he not been afraid to arouse the wrath of the influential businessman who might have noticed his image in Lourdalec. But Salacrou himself was not pleased with his work. His dissatisfaction with his own work, no doubt, derived from a *mea culpa* feeling toward his aesthetic theories and his idea of the theater which he had formulated with so much juvenile enthusiasm in the preface to *Le Pont de l'Europe*. The two plays betrayed his own ideals. Although no concessions to the public taste, they were meant to please a particular metteur en scène and to fit the particular style of a theatrical troupe. An entertaining character presentation and a diverting story have replaced the anguished inquiries of the young author into the basic problems of the human condition. For Salacrou, these two plays are not only deviations from an ideal conceived in his youthful intransigence, they represent an anachronistic trend in the development of the theater, since

most of the vestiges of Antoine's Théâtre Libre, Salacrou was pleased to note, have already been liquidated.

Salacrou had reached a critical point. Uncertain about the failures, dissatisfied with half-success, and seething with new ideas, Salacrou traversed a period of self-questioning. During these three years his name did not appear on the Parisian billboards. His notes, meditations, and marginal comments written during this period echo basically the general ideas expressed in the preface to *Le Pont de l'Europe*. Assessing the state of the contemporary French theater, he concludes that the causes of this crisis are attributable to all segments of theatrical activity. He attacks the eclecticism of the directors, inveighs against his contemporaries who prostitute their talent by seeking to satisfy the lowest common denominator of the Parisian audiences. He restates in the most cogent terms his repudiation of the "slice of life" principle in the theater. Psychological truisms, moral concepts, economic, social, and political phenomena are only accessories, tools for the playwright, who contemplates man in his universality and seeks answers to the most elemental questions.

These meditations condemn, along with many other contemporary productions, his own last two plays. In spite of the intransigent tone of his note, Salacrou was not immune, as he later admits, to public recognition and critical acclaim. Analyzing retrospectively his abortive attempt to collaborate with Jouvett, he felt no regret, for had he gained success with *Les Frénétiques*, "je me fusse égaré plus avant et plus longtemps." (II, 229) From these three years of self-imposed exile, Salacrou emerged with one finished play and two projects, which immediately captured the attention of Parisian playgoers and critics. Salacrou had oscillated from his dithyrambic youthful subjectivity to the opposite extreme where adherence to observation and objective reality had stifled his poetic imagination. The cycle completed, Salacrou was ready to enter upon a new phase in his literary career.

4 / *Illusion of Freedom*

SALACROU'S FAILURE and doubts in the theater were counterbalanced by fabulous successes in the business world where his initially modest advertising agency had reached astounding proportions. His big chance came with an innovation in newspaper advertisements in 1929. It was Salacrou's idea to transfer commercial advertisements from the last page, where they always had been, to the third page, where he "plugged" his products among fake miscellaneous items that never failed to capture the reader's interest. Soon Salacrou's advertising company outdistanced its competitors and surpassed his own expectations. His dazzling ascent in business had the facility of a wishful dream world. His recognition as a playwright, however, came only through plodding work and a series of failures. Many characters in his plays, renouncing their youthful ideals, rise to prosperity and power almost overnight, and critics have not failed to point out the implausibility of such happenings. But for Salacrou these were not fantastic tales. The success of his business made it possible for him to pursue his idea of the true theater regardless of public reaction. Because of his material independence Salacrou did not have to stoop before the demands of the crowd, like many of his confrères who did not fail to taunt him for having defiled the "Sacred Halls of Art."

From these years dates Salacrou's comédie-ballet *Poof*. As Salacrou remarks in the postscript, it is a kind of diary where he formulated his newly discovered laws of advertising. The play gained distinction among professional people as a document of prewar publicity methods. A professor at the Ecole de Publicité took his whole class to see the play, and others in scholarly articles have cited *Poof* as a historical example of the pseudo-scientific period in the development of the art of advertising.

Poof is a pitifully unsuccessful salesman, unable to distribute free leaflets among passers-by. In his last desperate effort he even fails to sell a fifty franc banknote, which he has inherited from his mother, for twenty sous. Then he suddenly realizes that at the

basis of good salesmanship is aggressiveness. Advertising creates customers who are conditioned to like the product offered. With this illumination, Poof rises to extraordinary heights. He becomes the prime mover of all business and his slogans set the taste for the entire country. Even the Church has sought Poof's help. With radio-broadcasts on the heavenly pleasures, with posters, his campaign has increased the number of converts by 28 percent. People dutifully buy what Poof suggests, for they prefer to have their choices made by Poof. But lonely in his undisputed supremacy, he does not enjoy his triumph. By giving people the illusion that they are happy, he will attend to what God neglected. He will correct the flaws that mar God's creation. He has induced others to relinquish their freedom in exchange for a worry-free life. Finally a conspiracy to kill Poof is organized among his humiliated customers who want to break the stranglehold of advertising. To insure success, the conspirators must popularize their cause through a gigantic campaign against advertising. Inevitably, they approach Poof, who assumes leadership of the enterprise.

Apart from being the author's diary of his personal experiences and of his meditations on the dangers and possibilities of advertising, *Poof* reflects also Salacrou's search for new dramatic media. It is a musical comedy, loose in form, with incidental music and dance. Much of the plot unfolds through mimeplay and movement. The chorus and the corps de ballet regroup in continuously changing kaleidoscopic forms to provide the setting for the swiftly moving action, to fill in lapses of time. Another experiment in the genre is *La Vie en rose*, written a few months after *Poof*.

La Vie en rose, a one act impromptu, was performed on December 3, 1931. This impromptu precipitated from heated debates on "theatrical place" and "theatrical time" with Michel Saint-Denis. Salacrou's friendship with him was short-lived and abruptly broken off when Salacrou suddenly discovered that this association wearied him. But while it lasted Salacrou drew from it a wealth of suggestive ideas which he later experimentally applied in his plays. Upon Saint-Denis' request to give him about twenty-five minutes of text to fill the evening, Salacrou wrote *La Vie en rose* in two weeks. With no other claim than being a pretext for songs, rich costumes, and décor, it is an interesting experiment with time. In *La Vie en rose* Salacrou evokes his childhood memories of the delusively careless days that preceded World War I. As seen through the eyes of a boy who pays small heed to the niceties of cause and effect, historical

events sometimes witnessed by himself, sometimes just imagined after hearsay, have no chronological orderliness. Thus, about twenty-five years, from the construction of the Eiffel Tower to the Russo-Japanese war to the first outburst of violence on the eve of World War I, are compressed into one scenic day from dawn to dusk. The action takes place on a public square where a motley crowd is milling around, dancing, singing and exchanging views. With a contrapuntal orchestration, several dominant themes are introduced, varied by embellishments, subdued by the appearance of other themes, to reappear again later. There is the theme of the high destinies of humanity heading toward a period of everlasting happiness, peace, and prosperity. The bourgeois and his wife periodically read the stock market news. A Russian prince falls madly in love with a simple caretaker's daughter. The political news is reassuring: the defeats of the Russians are too distant, and Mother Russia has many resources. But then 'all of a sudden, the stock market drops, the bourgeois starts hoarding food. Hatred erupts, the Russian Prince is taken for a spy and driven into the Seine, and a blaring martial song augurs ominously the coming of the holocaust.

La Vie en rose is another significant experiment with scenic time. With no reference to chronometric time and to logical time sequence, twenty-five years are compressed into one scenic day. The impromptu has a certain resemblance to Cubist painting. Dislocated, truncated historical events, rearranged in a different order, seem to be pasted together as in a collage. And as a matter of fact, the text of the impromptu is preceded by reprints of newspaper headlines which are interwoven into the characters' speeches. Thus, there is no continuity among the various thematic elements of the playlet, except the overall impression from the kaleidoscopic assemblage of scenes that it was a rosy life, a period of complacency, smugness, and of highly optimistic hopes. Almost simultaneous juxtaposition is achieved by bringing together occurrences, widely distant in space and time. Because of its skimpiness, the impromptu cannot be likened to Salacrou's major works, but it has its historical import during the author's formative years as an attempt to expand the limits of dramatic forms beyond accepted theatrical conventions.

The two experimental playlets, *Poof* and *La Vie en rose* have no dramaturgical affinities with *Les Frénétiques*, nor with *Une Femme libre*, the play with which Salacrou emerged from the period of doubt and experimentation. *Poof* and *Le Vie en rose* remain loose strands of a genre into which Salacrou will not venture again

until some fifteen years later with a historical divertissement *Le Soldat et la sorcière*.

Une Femme libre is the first of Salacrou's major works to bring him immediate public recognition and critical acclaim. The problem of freedom, with its moral and metaphysical implications, is immediately placed on the level of the spectator. "Where do you come from? Who are you?" asks Jacques, the young man; whereupon Lucie answers: "A woman like any other woman." And thus the spectator is to judge this ordinary young girl, her dreams and her struggle for happiness and freedom. "Are we free to be free?" Jacques asks wistfully, and the question resounds through the play with increasing intensity as the characters strive each for himself to assert what he feels is his right or his ineluctable duty to himself. Though ordinary people, they are endowed with a strange lucidity. They are not satisfied with half-truths, and yet, if they are lucid enough to deflate each other's illusions, they lack the acuteness to perceive that their efforts are wasted in the pursuit of evanescent visions. As one of them says, they all have the ingredients which could have made them happy, and yet instead of happiness, love and concord, there is only one reality they readily perceive at the end: the ever-present suffering and a deep sense of loneliness in the utter despair of shattered ideals.

The cycle starts and concludes in a well-to-do country house in Normandy where four ill-assorted members of an old peasant family reside: Jacques, a spirited young man, an erstwhile journalist who had abandoned the big city to lead an idle life in the country; his brother Paul, a priggish lawyer and president of a prosperous advertising agency; the mother, Célestine, a simple devout woman whose solicitude for the well-being of her two sons comprises her whole existence; and the aunt, Adrienne, a spinster whose personal life had pined away in the service of her much admired brother. When into this ill-matched household is introduced Lucie Blondel, the precarious state of equilibrium is disrupted. Fiancée of Paul, she elopes with Jacques to Paris. In love with Jacques, when he asks her to marry him she abandons him to plunge into a life of muck and despair. Aunt Adrienne, who can only despise Paul, her once favorite nephew, now a jealous wreck, disinherits him and bequeathes her share of the rich estate to the brazen demimondaine who was once a simple girl named Lucie Blondel. Célestine watches with horror and stupefaction the unexpected turn of events—the collapse of a family once so apparently happy and satisfied. When Lucie Blondel, after an abortive attempt at reconciliation, finally

disappears from their sight, it is clear that there are no victors but only five miserable persons suffering under the crushing weight of their wrecked lives. The final curtain falls as the two brothers fight each other and Adrienne and Célestine watch, one with contempt, the other with horror. There is no escape from the obsessive memories of their past.

Though dissimilar in many ways, the characters meet in the same pessimistic conclusions on human existence. The character of Adrienne is especially fraught with symbolic meaning. With nostalgia she remembers the days of her brother's despotic rule, when he sat at table by himself reverently attended by his sister and wife. She hopes to see the past glory of her brother's tyranny regenerated with Paul's ascendancy to the patriarchal chair. When Lucie's flight with Jacques leaves Paul encaged in his ungratified passion and jealousy, her former admiration for him turns into hatred, and all hope gone, she declares herself dead. Had Paul been strong enough to continue his father's rule, her life, which she had sacrificed for her brother, would have acquired a certain meaning. But even this imagined lethal state, in which she now prefers to exist, can bring no solace. If she had expected to find the oblivion of life in death, now, her life completed and immobile, with no future, she cannot escape the shadow of her past. "Le passé est un enfer dont les morts ne peuvent plus sortir." (III, 89) Expecting no special exemption from fate, she can only enjoy with a satanic pleasure the idiotic struggle of the living. But even her last revenge upon her dashed hopes, when she bequeathes all her property to Lucie, does not bring satisfaction. Her life will forever bear the stigma of dismal failure.

The character of Paul is not less colorful. Behind the façade of his decorum and his well-rehearsed platitudes, the solemn *phraseur* hides a passion that knows no limits. Paul stakes everything, including his directorial dignity, on conquering Lucie. He had begged, had humiliated himself before other people while chasing his secretary Lucie Blondel, who had insisted on remaining "jeune fille." And then having come so close to his victory with the promise of marrying her, Paul cannot grasp that she has once again evaded him. His mind can only ruminate on the thought that Jacques had stolen Lucie from him "une nuit trop tôt. . . . Tout mon avenir bute contre cette nuit que je n'ai pas pu vivre." (III, 85) At the heyday of the love affair between Lucie and Jacques, when Paul appears in their Montparnasse studio begging for the crumbs of their happiness, he cuts a pitiful figure. It is in his suffering face

that Jacques sees the future of their love. Paul nurses a delusive hope that if Jacques married Lucie, his wounded masculine pride would be healed. Lucie had been after all "une jeune fille sérieuse qu'on peut aimer pour la vie." His pride humiliated, his passion never quenched, his jealousy cannot be suppressed, and he insists that Jacques tell in the minutest details his first night with Lucie. Incessantly chewing the cud of this experience which should have been his, but through an absurd haphazard concurrence of circumstances never was, Paul is left with an existence which, like that of Adrienne, is almost immobilized. Nothing else has any meaning, and life for him can only be suffering that perpetuates itself with no end in sight.

The character of Jacques is charged with the heaviest philosophical load, and yet it remains vivid and true to life. At the beginning of the play, Jacques is installing a model of the entire solar system in the house. Expounding the idea of a mechanistic determinism, Jacques is making an ironic comment on the title of the play. "Ah! le premier pas étant fait, tout le reste s'ensuit." (III, 12) Again the old dilemma, from which no character of Salacrou's plays escapes with impunity, is restated. Rationally, determinism seems to them the only acceptable explanation of the universe, but they cannot brook the humiliating thought of being reduced to the role of a mechanical puppet. They constantly seek a crack in the armor and hope, through the intervention of a divine agent, in whom they do not believe, to gain deliverance from the prison of determinism. Jacques, imagining himself at a cosmic distance from the world while playing with solar systems and maintaining a kind of emotional aloofness, first appears as existing outside the typical dilemma. Deflating Paul's pomposities with his sarcastic remarks, Jacques does not expect great things from life. Feeling pity for Lucie as the future wife of his unctuous brother, Jacques describes for her, with magnificent gestures, a future safely channeled into the bourgeois smugness of the Miremont clan. As Madame Miremont, she will slowly renounce her young girl's dreams, knitting in the corner of the drawing room of the mansion. Above the fireplace there is an empty space for her picture in the communion dress. In the cemetery the family vault is spacious enough to receive her and the future members of her family. As Jacques concludes his speech, Lucie rushes to join him in his flight from the infested house.

Uncommitted, emotionally unattached, Jacques plays with nonchalance the comedy of freedom and determinism. But with the realization that he is truly in love with Lucie, the attitude of detach-

ment of his lazy days on the Miremont estate is no longer possible. When Paul comes to their Paris apartment to see him and to ask Jacques to marry Lucie, it is in his brother's ravaged face that Jacques sees the image of himself. Now Jacques is determined to fight for his happiness. On the eve of a journalistic mission to Poland, he feels that he must secure his love with all possible means. For Jacques, his brother's suffering is more real than the high-flown cynicism of his Bohemian friends who jeer at his attempt to monopolize love and happiness with formal marriage vows. Their empty gestures betray only an egotistic nature, afraid of emotional commitment; whereas Paul's distorted features are a reminder of the precariousness of Jacques' own love. But Lucie has been a good disciple of Jacques and prefers to continue her hide and seek game of freedom.

When Jacques comes back from his mission and finds their little studio empty, he experiences the same emotional tortures that Paul had undergone—the same incessant nightmarish repetition of the past lived, and the past which could have been lived differently. When Lucie is inveigled by Aunt Adrienne into visiting the Miremont estate, for a moment, swept away by the intensity of their past memories, Jacques and Lucie fall into each other's arms. But it can only be a momentary delusion, for Jacques will never be able to forgive Lucie the unfaithfulness with which she wanted to assert her freedom. The absurdity of their predicament bursts out in mocking tones. Stubbornly chasing the will-o'-the-wisp of freedom, Lucie can only produce empty gestures with which she has failed to free herself emotionally. Yet these same gestures have doomed her and Jacques to irremediable suffering. Chance has thrown the three characters together in a grotesque way. No part of this triangle can live without, nor with, the other two. Bound together in their tormenting memories, they fall apart into utter loneliness to dress the never-healing wounds that they had inflicted on each other.

For the first time in Salacrou's theater, the interest of a play focuses on a feminine character. At the outset of the play, Lucie Blondel displays the usual syndrome of Salacrou's early heroes. Lucie, whose contact with life has not yet modified her intransigent demands, is still waiting for the miracle that will fulfill the ideal of her youthful dreams. The miracle must come unexpectedly and surprise her. For Lucie, it means the coming of her great love, that impossible love which she has to conquer day by day, which will possess her and yet leave her free. When Jacques holds up the mirror

where she sees her well-compartmented future as Paul's wife, Lucie quickly realizes that she is standing on the brink of a buried life. The love affair with Jacques fills her with happiness, yet she consistently refuses to project this happiness beyond the present moment into the future. Like a gambler, she prefers to "live with the fear of losing." When Jacques seeks her in marriage, she renounces her love in the name of some hypothetical idea of freedom, and to burn all the bridges behind her, with a masochistic gesture, she flings herself into the arms of the first man who comes along. Suffering remains the only sign of a freedom so dearly acquired through a Pyrrhic victory. As Jacques lucidly points out, she is really not free at all. Having sacrificed her love in the exaltation of an idea, she finds that the words which carried her away become meaningless when she confronts the reality of her suffering. The realization of freedom creates conditions that deny its very meaning. The substratum of ambiguity and absurdity that underlies the human condition is not removable by gestures and words. Lucie plunges into a pandemonium of contradictory feelings from which she will never escape.

In *Une Femme libre* certain dramaturgical devices are introduced to buttress the essential conclusions of the author. Circularity and interchangeability are implied through the structure of the plot and the distribution of the dramatic functions of the characters. In the first act Lucie must make her choice between security in the bourgeois smugness of the Miremont clan or the unknown vicissitudes of life at large with Jacques. In the second act Lucie confronts a similar situation, but this time it is Jacques who implores her to cut short the Bohemian precariousness of their liaison and seek shelter in marriage vows. The bourgeois security offered by Jacques is now pitted against the cynicism and aloofness of Jacques' friends, Max and Cher Ami, who, bound by no emotional or moral commitments, can easily preach the gospel of dispossession and freedom. Lucie is swayed again to chase the image of her freedom. The brothers Miremont, too, repeat in turn certain dramatic situations. First, Paul and Jacques face each other, vying to influence Lucie. When Paul is removed from the competition, Jacques faces his friends, who now in turn play the role of exciting Lucie's fancy for a prejudice-free life. In the first act the dramatic nucleus is Lucie's renunciation of a life of bourgeois respectability and propriety and the second act centers on the sacrifice of her love for Jacques. The third act contains no real dramatic conflict, nor is there a dénouement in its traditional sense.

The plot unfolds in three more or less separate stages in which characters appear differently regrouped without transitional phases. Thus, in the second act it is somewhat difficult to recognize in the passion-ravaged man the pompous prig that Paul was in the first act. Jacques dons three quite dissimilar masks, changing from the jocose, spirited young man to the attentive lover and finally to the jealousy-ridden, jilted, and downcast man without a future. The simple, naïve young girl, Lucie, turns up in the third act as a world famous, dashing fashion designer who pilots her own plane. With these character changes in the triangle the mutual relations in this hermetically closed universe become manifoldly complex. Unable to sever the emotional ties that entangle them in a preposterous interdependence, the three characters vanish from the spectator's view in their weird postures. Methodically, the author has reduced the initially simple situation to a static, irremediably absurd entanglement: the two brothers will go on fighting each other over their past memories of Lucie who in the suffering of her moral degradation will never find a compensating thought.

Salacrou's characters, thus presented, lack the continuity and roundness that critics expect to see. But within this psychological collage which breaks up personalities into quite unexpected facets, the characters have deeply human touches and act quite consistently with accepted patterns of behavior. The secondary characters, although with striking individualistic traits, are, more often than not, schematically drawn and surcharged with symbols and ideas. Aunt Adrienne, and to a certain extent also Célestine, functions as a choric commentator to amplify the scope of the dramatic situation. Her decisions, actions, or mere presence, do not alter anything, but through her the dramatic situation is viewed from a different angle. When finally she demands to be considered as a dead person, her contempt for the absurd ant hill activity comes as if from a distant, detached observer who has little understanding and no pity for the despicable terrestrial creatures.

The plot consists of three parallel episodes, loosely strung together. But it is the problem of freedom, explored in its metaphysical import, that unifies the plot. In a sense, the progression of the action leads to a gradual reduction of the idea of freedom to meaninglessness. If at the rise of the curtain Paul hopes to free himself from his obsession, and freedom has an imperious appeal for Lucie and Jacques, the final curtain falls upon the three enslaved to a Sisyphean task of reliving their haunting memories and caught in the maze of their ambivalent emotions. They can-

not simply turn their backs on their past experiences and walk away to start life anew.

Instead of unraveling all complications, the final act leaves the three characters in an absurd entanglement. This is a kind of open-end dramaturgy where a dramatic situation is arrested at a certain point in its development. No psychologically conclusive state of equilibrium is attained in the relationships among characters. The final scene suggests that from this point on, with no solution in sight, a static situation is reached by repetitious perpetuation *ad absurdum* of the same occurrence. Again, the past has invaded the characters with such a force that life, whatever its contingencies may bring, cannot alter anything in their congealed destinies, sealed by the unchangeable, absolute past.

Thus, the form of the play casts into relief the basic conclusions of the author. But having chosen a dramatic situation with a quite clearly defined moral and social context, Salacrou invited strong criticism, especially of psychological inconsistencies and improbabilities. With his next play, *L'Inconnue d'Arras*, Salacrou is more successful in disarming such criticism by situating the dramatic conflict outside the realm of objective reality.

5/ *An Odyssey into the Past*

THE PLAY which established Armand Salacrou in the front ranks of the avant-garde theater was *L'Inconnue d'Arras*. Salacrou did not finish it until 1935, five years after the initial plan had been laid out. The play had a mixed reception. But whatever the nature of the reaction was, few remained lukewarm. The press was also divided. Some critics defended the play; others, like Pierre Weber, lamented: "Que de mal se donnent certains auteurs pour s'évader du théâtre alors qu'il serait si simple d'écrire de bonnes choses en suivant de vieilles règles dramatiques." (III, 219)

Without doubt, *L'Inconnue d'Arras* flouts most of the traditional dramatic rules. To a more conservative mind, Salacrou's dramaturgical innovations may smack of gratuitous sensationalism. At the rise of the curtain, three revolver shots are heard, a sentimental love song turns into the anguished cries of a woman. A servant runs out on the street shouting for help. The opening moments could hardly be more sensational. The protagonist has committed suicide, and that infinitesimal split second that it takes for the bullet to put out consciousness will be distended into three theatrical acts. Nicolas, the domestic, now transformed into a kind of master of ceremonies, explains the rules of the game. On the threshold of death, Ulysse, his master, will make his last Odyssey into his past. Episodes lived, phrases, words once uttered, will surge up from the oblivion of the unconscious in an incoherent procession. The string of episodes is completely anachronous, as forgotten images and haunting memories file past his conscious mind. Time remembered has totally different dimensions from time lived. Thus, Ulysse's love affair with Madeleine, which had lasted for two years spent in happiness, intense but uninterrupted, in retrospect shrinks into one certain emotion without image.

Among Ulysse's memories, there is the image of his grandfather, a young man, with a fresh face, whose picture on the mantelpiece Ulysse had always admired. The grandfather had died at the age

of twenty-one on the battlefield of Gravelotte during the Franco-Prussian war, long before Ulysse's birth. Ulysse's father, on the other hand, who had lived to a ripe age, will appear as a serious, white-bearded old man. There are the women who had crossed Ulysse's path: Yette who loved him so much that she had even attempted suicide when Ulysse had forgotten her; Yolande, his wife, who betrayed him and thus caused his suicide. There appears also a helpless young girl, drenched in rain, shivering with cold, reeking of absinthe, whom Ulysse, as a young pilot of World War I, had met in the ruins of Arras. The memory of this meeting has haunted Ulysse throughout his life. In an abandoned house where Ulysse had led her, he wanted to violate her. But after returning from a search for food and drink, he had found her, with tears on her cheeks, already asleep. When he returned the next day to see her, the house was empty. She had disappeared from his life forever, leaving Ulysse with a feeling of dissatisfaction, regret, and nostalgia for something pure and unspoiled. There is also his best friend Maxime: at the age of twenty, with whom he had shared his youthful ideals; at the age of thirty-seven, who had become his wife's lover.

As Ulysse, guided by Nicolas, watches the disorderly parade, he becomes more and more aware of the absurdity of his existence. Comparing the hopes and aspirations of his early years with the ignominious death as an unhappy cuckold, he can only conclude that his life was not worth living. His grandfather, who had always appeared to Ulysse as a hero, takes the opposite view and argues with his grandson that the latter's life, compared to his, had more meaning and purpose. And thus, both engage in a wager that becomes the dramatic nexus of the play. But when the tour ends and Ulysse exultantly exclaims "Grand-père, vous avez gagné," Nicolas, the master of ceremonies, sarcastically cuts short any further speculation: "Les jeux sont faits pour l'éternité." (III, 192)

Much of the tragic impact of *L'Inconnue d'Arras* is derived from the atmosphere of finality that pervades the dramatic situation. In the shadow of the hovering death, with no recourse to the comforting resolve to turn his trivial past into a significant future, Ulysse can only retrospectively evaluate his life. Ulysse turns incessantly around, butting against his death as against a wall that has arrested and immobilized his life, and bouncing back to the cramped quarters of his solitary self. But it is especially through his recognition of the finality of death that Ulysse escapes the snares of false hopes and reaches a higher degree of authenticity.

As Ulysse delves into his past, he encounters this disconcerting lack of proportion between the empty gestures, thoughtless utterances that abound in life and the final ineluctability that resulted from them. When Ulysse had opened his wife's letter to her lover and with tears in his eyes had showed it to her, Yolande, thinking his chagrin only a rehearsed expression of social conventions, sang "Parlez-moi d'amour." In that intolerable moment Ulysse committed suicide. The ironic impact is that now everything that seemed so trivial all of a sudden has final significance.

Ulysse's racing journey through his past is a painful experience which he is reluctant to undertake. He complains to Nicolas: "Je voulais mourir et voici que tout recommence." (III, 114) The thought of Yolande's adultery still circling in his mind, Ulysse asks Nicolas: "Je suis en enfer, n'est-ce pas?" "Non, Monsieur, vous êtes encore parmi vos souvenirs." "C'est l'enfer," (III, 121) affirms Ulysse. Again as the dramatic situation is placed in the twilight of a point in the present and of an ineradicable, immutable past, Ulysse, like most of Salacrou's characters, finds his existence unbearable in the mirror of his past. It is a torture for Ulysse to approach death with the frustrated feeling of a cuckold in the full knowledge that his life will end with this senseless suicide.

For Ulysse, life can only offer crumbs of his grandiose aspirations. The disparity between dream and reality, thought and action, underlies the tragic feeling of "l'humiliation de n'être qu'un homme." (III, 140) Life is like a snowball that swells with baseness and degradations and pointlessness as it advances. Ulysse regrets the hours wasted in waiting for a bus, a woman, a train to leave, a clock to strike. As Yolande sums up Ulysse's life, it has been a gradual surrender of all of his youthful ambitions: "D'abord tu oublies tes étoiles et la terre même devient trop vaste pour ton regard. Puis un jour, rappelle-toi, ton horizon s'est confondu avec les frontières de ton pays, où l'on se battait, et les années t'ont encore tassé, tu as continué de vieillir et les ronds se rapprochent tant et tant qu'ils te séparent même de tes amis. Alors, tes petits bras d'enfant que tu avais ouverts sur le monde, se renferment sur moi. L'univers s'était rapetissé à la taille de mon lit qui devenait ton univers." (III, 185) Thus, when forced to abandon his grandiose aspirations, Ulysse was also defeated in his final effort to render life significant through his great passion for Yolande; he had only one desire left—to end his useless life.

Yolande's adultery appears to Ulysse's grandfather and father a ridiculous reason to end one's life, and Yolande herself is utterly

confused as to the motives that had prompted her to take a lover. Looking at Maxime she says wistfully: "Je vous découvre plutôt laid, assez bête." So it was only a caprice and not an irresistible passion that drove Yolande into Maxime's arms. And Maxime unbelievably asks: "Alors, Ulysse s'est vraiment tué pour rien?" Yolande admits that had she known the consequences of this gesture, Maxime would not have interested her. While Maxime insists that nothing could have stopped him, the image of Maxime's fiery twenty years appears, interrupts these lies, and inveighs against Maxime at thirty-seven for having betrayed all that he cherished in his youth. Maxime at twenty mercilessly reveals to Yolande the true Maxime at thirty-seven, a traitor, a traitor to his youth and to his best friend. Maxime at twenty says that he can hardly recognize himself at thirty-seven. Thus, for Maxime too, life is a continual process of degradation and of betrayal of one's youthful ideals through devious compromises and through expedients.

There is a bitterly ironic twist, a suggestion of a false dénouement with a kind of recognition scene at the end of the play. Having ravaged through his past, denouncing his life, trampling underfoot the dearest of his memories, Ulysse all of a sudden seems to have reached a calm resignation, an acquiescence in his human condition. As if purified through the presence of his memories, Ulysse asks pensively: "Je voulais un destin grandiose? Mais pourquoi? Au nom de quoi?" When Maxime at twenty reminds him that he despised life because it was not eternal, Ulysse answers: "Je l'aime aujourd'hui précisément parce qu'elle passe. . . . Sur la terre, un homme sans souvenirs est un homme perdu. Et je viens de retrouver mes souvenirs. Que le soleil se lève. Je veux vivre!" (III, 190-191) And Yette, his former mistress, exclaims: "Il est sauvé."

It appears that Ulysse has recognized the vanity of his ravings, that he has renounced his extravagant ambitions, and that now he is healed to accept and love life. He even prides himself that he can calmly look into Yolande's eyes. He admits to his grandfather that he no longer wants to be his own assassin. And to Yolande he promises that they are going to be happy. But then Nicolas calls him to order: "Monsieur, on ne change pas, si changer, c'est ne pas avoir été ce qu'on a été." (III, 191) In Salacrou's universe, there is no divine intercession possible. No soul can be snatched away from Mephistopheles' hands to be carried upward to heaven because the fumbling efforts of the ever striving, sincere man can be a sign of redemption. Once the bullet has been fired, "Dieu n'y peut rien: l'homme est libre—et ce 'jeu de l'homme libre' c'est le seul jeu

auquel puisse s'amuser le Bon Dieu." (III, 191) Yolande starts her stupid song, and Ulysse howls, "mais j'ai mal." A revolver shot is heard again, Nicolas yells for help, and Yolande stupidly reiterates: "Pardon, mon chéri. Je n'étais pas si coupable." (III, 193)

A grueling cycle for everyone whom Ulysse took along on his journey through his past is completed without anything accomplished. Only a more poignant awareness of man's utter depravity is graven in the depth of the consciousness of those who loved Ulysse and yet could not help him. Love has no redeeming force in the warped human relations. Encased in the carapace of ego-centricity, man can never establish a true communion with another being. Vows of eternal love turn out to be ephemeral lies. The most sincere human sentiments are incommunicable. Ulysse's past reveals a series of cycles where excited passions gradually degenerate into infidelities and hypocritical face-saving attitudes. No human relation can resist the grinding of time and survive the inconsistencies of human nature. Exacting compromises and **fraud and meting** out defeats, life can only corrupt youthful ideals. The grandfather sacrificed his love to gain financial distinction. Maxime, the fervent young man in search of purity and authenticity, turned into a flabby petty philanderer. After her exalted passion for Ulysse had ended with an abortive suicide, Yette buried herself in a dull marriage with a man whom she does not love. Ulysse, who longed for a heroic life, found himself canvassing garages, trying to sell the newest models of carburetors. Only Ulysse was more conscious of the degradations and humiliations in life, and thus in the desperate moment of his discovery of Yolande's adultery, with his last refuge ransacked and destroyed, he committed suicide. And death is no redeeming reprieve from the absurdity of life. Even with suicide Ulysse cannot efface that ineradicable stigma.

L'Inconnue d'Arras makes a comment of universal application to humanity. It is not a case history of a hypersensitive personality, for the play distills a concentrated essence of human nature in a man called Ulysse, who is a man "like any other man." The universality is enhanced by the dramatic devices that serve to underscore the author's contentions not to permit the play to lapse into humdrum realism or boulevard melodrama. The spectator is frequently enough reminded not to seek a replica of real life, nor to identify himself with the protagonist of this moving tale of adultery.

The play has no specific temporal or spatial reference, for it takes place in man's conscience and consciousness. All characters

move in a world that has a direct bearing on life, mirrors life, but is exempt from the contingencies of life. Not representing a slice of life, the play is a game, a game that does not attempt to prove anything about the objective reality. But it is a game that reflects the metaphysical predicament of the human condition. The plot of the play is attached to reality only at one point—Ulysse's revolver shot. From that immobilized moment the action of the play proceeds and returns to the same moment at the final curtain, when the revolver shot is repeated. Ulysse has made a circular Odyssey from which he brings back no other experience than a deeper sense of pointlessness and man's futility in a universe that has no sympathy for him.

Although Ulysse's sphere is restricted to that immobilized moment, the other characters seem to move on two planes of existence, without the author's attempting to draw sharp lines of demarcation. First, the characters appear to be only visual representations of what Ulysse's mind, mixing memories and figments, has created. These characters are seen only according to their refracted image in Ulysse's idiosyncratic vision. Having no independence of their own, they figure in Ulysse's mind as he has apprehended them in the past and as he projects their existence at the timeless point of his suicide. The unknown girl from Arras does not step outside the narrow circle of memories, because Ulysse's mind, always returning to the meaning of that episode, seems to be incapable of fabricating anything beyond the facts of this enigmatic occurrence. Somewhat paradoxically, the character of the girl from Arras is the most fragmentary and yet the most significant and symbolic. Ulysse vainly asks her whether she was the "young girl" she pretended to be, whether she perished in the air raids that came on the heels of their meeting, or whether the retreating soldiers had taken her along with them. She cannot answer these questions for her existence comprises only the few hours of their meeting, before and after which she is nonexistent. Immobilized in Ulysse's memory, she only mechanically repeats the same phrases that she exchanged with him: "Je ne sais pas d'où je viens. Je ne sais pas où je vais—mais j'ai les pieds mouillés." Ulysse, angered by her reluctance and forgetting the rules of the game, slaps her in the face, as he did then, and she disappears, taking along her unsolved identity.

Other characters seem to detach themselves from Ulysse's mind to live outside his memories when Ulysse is absent. Madeleine, one of his mistresses, called to the scene in the dress she was wearing ten years before, is ashamed to be seen in such unfashionable attire.

Yette is aware of her present existence as a housewife married to a provincial business man. Yolande, Maxime, and the grandfather strive to detach themselves from Ulysse's mind. The grandfather, having died during his wife's pregnancy, meets his child for the first time. He had hoped that his wife would bear him a girl whom he had already named Eugénie. The grandfather is utterly disgusted to see his senile son, instead of Eugénie. He also learns that the war in which he was killed was lost, that Ulysse had survived a victorious one, which, however, had brought more misfortune than the lost war. When Maxime and Yolande discuss how Ulysse's suicide will affect their lives, Maxime reproaches her, saying that her regrets are not truly hers. Indeed, her intense egocentricity and a kind of malevolent frivolity which make Ulysse writhe with pain, seem to suggest that she is a haunting ghost in Ulysse's disturbed mind.

Nicolas is a choric personage. When the curtain rises, he has a stylized role of a domestic, faithful to his master whose plane mechanic he used to be during the war, scornful of his mistress whose true relations with Ulysse he discerns with the perspicacity of a nosy valet. But very soon he becomes detached from his earthly form to be transformed into a master of ceremonies who directs the game of the interlude between life and death. With an ominous air of omniscience, somewhat peremptorily he cautions the characters not to let themselves be carried away by the authenticity of their roles. Of course, he reminds them, they have to play episodes from their own lives, but it is just a game, not life itself, because for the grandfather, for Ulysse, for Maxime at twenty, "the chips are down." And indeed, the others, too, who will hope to survive the game of Ulysse's death, will be playing another game, for life itself is nothing but a game whose stakes have been already determined for eternity, and usually it is called "the free man's game." Thus, Nicolas serves as a nexus between the inner game and the outer game. He explains the rules of the game-within-the-game. Since Ulysse has to review thirty-five years of his existence in a fraction of a second, no time can be wasted, and Nicolas manipulates with the wry superiority of an efficient stage manager the entrances and exits of Ulysse's visions. He refreshes Ulysse's memory with explanatory remarks and sometimes he introduces characters to each other, if necessary, interrupts their dialogue, calms them down if, carried away, they threaten to come to blows. Sometimes he comments to give a scene its proper metaphysical perspective. And he does all this with the awareness that once this inner game is finished, he will return to his existence as a servant, and he already anticipates

the problems that he will face after the death of his beloved master. He explains to the grandfather, when the revolver shot is heard for the second time, that Ulysse will be dead; the grandfather himself will disappear in complete oblivion, for Ulysse was the last man on earth to think of him. Yette will return to her husband in the small provincial town, and he himself will face an unknown future.

Nicolas also transcends the inner and the outer game to intrude into the sphere of the spectator. Sometimes he directs his speeches to the public to give expository explanations and comments on the sequence of episodes. Acting as a stage hand, he brings in the table where Ulysse will find the revolver. Nicolas' perspective is wider than that of the other characters and actually coincides with the spectator's. Thus, being the link between the inner play and the outer play, he also connects the outer play with the reality within which it occurs—life. The metaphysical mold in which the characters are transfixed mirrors man's predicament in our universe which moves imperturbably by its mechanical laws and where man's desire for freedom is only a mirage.

In *L'Inconnue d'Arras* Salacrou utilizes death, not as a theological problem concerning afterlife, but as a vantage point from which man's being can be brought into question. Death, being already a *fait accompli*, precludes all speculation of avoiding it. The only thing the hero can do now is examine retrospectively his entire life and determine its meaning. This state cannot very well be explored with realistic dramaturgical methods. In Salacrou's use of Expressionist techniques, his innovations are not gratuitous efforts to gain originality, as many critics supposed. They are of the utmost necessity to express the author's thought. In *L'Inconnue d'Arras* content and form are blended into one organic unity. Salacrou was not committed to theatrical iconoclasm and radical experimentation. With his next three plays, *Un Homme comme les autres*, *La Terre est ronde*, and *Histoire de rire*, he returned to established forms. *Un Homme comme les autres* and *Histoire de rire* have elements of the boulevard theater, and in content the two plays add a new facet to Salacrou's work—the concerns of a moralist about the mores of his society.

6 / *Debacle of Love*

FOR ITS form, *L'Inconnue d'Arras* was more often disliked than admired, and many critics deplored that Salacrou had tried so hard to be original when it would have been so simple to write a good play by following the old rules. With *Un Homme comme les autres*, Salacrou proved, to the satisfaction of his alarmed critics, that he can write also plays that smack of boulevard techniques. A well-to-do, respectable bourgeois household is on the verge of disintegration. Raoul Sivet and his wife Yveline have spent eight years in what has appeared to be harmony, confidence, and mutual respect. It turns out that Raoul, however, has had love affairs with his friends' wives, has constantly trafficked with prostitutes, and periodically maids had to be dismissed to avoid public scandals. Yveline, miraculously unaware of her husband's lechery, nurses a vague feeling of guilt toward their childhood friend Roger Duhamel who had left for the colonies after Yveline's marriage. After years of service as a prosecutor in Madagascar, Roger returns to France to spend his vacation with the Sivets. He soon learns that time has not worn out Yveline's rapturous love for Raoul. As Raoul becomes aware of his friend's true motives, Roger is forced to leave the house, still hoping that one day an unexpected turn of events will throw Yveline into his arms. At the same time the household is worried about the future escapades of Denis, Yveline's vagrant brother, a social parasite, a constant menace to Sivet's bourgeois respectability. Two years before, Denis had tried to procure money by drowning an old rich lady, Mme Berthe, his mistress. Denis had been acquitted, while the real instigator of the crime, his other mistress Ded, was sentenced to two years in prison. She is expected to be released on the very day when Roger arrives from the colonies. As the tension mounts, a grotesque figure jostles onto the stage—Mme Berthe. She could not resist her desire to see Denis, "my last love." Having taken along Ded, now her protégée, she makes herself comfortable despite the protests of the Sivets. Ded almost seduces Raoul who is utterly ashamed of being powerless against her. Anna, the

maid, announces to Raoul that she has become pregnant. And that very evening Raoul, in a surge of disgust for himself, confesses all his infidelities to Yveline. Yveline disappears from the house. Denis declares that he is no longer interested in Ded. Mme Berthe's plan is now foiled, for she had hoped to follow the two lovers with her money on a trip around the world and to pick up crumbs from their happiness. Her last love so abruptly ended, she leaves the house. Yveline returns home to say good-by to her son. She finds Raoul a jealousy-ridden wreck who will never stop prying out of her the identity of the person she slept with the previous night. Yveline watches him with irrepressible disgust and finally realizes with resignation that their destinies are inseparably bound together. To forgive? "C'est seulement accepter de souffrir." (III, 305) The play ends as do most of Salacrou's plays: they must go on living, living a life that has now become doubly unbearable and absurd.

On this stock of a boulevard melodrama, Salacrou has grafted his favorite themes. "Un homme et une femme c'est bâti pour vivre ensemble, mais c'est trop différent pour être heureux ensemble." (III, 213) The play proceeds to demonstrate the truth of this statement in terms of its universal validity. Raoul maintains with a flair of self-righteousness that he is not different from other men. "Alors, ne pas la [sa femme] tromper, c'est renoncer à toutes les autres femmes. Et ce n'est pas possible pour un homme." (III, 291) Denis, who lives on the fringe of society, claims that he is ostracized not for a freakish trait in his character but because "j'avais tellement le respect de moi-même et de mes idées, que je les ai montrées." (III, 221) He even forces Roger, the priggish prosecutor, to admit that he, too, has had moments of aberrations when thoughts of murder and theft could have been translated into action. Yveline with horror admits that she feels like an accomplice in the crime which her brother committed and which she, too, could have perpetrated. Mme Berthe turns to Raoul who, for the sake of propriety, feigns indignation when she declares her love for her unsuccessful assassin: "Êtes-vous aussi certain de ne pas tuer quelqu'un avant ce soir? Nous avons tous des moments de colère et d'égarements." (III, 262)

Whatever mental attitudes the individual characters may assume at the outset, they are stripped of all trimmings of social and moral distinction when the final curtain falls. They seem to recognize that they are all cast in the same mold, that they are likely to repeat the same experiences. Mme Berthe explains to Yveline that she, too, was once "un petit enfant doux, une petite fille calme, une femme honnête," (III, 261) until the day when she understood that for

her husband and for all men faithfulness and true love, "ce n'est pas la même chose." (III, 264) Yveline unconsciously feels that in this crazy old woman chasing desperately a young *débauché*, she sees a possible image of her own senility. Although she consciously refuses to admit that Mme Berthe could be right, Yveline senses that the inchoate purity of their love is already endangered. Endowed with an acute perspicacity, the characters see their own reflections in the others.

Life holds no other promise than a gradual falling away from the once cherished childhood hopes and aspirations. The characters may differ in the way they accept their human condition, but they all have been tempted by the absolute. Denis in his childhood used to stuff his shoes with pebbles. "Je serais devenu un saint." But this early temptation to elect sainthood has been interpreted by the judges as a precocious perversity. Like Denis, Raoul, too, is a composite character. At the beginning he appears to have no qualms over hiding his lechery behind a façade of propriety and decency. But seeing his own reflection in the lucid madness of Mme Berthe, Raoul drops his mask that uncovers an anguished and disillusioned human being. Once he decides to end his duplicity, he plunges into abysmal suffering and despair. With a nostalgia for his childhood, he cannot suppress his repugnance for what he has become. "Ce qui sauve les hommes du suicide, ce qui leur permet de vivre, c'est l'oubli de leurs espoirs, c'est l'oubli de leurs rêves d'enfants." (III, 242-243) But there is never a complete, blissful oblivion possible. His frantic revolt against all norms of decency is not a substitute for the purity of childhood. Belying his initial appearance as a smug bourgeois who is quite content as long as his amours remain secret, Raoul is poignantly aware of the shallowness of his life. He discovers that only his love for Yveline can afford a measure of relief against his own worthlessness. For him, love, more than a physical desire or an emotional commitment, is a metaphysical axis that can orient one's life. "Cet amour est devenu ma seule réalité." (III, 290) As in many of Salacrou's characters, there is a masochistic strain in Raoul. He could not be satisfied with half-truths. He could not have stopped his lecherous life without avowing, with a gesture of self-flagellation, every little detail to Yveline. And this very confession destroys his last refuge. His attempt to restore his love to its purity precipitates Yveline to throw herself into the arms of any man who would be willing to defile their love. In a sense, Raoul has made a discovery, the discovery that man cannot aspire to a higher form of existence through love.

Yveline also reaches a higher degree of authenticity through a similar discovery. At the beginning Yveline lives in a world cut off from the human condition. Her world is that of her love for Raoul which came as a miracle, as a sign from God who had heeded her silent prayers. In her exaltation over her love for Raoul, everything else has ceased to be of importance. But Yveline does not realize how unreal is the Raoul that her love has canonized. The passage from adolescence to adulthood means the deflation of all illusion and exaltation. Mme Berthe has undergone the same experience, and Yveline also must understand the vanity of her dreams. Love is too fragile a sentiment to withstand the trial of time. For Mme Berthe, it gradually degenerated through the impurity of others and through her own temperament. For Yveline, the discovery comes from Raoul's confession. It is not only jealousy and repugnance that seize Yveline when she sees the real Raoul. It is the collapse of the meaning of life for her. Now she wants to destroy everything with a gesture that will separate her from Raoul forever. She is now fully initiated into the true society of men. There is only solitude and suffering left for her.

The gallery of Salacrou's characters is enriched by Mme Berthe. When Mme Berthe invades the Sivets' household, it seems that the author intends to create a moment of comic relief with this ludicrous old woman in love with Denis. Wealthy and alone, after her husband had run off with her seamstress, she is determined to renew her liaison with Denis whom she, in her unconcealed senescent lust, annoys with gifts and promises. Proprieties and drawing room amenities do not interest her, for she has little time left in life. In spite of all these features of buffoonery, Mme Berthe is a pathetic figure with that deeply tragic undertow that underlies many a Salacrou hero. In her senile folly there is the desperate last effort to defy solitude and death. Life has leveled her hopes and expectations, but it has not buried her joy of living. The shadow of death has even whetted her appetite for life. And nothing can stop her in her determination to enjoy every minute that is granted her to live. But her efforts come to nothing. Before leaving the house she turns to Raoul: "Je pars comme une morte. Ma vie est terminée et je dois vivre encore. . . . Il faut avoir pitié des hommes et des femmes, aujourd'hui, car ils se font du mal sans être des coupables." (III, 297-298) And Raoul, who himself cannot expect from Yveline more than a gesture of pity, agrees.

The main themes of the play are restated with the presentation of each character. Basically, their deceptions come from almost

identical experiences with the inconsistency of love and with the degradations that life makes everyone accept. In this treadmill no one at the end is spared the feeling of futility and absurdity, but through the different characters and their disparate efforts the themes gain perspective and depth. Regardless of how they may have aspired to transcend their human condition, when the final curtain falls, they are all reduced to the same level of spiritual destitution. They face mute suffering, or they may elect to become grotesque creatures, like Mme Berthe.

Salacrou's pessimistic view so far has centered on the incongruity between man, the inner man, and the world around him. Man, with his aspirations towards greatness, is caught in the inadequacy of his condition. In *Un Homme comme les autres*, to this metaphysical pessimism dealing with universals are added the concerns of a moralist. Casting a nostalgic look at the past, Salacrou seems to be disturbed by the inefficiency of existing codes of conduct, which have lost all moral authority. Bourgeois sense of propriety is only a shell that hides a moral vacuum. As long as the appearances are preserved, Raoul's conscience, which knows no other loyalty, can be tranquil. Whatever is not exposed to the public view is outside the domain of morality, and he knows that he is no worse than his contemporaries. Indeed, adultery and lewdness, if pursued secretly, could assure him a sense of conformity to established, but not openly confessed, practices. Raoul is deeply dismayed that society has engendered a monster of amorality like Mme Berthe who does not care to preserve a façade of dignity. The bourgeois moral code is quite clearly inadequate to avert the moral blight that plagues human relations. And Salacrou's characters ruefully allude to the time when religion could curb the vilest of human passions with admonitions of hell and its eternal flames. Of course, Salacrou does not expect that religion will be restored to its former authority over men's minds. He does not offer a positive social program to elevate the ethical standards of men. The direct didactic content of the play is virtually nil, for one can hardly extract positive values from these pessimistic conclusions, tinged with a misanthropic regret for bygone days of moral rigorism. The moralist is caught on the horns of a dilemma. The panacea, which his skeptical and inquisitive mind questions, has proven itself effective against this moral dissolution. But he could not propose, with all sincerity, the return to a religious faith in which he himself does not believe. Thus, his conclusions remain in a contrary-to-fact hypothetical

statement: it would have been better if all men could have believed. Now, of course, faith is beyond our reach. To herd everybody back to the fold would be futile.

The comically warped mirror that Salacrou holds up to his contemporaries is framed by his own wistful and sometimes agonized mood. At times the reflection is quite true to the object mirrored, but for the most part, it is distorted by exaggeration and simplification. Reflecting the author's own spiritual plight, the characters are not hardened atheists who can calmly accept the nothingness that awaits them, neither can they find solace in the Evangelists. An atavistic horror of carnal sins, an unavowed obsession with death and damnation seems to be ingrained in their consciousness. Salacrou's next play, *La Terre est ronde*, transposed to a time when Christianity arbitrated with authority what is good and what is evil, will return to these moral questions.

In contrast with the continuity of his ideas within certain thematic variations, the form of Salacrou's plays is constantly undergoing abrupt changes. Between the expressionistic techniques of *L'Inconnue d'Arras* and the hybrid forms in *Un Homme comme les autres* there are no intermediary stages. *Un Homme comme les autres* exhibits a mixture of various theatrical styles shading from naturalistic dramaturgical techniques into boulevard methods. The play opens on a scene before a bar in the harbor. Raoul is taking leave of his mistress Gladys. The enraged dancer uses a language that balances on the edge between the unpolished spicy idiom and sheer obscenity. After this filthy prologue, the scene is set in the Sivets' house. The setting is very concrete and realistically presented. As in the naturalist drama, the environment functions as one of the sources of the conflict that arises in the family. The amoral society sanctions Raoul's assumption that his extramarital relations are perfectly correct. Preserving the outward appearances of the most honorable of people, Raoul seems to be capable of any baseness without the slightest moral conscience. The atmosphere becomes unbearably stuffy with hypocrisy and pretensions, in the manner of a *comédie rosse*.

The plot proceeds through a series of well-timed mishaps and derailments. Roger, arriving from the colonies, brings discord into the household on the same day as the family awaits with apprehensions Ded's release from prison. The most important developments seem to hinge on pure accident. But any resemblance to the Scribesque well-made play cannot be extended beyond the obvious

contrivance of the plot. The characters are not mere pawns of the author, for the action is truly inherent in the characters and in the situation. The coincidences may be questioned as to the extent to which they can be a part of the natural train of life, but the characters are not expected to deal with their predicament in a different manner.

The dénouement is full of bitter irony. Outwardly, affairs seem to have been settled in the most happy way. Yveline and Raoul are reunited and will stay together for the rest of their life. Mme Berthe is sent back to her hotel room where a lady of her age may be expected to spend the last days of her life. Roger, the treacherous friend, is banished from the house. Denis' passion for Ded has ended with no damage to the good reputation of the Sivets. And the maid, who had frightened Raoul with her pregnancy, must beware, according to the cards of Mme Berthe, of full moon and young men with blond hair. Of course, the outward equilibrium belies the inner destitution with which each character is stigmatized. Life must go on and that is the most dismal prospect for these racked souls.

With the trappings of a comedy, *Un Homme comme les autres* ends in an abysmal moral and metaphysical gloom. But such grating incongruences mark every situation. Raoul's hypocrisy, reciprocated by Yveline's naïveté, is extremely loathsome. The bizarre juxtaposition of Ded's juvenile delinquency and Mme Berthe's senile folly can only provoke a shudder. The social parasite Denis and the priggish prosecutor Roger are repulsive. Even the most hilarious scenes create a mood of *humour noir*. The ever present threat of a catastrophe dampens the first impulse to laughter. All the characters repel our sympathy, and yet we cannot dismiss them with scorn and a feeling of superiority. The play fails to create a harmonious and unified dramatic experience, but it could hardly leave one unmoved.

Undoubtedly the most imposing figure in the play is Mme Berthe. With her boisterous presence she steals every scene. While the other characters too often represent philosophical categories or stereotyped human attitudes, she possesses deeply human touches. Mme Berthe is perhaps the most notorious personage of all of Salacrou's plays. Once, at a ski resort, Salacrou was told by the hotel receptionist that an elderly lady had left in a huff when she had found out that Salacrou was also staying in the hotel. She was sure that she had served as a prototype for Mme Berthe. Salacrou cate-

gorically denies such presumption: "Cette malheureuse vieille dame était une partie de moi-même."¹⁶

Histoire de rire, Saracrou's last production before the outbreak of the war, is similar to *Un Homme comme les autres*. In both plays conjugal infidelity is presented not only as an emotional crisis but as an instance of man's depravity and life's absurdity. In form, *Un Homme comme les autres* and *Histoire de rire* have elements of a typical boulevard production. The same emotional seesaw is created by the facetious situations and the deep pessimism of the underlying thought. In the two plays, the purely subjective inquiry is yielding room to the author's criticism of his bourgeois fellow man.

The plot of *Histoire de rire* is constructed on two triangles. Adé betrays her husband Gérard with her lover Achille, and Gérard's friend Jean-Louis has a mistress Hélène who intends to abandon her husband Jules Donaldson at the same time as Adé runs away from Gérard. Adé had taken a lover out of sheer mischief and spite. She resents being treated like a tiresome child. Gérard and Louis retire every evening from six to seven to a playroom where, among boyhood souvenirs, they play Russian billiards and reminisce about their bachelor days. Adé has been ordered to keep out of the playroom. At the beginning of the play Adé leads her lover to the playroom to add spice to the illicit caresses on forbidden ground. She asks him to wait for her in the garden to flee the house together. Gérard and Jean-Louis surprise her in their sanctuary and Adé must leave. But today everything seems in disarray. Jean-Louis had forgotten to leave his watch at the door, and he is reluctant to reenact an episode from their schooldays. He tells Gérard that Hélène is leaving her husband to live with him. Out of friendship for Jean-Louis, Gérard has no objection to it. As an uninvolved spectator he has no moral uneasiness. Adé intrudes to have a talk with Jean-Louis to whom she confides her plans. Forgetting his own situation, out of friendship for Gérard, Jean-Louis tries to convince Adé that she should not leave Gérard. When the latter joins in, the unsuspecting cuckold, so obliging to his friend, becomes the laughing-stock. Prodded by Adé, Gérard adduces all the reasons why adultery would be justified. Jean-Louis tries to mitigate Gérard's outbursts of feigned moral indifference that encourage Adé to overcome her hesitations and misgivings. Then Adé whispers to Jean-Louis that she was just joking about her love affair. Now only Adé and the audience know that her adultery is real. With a sigh of relief Jean-Louis defends his passion for Hélène. Gérard reverses himself

and pities the abandoned husband in his suffering and anger. With these shifts of perspective, the stereotyped farcical situation is exploited from various angles. The characters are caught in an entanglement of ambivalent emotions. Adé loves her husband and also wants to get even with him for the petty irritations he had piled up on her. Jean-Louis cannot stand adultery in his best friend's household, but he wants to justify his love for a married woman. Gérard, while thinking himself uninvolved, is willing to defend his friend's actions, but as soon as he imagines himself in the role of Hélène's husband he turns against Jean-Louis. They are all running around in a preposterous circle chasing visions of happiness and true love.

When Gérard discovers Adé's unfaithfulness, unable to stay alone in the empty apartment, he accompanies Jean-Louis and his mistress to the Côte d'Azur. He mopes in the luxury hotel and, flying into gloomy rages, spoils the pleasures of the two lovers whom he accuses of having caused his misery. Only the sight of a faithful woman could comfort him, but Jean-Louis and Hélène try to distract him with a divorcee who is ready to fall into his arms after their first meeting. Commissioned by Adé to seek reconciliation, Hélène's husband Jules calls on Gérard in his hotel. Gérard is indignant at how calmly Jules accepts Hélène's adultery. But when Adé comes back to him, Gérard, frightened to lose her again, glibly accepts whatever explanation she offers him about her stay with Achille. This household seems to be restored to its previous happiness. Achille, however, abandoned by Adé commits suicide. Jules discloses that Hélène had had similar adventures before, and Jean-Louis sees that their "great love" is nothing but a little joke, a little game. Like Alceste, he announces: "Je vais dans un désert attendre la nouvelle génération." (IV, 252) Hélène returns to her ever-forgiving husband, and everything that has been done is undone now.

In form, *Histoire de rire* has characteristics of a farce. Against the glittering background of a sumptuous residence or a luxurious hotel suite move young people of wealth and wit. The sun shines and they wear bathing suits. The dialogue, for the most part, is gay and rapid, sprinkled with charming paradoxes and facetious repartee. The plot unfolds with amazing rapidity, giving rise to comical and tragical situations. Adultery appears to be treated as a jest. An unaware husband facilitates his own cuckoldry. An overbearing husband is willy-nilly confronted with his wife's timid lover. A self-effacing husband turns the overweening lover of his wife

into a butt who cannot contain his jealousy for his mistress's husband. These painful encounters of people have the haunting inevitability of a nightmare. Having fled Paris they are all together again on the Côte d'Azur. Individually pathetic, almost tragic figures, the six characters are cast in a grotesque mold of their comic relationships. Their temperaments are ill-matched, their ambitions and aspirations divergent. Inevitably, when an intransigent and jealous husband confronts his frivolous wife who thrives on compromises, the effect is farcical. At the end the separated couples are reunited as if their marriages were restored without damage to their initial happiness. But belying this outward equilibrium, the dénouement underscores a more pessimistic thought. The exalted and the hopeful who had great expectations of life are downgraded to the level of those who accept defeats and lies and nourish themselves on half-truths in order to preserve an appearance of happiness. Those who refuse to bow must seek refuge in a desert to await a better generation that will never come.

The dramatic form of the play, with its stereotyped farcical situations, with its external glitter, contrasts sharply with the tragic undertow that engulfs the characters as their last ideals disintegrate and illusions are swept away. Again, at the end of this process of gradual impoverishment, there are no victors only disillusioned people who must face reality, now ugly and unbearable.

The two childhood friends, Gérard and Jean-Louis, had sworn to let no one step between them. Every day they snatch one hour from the present to spend it in sacred seclusion in the playroom where, surrounded by souvenirs, they hope to revive their mutual youthful affection and relive episodes of their past. But put to its first real test, their friendship is transformed into scorn and hatred. Abandoned by Adé, Gérard in his despair unconsciously identifies Jean-Louis with Achille. The sight of Jean-Louis' happiness is intolerable to him. When Adé comes back, Gérard is ready to console his unfortunate friend who has just dismissed his mistress. But Jean-Louis rejects his sympathy. A suffering man is helplessly alone. Now it is Jean-Louis' turn to pour out scorn on Gérard who bought happiness at the price of gullibility. And such a frail sentiment as friendship is no solace.

Along with his friendship for Gérard, the "great love" of Jean-Louis turns into a "laughing matter." When he first reveals to Gérard his love affair with Hélène, in his exaltation he can hardly find words to describe it. As Jules later insidiously alludes to Hélène's occasional disappearances from his house, Jean-Louis

becomes aware that Hélène is inured to exclaiming at the beginning of each new adventure: "J'ai rencontré l'homme de ma vie." (IV, 179) When Jean-Louis has sent her back to her husband, the last hopes and illusions of a life of happiness have vanished. Jean-Louis' tragic predicament is that of every Salacrou hero: "Je manquais d'expérience. L'expérience vient. Mais c'est une expérience inutile, car lorsqu'on la possède, on n'a plus envie de s'en servir." (IV, 247) His insight into truth and happiness is not negotiable. For he cannot convert his experience into saving advantages. The experience is final and so absolute that nothing of significance can follow it.

For Adé's timid lover, Achille, "the little laughing matter" ends with suicide. The young man appears to be living in a daze. Pushed around by Adé, he unwillingly follows her to the forbidden sanctuary of her husband, flees with her as she has decided, and delivers her message to Gérard not understanding that Adé is no longer interested in him. Dumbfounded, he listens to Jean-Louis' explanation. "Vous n'avez été que le partenaire de sa comédie. Nous croyons être leurs amants, nous ne sommes que leurs complices." (IV, 243) The young man suffers in silence. In retrospect, his past happiness with Adé was so short his present suffering seems endless. In the same sleepwalking appearance, Achille steps outside and shoots himself—the only action he performs on his own initiative.

Hélène's husband Jules, calm and cocksure of the outcome of the excitement, functions as a choric commentator. Without illusions about the surprises life reserved for him, Jules is resigned to the mediocrity of his existence. With the wisdom of a sensible moralist he tries to calm down Gérard. Adultery is almost inevitable in a society that no longer believes in God and has no other set of values to live by. Salacrou's concern about the contradictions of bourgeois ethics and mores had appeared already in *Une Femme libre* where Jacques cautions Lucie against discarding all tradition and prejudice as useless trash. The theme becomes quite prominent in *Un Homme comme les autres*. Raoul commits enormities that the mere bourgeois code he lives by is powerless to curb. Mme Berthe, in the same outrageous manner, overthrows all the laws of God and man with the rigorous logic of a faithless soul. The teachings of the church exert no longer the influence that could affect human acts. Salacrou seems to be disturbed by the moral vacuum that the destruction of religious values has created. But the moralist regrets are not coupled with a lawgiver's zeal to institute another viable morality to live by. It is not part of the play's purpose to suggest

that men should return to the Christian faith. In a rueful mood the author contemplates the stay and the comfort that are now beyond his reach.

It is Adé who moves most freely in this morally undefined medium. Responding only to her instinct to seek gratification of her desires, she brazenly avows her duplicity. Heedless of the suffering and despair that trail behind her, Adé insists: "Je veux un grand emportement." (IV, 137) Hélène blames the taints of life for what she has become. Or she invokes God, whose law has no meaning for her, to shrug off accusations. Flitting from one amorous adventure to another, she hopes to surprise her true love, while the past must disappear in oblivion. Lacking the open impudence of Adé, she nevertheless wreaks suffering around her. Gérard is first outraged at the thought that the husband in a way profits unknowingly from adultery. The lover will very likely be abandoned soon, and it is always the husband who gets the better of his wife's unfaithfulness. Thus, Jean-Louis, the deceived lover, reaches the farcical paradox: "Quoi qu'on en pense, le cocu c'est presque toujours l'amant." (IV, 220) Jules is quite content to enjoy the afterglow of his wife's excitement over her lover, and Gérard, too, receives from Achille's arms a more appreciative and affectionate wife. The two lovers must yield to the husbands. Unable to accept their defeats, one commits suicide, the other will become an anchorite to await the new generation.

Deceptively frivolous on the surface, the play expresses some of the author's most serious reflections on the human condition and restates his favorite philosophical notions. Since the plot of the play develops on two basically identical situations in the husband-wife-lover triangle, the characters experience a confusedly objective and subjective apprehension of their involvement. Emotionally implicated in one triangle, they are spectators of an analogous situation that may appear quite ridiculous. But with the realization that any judgment passed on others is applicable to their own case, the distinction between the actual involvement and the mirrored one breaks down. Gérard vents his wrath accusing Hélène with words that are really meant for Adé. Hélène shows affection, pity, and a feeling of guilt for Gérard as if he were her husband Jules. Gérard inveighs against Jean-Louis whom he subconsciously identifies with Achille. These emotional entanglements accentuate the virulence of their reciprocal judgments.

In Gérard this confusion of attitudes is carried even further. In his suffering he seeks solace in an attempt to escape his own

consciousness. Deceived by Adé, he imagines himself being Adé's lover in order to receive her caresses. But the transfer of consciousness is never complete, and the momentary perspective as a lover and a cuckold is doubly painful. His consciousness is simultaneously subjective and partly objectified. Holding in his arms the divorcee Hélène had sent to console him, he says: "J'ai l'impression d'être 'l'autre.' . . . Dans vos yeux, il est évident que ce que je cherchais c'était le bonheur d'Adé lorsqu'elle me trompa pour la première fois. . . . En jouant le rôle de l'autre je me regarde me tromper moi-même." (IV, 184) Jean-Louis tries to remove himself from his subjective experiences. He keeps saying that they all play roles in a puppet play. Adé's sudden decision to leave Gérard must have been borrowed from fiction. When Adé has returned to her husband, he explains to the humiliated Achille that she only wanted to play with him a role in a novel. Jean-Louis and Gérard have assumed attitudes which they prefer to call friendship. But this friendship does not go beyond the execution of some ritual gestures with which they replay their schoolboy experiences. Jean-Louis seems to have grown tired of playing the naughty boy. Inversely, Gérard asks Jean-Louis not to play the correct friend with his wife. When love and friendship turn out to be only attitudes without a deeper meaning, the other person is but an actor who plays a role "comme dans certains films d'autrefois." (IV, 166) To Jean-Louis the entire dénouement of the situation is arranged with the efficient artificiality of a puppet play, "où les poupées sont parfaitement en place pour recevoir les coups et disparaître une fois touchées." (IV, 247) Thus, when Achille has committed suicide and as the wives return to their husbands, Jean-Louis, before disappearing from the civilized world, concludes this "little laughing matter": "Le ballet est terminé." (IV, 251)

These frequent references to the world of fiction delineate also Salacrou's aesthetic aims. The mention of the world of fiction can be a design on the author's part to render an improbable situation plausible. But in *Histoire de rire* the characters themselves display consciousness of their improbable situation. Whatever illusion of reality may have been created has now been broken. A dual consciousness of play world and real world is forced on the mind of the spectator. Allusions to fiction give distance to the dramatic experience and draw attention to the play as play, underlining the essential unreality of the play world. The illusion of reality is purposely broken to tone down scenes where emotions otherwise might run too high. Aware of the two worlds of fiction and reality side by side,

the spectator does not identify himself with the character on stage. He is reminded by the farce of the real world where these tragic-farcical situations are to be encountered. Denying emotional identification on the part of the spectator with the characters, the play makes a comment of universal validity on the human condition in general.

With these two plays, *Un Homme comme les autres* and *Histoire de rire*, Salacrou perfected the technique of tricking the spectator's expectations. The spectator is first pleased to find himself in the presence of a theatrical mechanism well known to him: a boulevard comedy or a bourgeois drama, with its subject matter solidly anchored in a contemporary context, with a traditional type of plot and character. But the subsequent development of the play belies the initial promise of maintaining the public's good conscience. Any motive for satisfaction is destroyed and the spectator is shaken in his contentment about himself and his world. Allusions to the contemporary scene turn out to be indictments of the existing order of things, and the spectator is accused of perpetuating it. His complacency as man is denounced not only on a moral plane but also on a metaphysical one. And even the theatrical genre, in which the play is written, is proven to be false.¹⁷ A number of Salacrou's postwar plays, notably *L'Archipel Lenoir*, will hark back to this method with increasingly bitter tones.

The mood in which Salacrou contemplates the human condition is rarely sustained for two consecutive plays. Thus, *La Terre est ronde*, separating *Un Homme comme les autres* from *Histoire de rire* in chronological order, is a purely subjective quest for faith, different in content and form from its antecedent and sequent. After the completion of *Un Homme comme les autres*, Salacrou wanted to acquit himself of a debt. He felt he owed to his youth a play on Savonarola for which he had taken extensive notes some fifteen years before.

7 / *The Infernal Cycle*

ALTHOUGH *La Terre est ronde* belongs to the period of Salacrou's maturity, in a sense, it is also a "firstling." It was in 1920 that Salacrou, with his newly acquired *licence de philosophie*, intended to spend his summer vacation visiting Florence, Rome, Naples, and Sicily. But at his first stop in Florence he was so fascinated by the city that he forgot to continue his trip, and the three months passed swiftly on the banks of the Arno. Salacrou became first interested in the life and personality of Savonarola upon reading Gobineau's *La Renaissance*. He retraced Savonarola's *via dolorosa* from the convent of San Marco to the Piazza della Signoria. Inspired by the surroundings, Salacrou laid out a detailed plan for his first play which he entitled *Savonarole*. Back in Paris, Salacrou continued to gather documents for two more years, trying to reconstruct the life of the prophet day by day, but without actually attempting to start writing. At that time the main difficulty was the reintegration of historical personages into the subjective realm of art where the author wants to reign supreme, independent of psychology or history. This difficulty appeared to Salacrou almost insurmountable during his intransigent formative years when any incursion of the objective reality into a work of art would be considered treason. Prying into history, Salacrou had uncovered so many external facts, irreducible to the exigencies of art, that he was afraid to produce a chronicle play. Without a solution, the plan lay dormant for about fifteen years while many other projects were conceived and executed. And then one day, not even consulting his once painstakingly gathered notes, Salacrou started to write.

La Terre est ronde was produced at the Atelier on November 7, 1938. The Munich Conference had just taken place. As if to forestall the misinterpretations that the public of 1938, a year of ominous forebodings and premonitions, might impose upon the play, Salacrou added a note to the program to the effect that his play was neither political nor historical. But the public was bent on deforming the play to suit its predominantly political preoccupations. The public insisted on extending the superficial resemblance

of the regime of Savonarola to the contemporary totalitarian states. The political implications of the play did not appear incidental, and led astray by its own predilections the public really did not understand the play and found the ending especially disappointing.

The historical figure of Savonarola and his dictatorship have fascinated many historians ever since the days of Machiavelli, who had himself witnessed the events. They have attempted to explain the revival and rise of a medieval ideal in the midst of the worldly city of Florence, which is often considered the cradle of the Italian Renaissance. This great theocratic experiment to reinstate Christianity as a system of statecraft and as a way of practical life had diverted the Florentines for a brief moment from the admiration of their ancestors for whom the supreme law was the satisfaction of life. With all its affluence and culture, Florence, cowed and subdued by Savonarola's fulminations, had accepted this ascetic faith at whose core lay the renunciation of the world.

Salacrou handles the plot of the play along these points of spectacular contrast. He selects three crucial episodes in Savonarola's life around which the plot is built: Savonarola's vision in which God commands him to reform the world; his temptation to accept the Purple offered by Borgia; and the day before his execution. Savonarola appears only in three isolated scenes—three soliloquies in his solitary cell where he meditates on the three general themes: on his purity and the corruption of the world, on virtue and austerity, and on death. These static scenes, focal points for each act, are not directly integrated in the plot. The outside world, with its bustle and licentiousness, contrasts sharply with the asceticism of Savonarola. Although Savonarola is never seen among those whom he is supposed to save, the two distinctly opposed domains interact. First, Savonarola's whip shapes the destinies of his flock. At the end, as the Florentines revert to their old ways of life, they take their revenge on the visionary spellbinder.

The play opens with a carnival scene on the Piazza. As if on a merry-go-round, masked people of various occupations and interests swirl by. It is rumored that a man named Columbus has just departed towards the West and that the Prior of the convent of San Marco, Giromalo Savonarola, has refused to grant absolution to the dying Lorenzo de Medici, the Magnificent. Manente, an apothecary and a self-conscious humanist, and Mariano, a dissolute Franciscan, discuss with satisfaction the great strides mankind has made toward a better future, freed from the superstitions of the past. The apothecary and the friar disappear in the commotion and

a sensuous youth, Giacomo, wanders on stage chasing a masked woman whom the ardent seducer does not recognize as a cheap prostitute. Two matrons, Margherite and Clarissa, come to the fore to exchange their plans and hopes of capturing a young man in the merrymaking of the masked crowd. Silvio, a boisterous rake, and Bartholomeo, another member of his gang, decide to play a prank on the old Minutello whose daughters Faustina and Lucciana have attracted the two young men. To expose the father, who keeps his daughters under constant surveillance, they arrange a meeting between Minutello and his masked daughter Faustina. Thinking that he is about to enjoy his last amour with a "virtuous" married lady, Minutello unmasks his sensuality. Faustina is horrified to see the sensuality of her father and flees his house. In his indignation and utter shame Minutello curses Silvio who shrugs off the imprecations with blasphemy and unconcern. Silvio accosts the pious Lucciana who first refuses his advances. But finally another mask falls, and the carnival scene ends with Lucciana avowing her love to Silvio.

Salacrou attempts to give a panoramic view of Florence in a definite historical context and to capture the spirit of the age, the currents that swept across Western Europe as it emerged from the Middle Ages. Manente, a fifteenth century Homais, is a caricature of the self-conscious, cock-sure humanist. The characters, such as the gullible Minutello, the harridans Margherite and Clarissa, the prankish scoundrels Silvio, Giacomo, Bartholomeo seem to have stepped out of Boccaccio's tales of *The Decameron*. In this general atmosphere of gaiety and laxity, the dissonant themes of death and carnal sin are preluded through allusions to the dying Lorenzo and the prophetic fulminations of Savonarola. But these ominous sounds are drowned in the laughter and merriment of the carnival crowd.

The next scene is set in the bleak cell of Savonarola. Withdrawn from the world, Savonarola contemplates with contempt the vanity of men. But the meditation is really not directed toward man but toward God, and his indignation intimates a thin-veiled consciousness of his own purity and righteousness. Frightened by the world and disgusted with it at the same time, Savonarola strives to detach himself from everything that is human. His thoughts are couched in a dignified, rhapsodic, biblical language, the medium which can communicate "God's Word." The meditation is interrupted by Savonarola's vision of a clenched hand in a cloudy firmament clasp ing a sword, proclaiming the wrath of God on the tainted world. The scene is wrapt in an atmosphere of mysticism and asceticism,

thus contrasting with the preceding sweeping tableau.

The third scene picks up the strand of the love affair between Silvio and Lucciana. For several months Silvio has been frequenting Lucciana in her room, behaving in the exemplary manner of a polite young man. But he has grown weary of Lucciana's pious reservations and insinuations that he should obtain Minutello's forgiveness and ask for the paternal blessing to marry her. Silvio has just learned that the earth is round. Excited and feeling invited by the unknown that lies behind the Western horizons and expecting to find there a more intense life, Silvio plans to join the expedition of Amerigo Vespucci. The unknown regions of the orange in the sky, as he tries to explain his cosmology to Lucciana, seem to him full of mysterious marvels and unlimited possibilities. Minutello appears unexpectedly and Silvio hides in a niche behind a curtain. To find out her father's intentions, Lucciana tells him a story which she pretends to have read in a book, about two lovers who must keep their love secret. She minutely describes her own plight. Minutello is moved by the story and sympathizes with the unfortunate lovers. When Lucciana asks him what he would do, if he were the father, carried away by the authenticity of the story, he unsheathes his sword to thrust it in the curtain where Silvio is standing. Lucciana reminds him that it was just a story. When Minutello has left, casting her religious scruples to the winds, she becomes Silvio's mistress. With this incident ends the first act. Against the colorful background of Florence in 1492 rises the gaunt figure of the Prior of San Marco. Silvio, who is to become one of his most fervent disciples, is still restlessly seeking satisfaction in carnal pleasures.

Several months later, by dint of adventitious circumstances, Savonarola has risen to the height of his power. His prophecy that God's scourge will descend upon Italy has come true in the form of the barbarian French army. Savonarola has succeeded in turning his flock away from the world. For fear of being whipped, people greet each other with "Christ is King." With the ardour of minors, children roam streets to drag preening women and dissolute youths to the pillory. They spy on their parents to report their sins. Chastity reigns in Florence even among married people. Under Savonarola's whip, a divine order is imposed upon the city which has risen from the muck and sloth of its past to become the city of God.

The love affair had ended abruptly in the restlessness of the time. Carried away by his love for Lucciana, Silvio never joined the expedition of Vespucci. After three months, as if driven by an obsession to torture himself and the woman he loves, Silvio had

run off with a gypsy girl. Pregnant and abandoned, Lucciana in her desperation had consented to conclude a loathed marriage with the old pharmacist Manente. Having learned of Lucciana's marriage upon his return to Florence, Silvio in his remorse sought consolation in the asceticism of the reformed convent of San Marco. He is brought to the house of Manente by a rabble of children in search of recalcitrant Florentines. There he confronts Lucciana for the first time after his flight with the gypsy girl. Like the uneducated simple followers of Savonarola, Silvio, who used to have the refinement and taste to enjoy the exquisite art of the past and present, orders Boticelli's paintings and rare edition of Ovid brought to the pyre. The next day Savonarola will burn the idols of the humanists on it. Savonarola has almost succeeded in turning this worldly city into a community of monastics.

But Savonarola himself, once having embarked upon his mission to save the world, is also exposed to the temptations of the world. In his solitary cell he weighs the Pope's propitiating offer of the Purple. His reason argues eloquently with his conscience in favor of accepting the offer. Elected cardinal he could become Pope and reform the Church from within. Savonarola temporizes. Florence, chastened, now lies at his feet as a votive offering. He would have liked to withdraw from the world to contemplate his accomplished work. But he realizes also that once having committed himself he will never find repose because his task is unending. Once he has silenced the carnival songs, the cries of the merchants and usurers, a dreadful silence envelops him and he hears only the reverberations of his thundering voice. And so he must continue his work. When Borgia's emissary comes to offer him the Purple, he will lash out with vehemence and scurrility. The two worlds, the human and the divine, that were so distantly apart, have interacted. The humans, spurred by Savonarola's coercion, are struggling to attain the chastity of their prophet. But Savonarola is irremediably drawn into the human affairs.

Six years later Savonarola's theocratic regime is crumbling. Faustina, who had meanwhile become a prominent courtesan at the papal court, has come to Florence to bring matters back to normal. With the cynicism that she has absorbed at a worldly court where life is evaluated in terms of everyday pleasure, Faustina is determined to end this masquerade inspired by Savonarola. From now on Fra Mariano will make his own prophecies and take away from Savonarola the monopoly of interpreting celestial voices. Fra Mariano will proclaim that Savonarola is a false prophet, and to

back up his claims he will challenge him to undergo an ordeal by fire. Fra Mariano, frightened by his role in the plan, backs off and Faustina's project is almost foiled. But then Fra Mariano is dragged out before Savonarola by a group of children who had overheard the conversation. With the same cynical clairvoyance, Faustina approaches the two frustrated lovers, Silvio and Lucciana, who claim to have transformed their earthly passions into an ethereal Christian fraternal affection. With no illusions about the human heart, she challenges Silvio to deny what she sees so clearly but what the two lovers dare not reveal to themselves. She proposes a very practical solution. She will take both lovers along with her to Rome, and Borgia will absolve Silvio from his monastic vows. They would hide in Faustina's villa until Manente's death. But if Faustina has so lucidly detected the irresistible impulse of the flesh, she underestimates the ecstasy of despair of a soul that will never acquiesce to human depravities.

With the rarest of courage, Savonarola has ignored the coward's challenge because it is not man's right to provoke God. Silvio, however, cannot withstand the temptation to force God's hand or to perish in the flames, for if God refuses to reveal himself, his life would have no value anyway. But on the day of the ordeal a rain storm puts out the flames and soldiers seize Savonarola and Silvio. On the Piazza, as in the carnival scene of the first act, a motley crowd is milling around. There are embraces, sighs of relief, and merrymaking. The children who used to help Savonarola make Florence the city of God are now sharpening their sticks and anticipating the joy of jabbing the false prophet.

The cycle has ended. Savonarola's experiment had not quickened the conscience of the city. No one, not even his most ardent disciple, Silvio, had understood him. The Florentines had played along with him in another carnival masquerade, a grim one, to be sure, and having grown tired of the game that could not even produce a miracle, they cast him aside. These unredeemable creatures have preferred their perishable earthly happiness to a vision of eternal bliss. The world will go on as before. In thirty years those who lived and suffered will be dead, and in another thirty years they will be perhaps forgotten.

Along with the failure of his efforts to reform the hearts of men, Savonarola faces also an inner crisis. A recluse abhorring the world and dreading life, a stranger to Florence, thrown into the midst of political turmoil and moral degradation, Savonarola first flinches from his divinely inspired mission. To beat back his fear of the

human beasts, Savonarola encloses himself in arrogance, in a feeling of superiority and hatred. The human talk with which man expresses his petty concerns, displeasures, and joys perishes as soon as uttered. He through whom God speaks will use only the eternal "Word of God." No woman's hand has touched him, and he had abandoned even his mother to follow Christ. With self-righteousness and superior consciousness of his own goodness, he contemplates the nauseating sight of his fallen brothers. He could have loved humanity in the abstract, but he could never stoop down, without repugnance, to help his miserable fellow man in need. His mission to save the human race is a means to elevate himself in the eyes of his Creator and to attain his own salvation. The anguished cries of the whipped and the tortured will never interrupt his hosanna.

Assured by his visions, Savonarola knows that his work is just and pleasing to God. When Friar Silvio lets everybody know that he is accepting the challenge to undergo the ordeal by fire, Savonarola reprimands him, for "un homme n'a pas le droit de provoquer Dieu." (IV, 113) Seeing that his work has started to crumble, for the first time he waivers in his convictions. Perhaps God is willing to offer an easy solution. Since God's voice is silent he reassures himself with human words that betray anguish and doubt. When Savonarola is seen in his dungeon after twenty-seven days of torture, his flesh mangled, alone, abandoned by his disciples, the divine *logos* is replaced by the anguished voice of a suffering human being. Savonarola had never shrunk from the thought of martyrdom. But no luster surrounds the humiliating sight of a frightened and agonized man before his mute torturers who show no compassion, not even hatred, but only satisfaction with a job well done. Their presence only accentuates the loneliness of this forsaken being. There is no gauge to measure the distance between a man tortured alone at the bottom of a dungeon and the tranquil men who, as if aping God, stolidly listen to his cries. "Qui pourra dire aux hommes heureux, l'horreur d'un homme seul dont on déchire les muscles, dans une cave, muscle par muscle." (IV, 116) In human terms his suffering has no sense. It cannot be in retribution for some transgression, for he, the pure, has committed no sins. Like Silvio whom he rebuked for provoking God, now Savonarola himself continues to interrogate the silent sky in the hope of obtaining a sign.

As if answering Savonarola's anguished cries, the executioner enters and starts flogging him. It is the same whip with which the executioner used to chastize those whom Savonarola had con-

demned. On the day of Savonarola's execution, the hangman promises to do his job with such refinement that Savonarola, while hanging alive over the flames, will fully recognize the futility of his life. Before he dies he will hear the humiliating laughter of his amused spectators who will enjoy his convulsive dance in mid-air. The executioner, the symbol of the brutality of the world, dashes Savonarola's last hopes of consecrating the imminence of the divine order through an awe-inspiring martyr's death. His death as well as his life will be just another spectacle for the Florentines. Delivered of all his illusions, Savonarola is finally initiated into mankind. Awakened to life in the clutches and twists of the rack, he is born to humanity whose only reality consists in pain and in a sense of futility. Tomorrow he will be hanged, and his ambitions, his struggles, his suffering, the suffering he inflicted on others—all will vanish without a trace in the timelessness of the universe. "Je serai mort demain, mais dans trente ans, vous serez tous morts, et trente années passent vite. . . . Des hommes vivront qui ne sont pas nés et certains porteront des noms semblables. Dans trente ans, tout sera mort, et tout sera vivant. Tout sera semblable et tout sera différent, sous le regard identique de Dieu." (IV, 122) Having reached the bottom of his despair, Savonarola hears again his reassuring divine voices. "Tout cela est comédie et la comédie est finie. Comprenez que vous n'êtes rien, et que ce qui fut avant ne fut rien, et ce qui sera après ne sera rien. Tout est comme rien. Et rien n'existe si ce n'est toi, clarté de Dieu." (IV, 123)

Upon this note, the curtain falls. Savonarola must accept the fact that his life, his suffering and struggles, and all that is human have no meaning beyond that of a mere succession of mechanical phenomena. The two domains, the human that is so utterly wanting in purpose and transcendency, and the supernal, not realizable in human experience and unknown, have no mutual relation. In the face of the divine, man can only appear ridiculous at best. But to reduce anguish, suffering, and frustration to a comical experience is tantamount to a total negation of everything. If the human tragedy is but a puppet play, the significance of a superior order is likewise unthinkable. If "everything is like nothing," then "God's light" wanders meaninglessly, without an object, in nothingness. God's light becomes a complementary absurdity in the universal absurdity. There is just one certainty left—the certainty that the earth is round and that it revolves and moves in the infinity of space toward nothing. In this universe, man with his ambitions and hopes is just another absurdity.

The theme of sainthood and asceticism has already been suggested in previous plays. At one time in his life Ulysse felt the temptation to spend his days on a solitary mountain. Denis in boyhood had stuffed pebbles in his shoes. But it is only in *La Terre est ronde* that the anguish of salvation and the appeal to self-flagellation come to the fore. The aspirations of the hero in *La Terre est ronde* are basically identical with those of some of the earlier heroes. With the same irrepressible desire to transcend the mere facts of life where he cannot quell his thirst for the absolute, Silvio elects sainthood instead of love, the choice of Lucie Blondel, Yveline Sivet and others. Silvio, closer to the medieval simplicity of *credo quia absurdum*, is more apt to be carried along in the avalanche of Savonarola's crusade for asceticism. But like his twentieth century fictional brothers, he is not exempt from doubts and nightmarish incertitudes. The same oscillation between carnal obsessions and fear of damnation prevents him from finding his peace. Blasphemous debauchery does not drown out his anguish for salvation, and while following the narrow road to sainthood, he regrets the many denied possibilities that awaited him in the worldly life. The basic predicament of Salacrou's protagonist has not changed. The investigation of this ambition is likewise pursued to its very end—until again nothingness stares at the man who had ventured too far beyond the limits of his human condition.

Silvio is a multifaceted being. During the carnival time in Florence he first appears as a boisterous rake. Two months later he turns up as an impassioned lover. But as if guided by God's hand to fulfill a greater destiny, he refuses to marry Lucciana. He finds a mysterious attraction in renunciation. Whatever mask Silvio dons, there is always an *arrière-pensée* of some sort. The great adventure of Amerigo Vespucci makes him feel that new times are at hand. He must remain free, unbound by marriage vows, to participate in the exciting events that will uncover the Truth. Two years later, flinging himself with the same unrestraint into the other extreme, Silvio has become the most devout disciple of Savonarola. He burns humanist treasures, orders that Manente be whipped, and exhorts Lucciana to take the monastic vows. He is proud of having forced his own will into complete submission to the authority of Savonarola. Lucciana is now jealous of God as she was jealous of the gypsy girl. Subconsciously jealous also, Silvio denounces Lucciana's marriage as prostitution. He evokes his image of their nuptial night, Lucciana's young body in the arms of the decrepit old man Manente. Although he intends to inspire in Lucciana abhorrence

of the flesh, he really reveals the tortures of his own haunted mind, still obsessed with the temptation of carnal sin. His aspirations toward the divine and the pure, his preoccupations with the salvation of his soul are still mixed with his love for Lucciana. He has oscillated between his urge to save his soul and carnal attractions. He is forever condemned to live in this state of dialogue where neither inclination gains a definitive victory. In his days of lasciviousness Silvio never reaches the ecstasy Faust longs for, "Verweile doch, du bist so schön," and the fear of perdition could never subdue his flesh into silence and obedience. And yet this tortured soul possesses a nobility that Faustina with all her lucidity and scepticism cannot measure up to. He reminds her of the pettiness and compromises that she shamefully accepts in order to convince herself that she is happy.

Silvio not only suffers from his own ambivalence, but he is also to spend the last moments of his life in that ever-gnawing doubt that tends to reduce his suffering and sacrifice to a vain gesture. Faustina tells him that men from the expedition to the West have returned. They had brought back gold, men whose skin is red, and birds that talk. But the birds "ne nous parlent pas du ciel! Ils ne nous parlent pas d'un monde inconnu. . . . Ils répètent les paroles que les hommes leur apprennent. Rien de plus." (IV, 108) Lucciana consoles Silvio saying that he would not have gained anything had he joined the expedition. When Silvio wards off the temptation to escape with Lucciana to Rome, saying that Savonarola's divinely inspired word will solve everything, Faustina bursts out in blasphemous cynicism: "Mon pauvre Silvio. Dieu lui parle comme parlent les oiseaux des îles. Dieu ne lui répète que ses paroles. Dieu est le plus fameux des perroquets." (IV, 110) "Et Silvio aurait perdu sa vie et la mienne pour un perroquet?" asks Lucciana horrified. Faustina presses Silvio for an answer to a question which he himself must have asked in his darkest moments. "Pour se calmer, se consoler et même tout expliquer, les étoiles et leur cœur, que les hommes aient eu le désir d'inventer Dieu, je le comprends. Mais fais-moi comprendre calmement, tranquillement, qu'un jour, dans le grand ciel vide, Dieu ait eu le désir d'inventer les hommes?" (IV, 109) Silvio only answers that within an hour Savonarola will be climbing the stake, singing chants. The miracle will prove to all the doubtful that God has not abandoned his creatures. But the next moment comes the news that Savonarola has not accepted the challenge. In his last hope to escape the meaninglessness of his life and Lucciana's, Silvio will undergo the ordeal by fire. But as the storm puts out the

flames, he is even deprived of that last desperate act. Savonarola, in his dungeon, appraises his disciple from whom the executioners could not extract a sound: "Et mon œuvre périra parce que tu as voulu sauver l'âme d'une seule femme. Tu n'as pas une nature de saint, Silvio. Le saint ne fait pas de choix parmi les pécheurs. Le saint prend sur lui tous les péchés de tous les pécheurs et se tait. Tu voulais te battre, te jeter au-devant de la mort, tu n'avais qu'une âme de héros." (IV, 118)

La Terre est ronde is the author's own spiritual adventure through his fictional heroes in the realm of the divine, the adventure which had tempted him ever since the days when the simple affirmations of *Le Catéchisme républicain* proved inadequate to explain the mysteries of life. *La Terre est ronde* ends on a note of failure. Commenting on the Roman girl who, raped and tortured, awaited her execution in a dungeon, Salacrou concludes: "J'attends toujours une réponse à ce hurlement de terreur." (VI, 206) The spectacular adventure of Savonarola, the pure and the flawless, cannot affirm that the little Roman girl's life and death, as well as his own and the death of millions of other unknown people, might have a meaning on a transcendental plane. Their terrestrial fortunes could only confirm an irremovable absurdity. Savonarola's final spite hurled at all that is human remains doubtful as to its divine inspiration. Was not his voice, like a parrot, repeating what his despair was dictating to him? And if he merely transmitted words that came from something outside him, what God, with all the heavenly joys, could erase that single moment of loneliness and despair when he was tortured at the bottom of a dungeon? The answer is not found in *La Terre est ronde*.

With its dramaturgically difficult subject, the play was a great challenge to Salacrou's technical mastery and ingenuity. The events sprawl over eight years, involving a great number of incidents and characters. Being at the crossroads of two historical epochs, they must be viewed in the light of the all-important *Zeitgeist*. Salacrou has achieved an admirable degree of dramatic compactness and intensity even while giving a panoramic tableau of Florence. The characteristics ascribed by history and tradition are carefully selected to evoke the most vivid, if not always a faithful, image of the past. The procession of the anonymous background personages is colorful and impressive.

Without introducing glaring anachronisms, Salacrou has handled freely the historical personages. The historical Fra Mariano

is altogether different from the unprincipled priest in the play. Fra Domenico, Savonarola's most ardent disciple who mounted the scaffold with him, was a simple soul, determined to prove his unwavering faith by fortitude, quite unlike the anguished, sophisticated Fra Silvio. Salacrou treats Savonarola's dictatorship as a moral and spiritual crisis. The political and economic aspects of the theocratic regime are neglected. The ardent social reformer, who sincerely wished to help his fellow men, appears in the play as a castigator whose divinely inspired mission is only a means of elevating his arrogant and intimidated self. In his desire to emulate Christ, Salacrou's Savonarola deviates completely from the true spirit of Christ's teachings. But with these historical distortions Salacrou achieves dramaturgically advantageous contrasts and contrapuntal juxtaposition. After all, Salacrou was not interested in writing an historical play. Nor is *La Terre est ronde* a contemporary play dressed up in historical disguise. Salacrou attempted to find a common denominator for humanity across time, "trouver dans la vie contemporaine des moyens de comprendre ces années disparues." (IV, 126)

In 1937 the Parisian spectator insisted on seeing in the play a political parody of the present. He was disappointed by the strange ending, and Savonarola's last monologue on his agony in the torture chamber could only remind him of the horrors of the remote past. But for the postwar spectator, who himself had witnessed the violence of our age with the ingenious refinements invented by the Gestapo and Cheka, Savonarola's anguished cries reverberate with the same intensity still today. Thousands of people who are caught in the fury of political passions could ask the very same question. In the contemplation of the past, Salacrou seemed to have envisioned an image of the future which most of his contemporaries considered unduly pessimistic. The course of subsequent political events proved that Salacrou's apprehensions would have to be magnified if they were to match the reality. The author himself was soon thrown into the midst of the violence and destruction of the war.

8 / *The Gloom of the Occupation*

AT THE outbreak of the war, Salacrou was organizing radio broadcasts from the front lines. But the project came to nothing, for the correspondents had little to report during the calm of the winter of 1939–1940. In February 1940, Salacrou was mobilized and assigned to the auxiliary service. Upon his own request he was later transferred to a combat unit. Taken prisoner at Brest on June 18, 1940, he escaped the same day. In July he was demobilized at Toulouse. After a short visit to Luchon, he settled in Lyon in the fall of 1940. Forcedly relieved of his many prewar activities, he assiduously played the piano, occupied himself with various dramatic projects, and edited notes and autobiographical items which he added as postscripts to his plays. In Lyon, Salacrou wrote *La Marguerite* and *Les Fiancés du Havre*. Though dissimilar in theme and dramatic mode, the two plays are written in the same mood, reflecting the gloom and discouragement of the author during the first years of the Occupation.

La Marguerite is a tight, realistic sketch. Ever since the disappearance of her husband Paul, Marguerite leads a miserable life in the company of her father-in-law. Blind, seriously ill, and tyrannical, the old man refuses to believe that his son has died. In spite of his physical handicaps, he is alert enough to suspect that Marguerite has a liaison with his doctor. He taunts her for having renounced all hope of Paul's return. As usual, the old man rehearses in his mind the imagined shipwreck, the rescue, his son's wanderings through China from tavern to tavern, and his final trip home. A knock is heard at the door, coinciding with the imaginary arrival of his son in the old man's mind. He answers the knock without becoming aware of the transition from his imagination to reality. His illusion materializes in the person of a vagabond who happens to drop in at that very moment. The blind man takes him for his son. The surprised vagabond, welcomed with joy and solicitude and a shower of reproaches for his long absence, answers vaguely and evasively. Suddenly the old man realizes that he is no longer

talking in his imagination to his son, but that there is really someone who answers his questions. He faints. When Marguerite comes in and finds out that the game has gone too far, she pleads with the vagabond to lend himself to the deception. Deeply moved, Marguerite, too, joins in and plays her role in the game. The old man's tenacity in preserving his illusion awakens in Marguerite regrets for her infidelity. The old man dies happily in the arms of the stranger, and Marguerite decides to leave her lover to wait for the husband who will never return.

The mood of the play is disturbingly uneven. At times the author seems to be bent on destroying all the sympathy that he was attempting to elicit from the spectator. Lyrical scenes filled with feeling are suddenly disrupted by rude remarks. The image of the blind old man who desperately clings to the memory of his only son is moving. But it turns out that in his earlier days he was a brutal miser, a chaser of women whom he regarded as detestable creatures. He rebuffs Marguerite's solicitude and treats her with scorn, mixing rudeness with obscenities. And then again warmth, pity, and affection envelop the scene as the old man leaves the room supported by a stranger whom he thinks to be his long-lost son.

Marguerite first appears as a mediocre woman who, in the arms of her dull-witted lover, has quickly forgotten her husband. She seems to pretend concern for the old man in her impatience to see him dead and herself freed from this bothersome witness. But the game of her husband's return holds a stronger sway over her than life. In her sincere repentance she decides to carry on the illusion which bestows on her dead husband a kind of reality that reality itself could not create. The stranger too changes masks. The weary vagabond is touched by the role he has to play. When the old man reminisces to him of his son's wedding day, of the honeymoon Marguerite and his son spent in the country, the stranger is moved to tears and he responds with vague allusions to his own happy days of youth, love, and innocence. It is more than the promise of food and shelter that makes him such a superb actor impersonating someone of whom he has never heard. But as soon as he has led the old man to his room where the latter dies happily in his arms, the stranger turns into a wicked tramp. He brutally demands money to flee the house where, in one hour, he had been given a wife, a child, and a father whom he has now lost.

For the most part, the interplay of illusion and reality accounts for the changing moods and the metamorphoses of the characters. The contagious illusion overtakes all characters except the doctor,

who is too obtuse and too conceited to come under its spell. Ironically, the man himself, Paul, has been a rather uninspiring person, a drunkard and a kind of vagabond. But in the memories of his father and wife his image appears in a totally different light. Their imagination surrounds him with a martyr's aura. He had left them in order to maintain his love pure and untainted by the contacts of everyday life. This image of his purity becomes so strong and real for Marguerite that she abdicates the shoddy contentments she receives from life to live in her illusion. Had circumstance permitted her husband to return alive, his actual presence would never have effected the moral regeneration accomplished by the illusion of his return. For the old man, the illusion of his returning son allows him to die happy. For the enigmatic vagabond, his participation in creating this illusion is only a short episode that strikes a nostalgic chord in him. His past remains unrevealed and he disappears wrapped in mystery. Marguerite's destiny is also left incomplete. She has renounced her former way of life to live in the purity of her husband's image.

The theme of the interplay of reality and illusion is too complex to be significantly exploited in such a brief sketch. Sympathy is evoked and then suddenly destroyed by the revelation of a repulsive trait in the characters. Moral elevation and a suggestion of sacrifice, rudeness, and brutality are like strands that continue to weave a fabric that is a little drab and, all considered, quite hopeless. *La Marguerite* cannot rank among the best works of Salacrou, but it evokes the bleak ambiance of the times when the present was so gloomy and the glimmer of a more hopeful future still so remote.

After *La Marguerite* Salacrou undertook to write a play called *Le Loup*, but he could not bring himself to finish it, and the manuscript has remained unpublished. As if seeking refuge from these dismal days of the Occupation, Salacrou conceived of a cycle of reverie plays. An inextricable entanglement of a love triangle would constitute the frame of these plays. To counterbalance the ugly reality of their lives, the three characters of the triangle abandon themselves in turn to daydreams that make up the three plots of the trilogy. For the setting of the cycle Salacrou chose the city of his earliest memories—Le Havre. The action of the first play, *Les Fiancés du Havre*, takes place in 1908. The play is not autobiographical, yet it reflects the author's nostalgia for his childhood days. It reflects also the bitter mood of the present when every true Frenchman thought of vindicating himself and his humbled country.

According to the initial plan, the three plays would deal with three characters: Richard, the son of a poor fishwife; Irène, an orphan girl, first betrothed to Richard, then married to Guy; Guy, the heir to the fortunes of the wealthiest merchant family in Le Havre. *Les Fiancés du Havre* treats the emotional entanglement mainly from Richard's point of view. Richard had left his native town to seek a fortune in the African forests. One day he receives a letter from his fiancée Irène who announces that her engagement to him must be broken off since Guy has asked her to marry him. In his solitary hut in the middle of the African virgin forest, Richard dreams of his return to Le Havre and his vengeance on Irène and Guy. The second play was to be Guy's dream ten years later, and the cycle would have been concluded by Irène's dream. On her deathbed, another ten years later, Irène imagines the death of the two men. The objective of the trilogy was to have been to present the characters according to their idealized image of themselves at three distinct conjunctures of their existence. If completed, the trilogy could have given the intricate interplay and contrast of an inner *modus vivendi* of the three characters and of their mutilated external image when they appeared in the reveries of the other two. Since the plan was only partially carried out, the characters may appear somewhat flat, lacking the depth of perspective which would have come with variations in focusing and with different projections in time.

In tone and mood, the opening of *Les Fiancés du Havre* is reminiscent of the first tableau of *Les Frénétiques*. The spectator is introduced to a musical comedy. The Duval-Lavallées, owners of a prosperous shipping and rum manufacturing firm, are preparing for the marriage festivities of Guy and Irène. The setting is a glittering one. It is a sunny spring day. The richly decorated interior of a sumptuous villa on the seashore has a delightful view of the sea and the sky. Designated by the author as the chorus, two comical characters, Antonia, the governess, and Mme Pascaline, the seamstress, set a light and humorous mood. Under the fairest auguries for this morganatic marriage, in an atmosphere of amiability and accord, the future couple and Clotilde and Charles, Guy's parents, discuss their plans for the festivities. All of a sudden, Richard's mother La Reinette, a vulgar fishpeddler, forces her way in to warn Clotilde of her son's wrath. Having amassed a stupendous fortune within three years, Richard has just come back to Le Havre. And he soon calls on the Duval-Lavallées to settle accounts with his former fiancée and Guy. The romantic hyperbole of sweetness turns

into a nightmarish obsession of hatred and fear. The mood of the play abruptly changes. Drawing room amenities are replaced by caustic remarks and merciless accusations which expose the true motives of acts that appeared to be inspired by charity and magnanimity. When Guy had insisted on marrying Irène, his parents had persuaded Irène's mother to liquidate her shop and to move to another town where she died. Her death had been welcome news for the Duval-Lavallée family, for now Guy's marriage to an orphan girl would gain respectability as a charitable act. Little by little, the sordidness of the three characters involved in the triangle comes to light. In their early schooldays Guy had tortured and humiliated the puny Richard. Then after a prolonged illness one summer, Richard had returned to school stronger and bigger than Guy. It was Richard's turn to humble Guy who was forced every Saturday to receive a kick on his backside. Irène had admired Richard for his strength and for the protection he could give her. Frightened and attracted she had submitted to his brutal demands to become his mistress, and they had been engaged before his departure. During Richard's absence, Guy had tried to force Irène to become his mistress. Failing that, he ingratiated himself with Irène through his attentions, gifts, and promise to marry her. Now it is again up to Richard to wreak vengeance on Guy and Irène. He no longer wishes to inveigle Irène away from Guy; he vows to himself to humiliate them both, to render their future marriage intolerable, to make them despise themselves. Irène succumbs under Richard's accusations and offers to accompany him wherever he might want to take her. But Richard spurns her submissive proposal. Guy is likewise unable to refute Richard's revelations of his petty schemes against him. Upon Richard's arrival at the Duval-Lavallée's house, Clotilde, Antonia, and Grandfather Aubanel were struck by his resemblance to Aubanel's son Gustave who had died in a shipwreck several years ago. From conversation with Reinette, Clotilde learns that both Guy and Richard had been born on the same day in the same clinic. Reinette had tied a piece of blue ribbon around the neck of her baby and just such a piece of blue ribbon, found around Guy's neck, had mystified Clotilde for twenty-eight years. Aubanel's search for the nurse who was suspected by Reinette of having made the wanton exchange of babies leads to no solution, for she had died two years ago. Guy had just made his debut in the business world by making ruinous investments during his father's brief absence; Richard, on the other hand, has displayed an amazing flair for sensing business opportunities. Although the older

generation is shocked by the absurdity of "un bout de ruban détruisant vingt-huit ans d'amour maternel," no one has a definite proof against it. Amidst this confusion and indecision Richard's father, Lefort, arrives. The old poacher and brawler has just been released from prison.

Guy is now completely dispossessed: he has lost his name, his past, and his love. Richard tries to recapture the youth that has been stolen from him by Guy. Too humiliated, Guy sees little hope in marriage with Irène, who had been Richard's mistress. Charles proposes a complicated solution whereby Guy and Richard would become sons of the family. In order to preserve the blood and the name, he decrees that a future son of Guy be married to a future daughter of Richard. "But what if I have only boys and he only daughters?" asks Richard, and Antonia adds pensively, "that can happen." Finally Lefort, the drunkard and parasite, cuts the Gordian knot by ordering Reinette to lead him out of the house. Antonia asks him: "Mais comment remettez-vous tout en place, vous?" Lefort hardly deigns to answer: "Tout était-y point en place avant?" (V, 117)

The stage gradually empties. Mme Pascaline and Irène will go for another fitting of the wedding gown. Charles and Guy must be at the office. For Aubanel and Antonia the dream of Gustave's return is now over. Left alone, Clotilde and Richard discuss the strange episode. Richard has found refuge from his vengeance in the never-changing maternal affection of Clotilde. Richard's dream in his solitary hut in the African woods ends on a nostalgic note, which comes from the author himself, separated by war from his native town: "O ma ville, ô ville du Havre, je viens de renaître, et je n'aurai plus que toi et ma mère dans mon cœur." (V, 120)

The postscript of the play may suggest that *Les Fiancés du Havre*, a revery play, is primarily a character study. Moreover, throughout the play the author employs dramatic devices such as monologues and asides, with the ostensible design of presenting more directly subtle psychological revelations. Yet it can hardly be called a psychological play. The fact that the play is Richard's vengeful dream of his return to Le Havre is not directly revealed to the spectator within the work itself, and there is no dramatic necessity for the spectator to know it. Nothing significant would be added by the disclosure that these happenings are creations of Richard's haunted mind. Within this subjective frame, the characters are psychologically sovereign entities that seemingly assert their own will. But their actions are reduced to gestures of nonconse-

quence. Except for Richard, of course, they all drift along in the unchangeable flow of events, struggling in vain to determine their own course of action. The spectator, who does not know that the characters enact roles in Richard's imagination, sees a deterministic universe, a reflection of the world he lives in.

The young man in *Le Casseur d'assiettes* is horrified at the thought that perhaps his reality is that of a haunting figure in God's nightmare. *Les Fiancés du Havre* could be an amplification of this early suggestion. At times the characters, so frustrated by the inefficiency of their will, seem to be aware that their reality does not extend beyond the nightmare in which they have to participate. This feeling of unreality is especially implacable in Guy and Irène who bear the brunt of Richard's vengeance. Dispossessed of everything that he used to call his own, Guy exclaims: "Qui m'éveillera de mon cauchemar?" (V, 111) For Irène, the sudden appearance of her former fiancé, who so easily could have perished in the African woods or in a shipwreck, "c'est une rencontre absurde." (V, 47) An inevitable catastrophe looms almost from the very outset, but in the nightmarish suspense no one knows what preposterous coincidence may occur to bring it about.

When the suspicions of the parents are aroused that Richard and Guy could have been exchanged as babies, Richard and Guy feel that they possess a false consciousness, a consciousness which should not be theirs. Each one's attempt to transplant his own self into the person he hates most throws them into utter confusion. To render his solitude in the African woods bearable, Richard had anchored this new life in two emotions that had accompanied him since his childhood: his attachment to Irène and his hatred for Guy. Then he had received the news of Irène's infidelity. He had endured hardships and solitude for a worthless cause. His hatred for Guy had given him strength to meet the adversities of life. Now, with the discovery that he could have lived Guy's life, with his victory over Irène and Guy, Richard feels emotionally exiled. He faces a twofold disjuncture from his own personality: he has lost his past, for the childhood and youth he had lived should have been Guy's; and the two emotions which had constantly oriented his life and given him a sense of self-identity have dissipated. Uprooted emotionally, Richard tries to transplant himself into Guy, acquire his consciousness. He spends the night in Guy's room. He even considers the possibility of taking piano lessons as Guy did in his childhood. He suggests to Guy that they exchange their childhood memories. The absurdity of the situation appears to him so consistent

that chance has become a providential agent. Irène would have stood before him in the same bridal gown if she had remained faithful until his return from Africa or if the nurse had not placed him in the crib of the Leforts' baby twenty-eight years ago. Looking at the portrait of the great founder of the firm, now his great grandfather, Richard once again is not convinced of the reality of his incredible success. In keeping with the other events, the ancestor could very well step out of the portrait to make his acquaintance.

Of course, Richard fails to carry out the impossible task of assuming Guy's consciousness. But he can always return to his own self with complacency, while Guy faces a profound disgust of himself: "Je dois vivre et je ne m'aime plus." (V, 90) Richard's victory over Guy is complete. Guy has been humiliated, he has lost the love of the parents whom he respected and admired, to become the son of a fishwife and a drunkard who loathe him. Clotilde's maternal affection, so warmly reciprocated by him, had really not been for him, but for her son. Now he is no longer her son. Thus, he faces the task of severing all ties with his past, a falsified past, which had not been rightly his. With this confusion of self-identity, Guy has been led to an impasse from which he cannot even back out. Humiliated as Guy, he now has become Richard, the most hated person in the world, Richard without Richard's triumph. His childhood and youth appear to him as a joke, false and without any meaning for the present. Now he discovers the indelible stigma of absurdity of his life. A meaningless and foolish act of the nurse has suddenly reached out from the past and turned his life into a nightmare. In this impasse, there is only one assertive attitude possible for Guy: to accept the absurdity of his life. And with this conscious acceptance of this reality of the human condition, he reaches a higher degree of authenticity.

Alongside this adventure of Guy and Richard, the character of grandfather Aubanel injects philosophical musings so dear to the author. Aubanel is concerned about the meaning of his presence in the universe. Aubanel, exiled from life by the proximity of death, and Richard, who has been ostracized by adverse circumstance, are both attracted by the immensity of the sky. Richard invites Aubanel to "écouter le voyage de la terre dans le ciel noir." (V, 87) It is a soothing pastime, for later, "nous plongerons avec plus de légèreté dans nos petites misères." (V, 87) Aubanel feels himself a distant spectator of planetary movements. From his cosmic perspective, which Aubanel assumes to face death, the activities around him appear ridiculous and insignificant. The inevitable unknown that

awaits him casts a strange spell over him. Death besets, attracts, and frightens him at the same time. In this twilight hour, when life, slipping away, loses its hold, and death offers no definite promise, Aubanel finds a replica of his son Gustave in Richard. As if his paternal love, unending, but without object after Gustave's death, had now called forth Richard, Aubanel feels that in the intensity and constancy of his affection there must be a suggestion of immortality.

In addition to Aubanel's incidental philosophisms and Richard's adventure in personality transfer, the play makes vitriolic comments on contemporary mores. The inflated upper world of the Duval-Lavallées is contrasted with the "lower depths" of the Leforts. But the juxtaposition is not intended to underline social and economic injustices. Salacrou has not tried to evoke the spectator's sympathies for the misery of the poor. Weighing the two families against each other, Salacrou produces a disenchanting and ridiculous picture of the social order. The upper social stratum is disgustingly insincere and egotistic. Charles maintains a dignified and calm pose, but his platitudes on bourgeois propriety are ludicrously out of place when important decisions must be made. With sternness and dignity he decides to settle the question of identity. But his Babbittry and priggishness are vain attitudes that arbitrate nothing in life. Lefort and Reinette are repulsively vulgar and selfish. The old poacher is as complacent about his parasitism as Charles is of his social status. On both social levels there is no idealism, no gleam of hope. Materialism engulfs the rich and the poor. The former feign righteousness and propriety with vain gestures and attitudes, the latter brazenly avow their indulgence in the gratification of their basest drives.

In theme and mood, *Les Fiancés du Havre* has an intricate pattern of progression. The beginning of the play with its sentimental songs, comical interruptions by the chorus, seems to suggest a musical comedy of manners. But the initial mood of amiability and kindness dissipate quickly as Guy, Richard, and Irène, who are bound together by the strongest of passions—hatred and vengefulness—spare no efforts to degrade each other. After this climax of raging passions, the plot proceeds in a more serene mood of acquiescence and compromises. Richard's vengeance quenched, his hatred abated, Irène and Guy pick up the shards of what could have been their happiness. The focus of the dramatic interest turns to Richard's venture of exchanging his consciousness for Guy's. As the attempt has no possibility of success, the only solution remains to ignore all that Richard's intrusion has caused. Without a true

dénouement, the play appears to lack a real objective of the dramatic action. Having reached its impasse, the dramatic situation returns to the initial starting point. And yet it is not the same. The characters have changed their moral complexion. Irène, the ideal heroine of a musical comedy, the poor orphan girl, so lovable and virtuous, so humbly grateful to her future husband for material comfort and ease, turns out to be a petty intrigant. Seeking Richard's protection and fearing him, she had become his mistress. Hoping that Richard would perish in the African woods, she had found Guy's marriage plans advantageous. The character of Guy is developed in the opposite direction. At the beginning he has extremely unpleasant features as a cocky young bourgeois, so conscious of his social status which he has earned by being born into the wealthy family. But at the end, virtually expelled from his family, dispossessed of everything, Guy rises sincere and human in his despair and shame. Lonely and humiliated he truly longs for Irène's love. Richard, the wronged love-lorn young man, never earns admiration with his victory over Guy and Irène, for his hatred and vengeance are too fierce and pitiless. No character is truly capable of eliciting the spectator's sympathy, nor does anyone inspire admiration and awe.

Falsity, on various levels, rings through with irritating intensity. In the first act, the emphasis is on the faked social milieu. The Duval-Lavallées thrive on self-righteousness, pretensions, and devious means in their business and social relations. The second act reveals the forged emotions of the characters. Irène is not truly in love with Guy, but rather with the wealth and comfort that would come with the heir of the prosperous import firm. Guy did not really want to marry Irène, he wanted to get even with Richard. Richard first poses as a jilted lover but actually wants to quench his vengeance. Clotilde has been a false mother for Guy, and Charles' paternal affection is nothing but his concern over the good reputation of the family and the business. The third act develops the theme of falsity even further. Guy and Richard discover that their personalities are falsified. But the exchange of their roles can only be a game of groping around in a labyrinth of bad faith. When everything seems to be false and nothing is any longer true and sincere, the distinction between the two qualities ceases to be possible. And thus everything reverts back to the initial situation.

This lack of authenticity, social and emotional, is inherent in the characters themselves. The characters seem to enact certain roles not only before the others, but also before themselves, as the play

itself is Richard's wishful game of revenge. Even the soliloquies reveal only self-deceptive projects of unrealized ambitions. The minor characters, however, throw more light on the psychological contortions of the three personages. Antonia and Pascaline are ironically labeled as the chorus. They have no dramatic function in the development of the action. On the contrary, most of the time their presence disrupts and arrests the progression of the plot. Pascaline can intervene at any untimely moment to ask the most inappropriate questions on the bridal gown. The appearance of the white bridal gown amidst the conceit and hatred serves as a recurrent leitmotif of absurdity and incongruity in the entangled situation. Sometimes from one of the recesses, which is its customary station for eavesdropping, the chorus offers candid comments. As seen through the eyes of these guileless persons, the finesses of a situation may escape their comprehension, but their intuition invariably detects the motives that wage the ruthless struggle. Thus, the chorus provides a different point of view, that of a naïve, uninvolved yet sympathetic observer.

Les Fiancés du Havre does not follow a single dramatic mode. There is fluctuation between stage realism and formalism. The play has a realistic setting to represent a particular social milieu. The characters of the lower social stratum, such as the chorus, Lefort, and Reinette, use the dialect of the Le Havre region. And yet these realistically set scenes are interspersed with purely formalistic theatrical devices. The aside is frequently used by the chorus and by Richard, Guy, and Irène as a kind of interior monologue. At the climactic point of indecision and doubt in Act II when the characters meet, not knowing what decisions or alliances the other two may have made, each character pursues simultaneously his own idiosyncratic thought in a reflective soliloquy which is orchestrated with the other two. The chorus, another formalistic device, is a parody of the classic chorus. Its presence does not lend meditative calm and restraint to the scene but quite often is rather boisterous and comical. To be omniscient, they must eavesdrop, and being surprised they must invent facetious excuses, thus creating a comic relief in the emotional suspense.

All in all, *Les Fiancés du Havre* cannot be ranked among Salacrou's best plays. The play lacks a distinct emotional or aesthetic bond which would unite the divergent ideas into one artistic mold. The emotional seesaw, the gratuitous injection of philosophical reflections, the absence of a dominant mood, do not converge to create a unity of impression. The mirror of the social milieu which

the author holds up reflects a sordid picture, and the spectator shudders rather than feels moved.

His personal life having been uprooted by the war, Salacrou's artistic activity, during these first two years of the Occupation, was marked by hesitancy and repetition, by retrospection and reevaluation of what has been achieved. The political ambiance, so little conducive to artistic creativity, demanded immediate readjustments. But Salacrou lacked the impulse and motive to find and follow new directions. He was occupied with several projects, yet he brought only two to completion. And even these two plays fail to convey that sense of inner necessity which flows forth with force and conviction in Salacrou's best plays. *Les Fiancées du Havre* harks back to *Un Homme comme les autres* and *Histoire de rire* for much of its theme and form. The author's own attitude hesitates between sympathy and gloomy irony, between nostalgia and revolt. *La Marguerite*, with its inconclusiveness, suggests the author's unwillingness to pursue the ideas and lead them to a conclusion. The time just did not seem to inspire Salacrou to creativity.

9/Nights of Wrath

SALACROU's personal life, following the relative seclusion at Lyon during the first years of the Occupation, was marked by an unprecedented amount of political activity. His work, which so far had remained basically apolitical, reflects these new preoccupations. The struggle for freedom and the task of reconstruction generated new hope and promise. During the last two years of the Occupation and the first years after the Liberation, Salacrou's attitude has optimistic overtones, as if he envisaged the possibility of a meaningful life through man's political endeavors and unflinching devotion to patriotic causes. This new facet of Salacrou's thought does not signify a complete reversal of his basic premises. During these years Salacrou wrote two plays and conceived of or partially executed other dramatic projects. Only the two completed plays, *Le Soldat et la sorcière* and *Les Nuits de la colère* attesting to the surge of the author's patriotism and effervescence, attempt to make a positive assertion of the values of political freedom and commitment. With *L'Archipel Lenoir* Salacrou returns to the same pessimistic and bitter mood with which he contemplates the conundrums of life and denounces his complacent fellow men. Later Salacrou appraised more realistically the meaning of political commitment. While his first optimism lasted, his work was enriched by these new reflections that gave birth to his best play, *Les Nuits de la colère*.

In 1943 Salacrou joined the Front National and participated in editing and distributing the clandestine publications. In April he made the first sketches of a play on the eighteenth century military hero, Maurice de Saxe, and his passion for the wife of the poet and musician, Favart. Salacrou had discovered some little known letters of Justine Favart and the secret correspondence of Maurice de Saxe. *Le Soldat et la sorcière* was written in July and August 1943 at Evian. This historical divertissement may first appear as a comical interlude, out of place amidst the violence and seriousness of the time. When Dullin agreed to stage the play in 1945, Salacrou

felt uneasy about the possible interpretations of the play. But after he had attended the first rehearsals, his misgivings were allayed. "Je découvre aujourd'hui avec étonnement qu'il n'est question que de la mort et de la liberté." (V, 257) Like *Un Homme comme les autres*, a boulevard comedy of bourgeois manners and of metaphysical pessimism, or *Historie de rire*, a farce of vaudeville glitter and of misanthropy, *Le Soldat et la sorcière* is only nominally a divertissement. The underlying thought is deeply serious, and the historical substance is impregnated with the most acute contemporary preoccupations of a Frenchman under the Occupation.

The plot of the play concerns Maurice de Saxe's infatuation for Justine Favart, called Mlle de Chantilly, the wife of Maurice's court musician and poet Simon Favart. As the aging marshal pursues obstinately the young wife who is equally obstinate in refusing his advances, the dramatic action fans out into many comical situations. The swashbuckling military leader is surrounded by several historical personages such as the Favarts and the royal physician Sénac. The pageantry and the court licentiousness and frivolity of the time lend an historical coloring to the play. But the spectacle and gaiety of this historical vaudeville never drowns out the contrapuntal themes of freedom and slavery, of life and death, of innocence and debauchery, of youth and old age.

Maurice de Saxe views his irrepressible passion for Justine as a preposterous occurrence that has entangled him, while there had been countless possibilities of not having encountered her. But in a deterministic universe, as Maurice prefers to explain it, every apparently meaningless gesture has its inexorable consequences along the causal chain of events. Once his passion has flared up, he must now quench it. There is no law, human or divine, which could forbid him to do so. With the petulance of the young man in *Le Casseur d'assiettes* who was angry at God for not having revealed himself, Maurice repudiates Justine's suggestion that man will be called upon to give an account of his deeds. The divine is incompatible with the human, and even Jesus, with all his partaking of human substance, cannot be an example for men. With the special prerogative as the king's favorite military leader, Maurice stands above the laws of the country. And thus there is no reason why he could not give free rein to his inclinations.

For Justine, submission to Maurice's insistence is not so much an offense against her moral sense as a loss of personal freedom. On the eve of the battle at Raucoux, Justine had evaded Maurice's grasp by feigning illness. But in her apartment in Paris she is

tempted to yield to him. Forgetful, she opens the closet where Favart is hiding from his creditors, and the husband stumbles out to greet the enraged lover. When the marshal has left in the company of Favart, Justine lets in her young accompanist, who is passionately in love with her. To force Justine to submission, Maurice orders her to be put in a convent. To be freed Justine must agree to become the marshal's mistress and she will rule at the marshal's private court at the château of Chambord. After a short time, Justine succumbs under physical exhaustion and is taken to Chambord. There she obeys the slightest wishes of her master. But Justine's mockingly submissive attitude is her revolt against injustice and brutal force. Her revolt, of course, cannot change the physical coercion. But she can always oppose Maurice's attempts to make her accept his right to subjugate her. Justine recites poetry and rehearses mentally her parts in Favart's operas while Maurice makes love to her. No matter how desperately Maurice is trying to make her renounce her contentions, she will never acquiesce in her status and he will never find approval and justification for his acts in her eyes. Knowing Sénac's prognosis that the irascible military hero will one day anger himself to death, Justine is meticulous in not missing an opportunity to infuriate him. And thus one day she can exultantly exclaim: "Favart, ton rival est mort,—et nous sommes vivants." (V, 253)

But the victory does not come without apprehensions and doubts. When Maurice dies Justine sighs with relief: "Mort? Ah, il était temps, la petite noirette allait l'aimer." (V, 253) There is always an irresistible attraction to find repose and peace in submission, in abdication of one's responsibilities. Having conquered her flesh, Maurice was on the point of enslaving her spirit also. The image of Maurice's youth appears, and the little singer is so fascinated that she avows her desire to throw herself into his arms. But the image is Maurice's farewell to his earthly existence, and Justine is saved in time from this final temptation. Thus, the play ends on an optimistic note.

Justine's attitude has obvious implications in regard to the contemporary scene, when every Frenchman was grappling with the task of finding for himself a morally responsible and politically meaningful attitude to face the defeat and the humiliations. Justine's attitude is that of the average man who lacks the uncompromising rigorous perseverance of a true martyr. Favart's proud sister Hélène, on the other hand, is the paragon of absolute morality, ascetic and unyielding to the end. She spurns Maurice's money,

which he had sent to Favart's mother to pacify her. In her ethical rigorism, good is desirable because it is difficult; it exacts courage, sacrifices, and suffering. An evil man is only a coward and a weakling. Gogo, the marshal's mistress, points out that Justine will be forced to submission sooner or later and that the resistance of the Favarts would have accomplished nothing. But Hélène, contemptuous of the sycophant, answers: "Nous aurons gagné quelque chose . . . de ne pas vous ressembler." (V, 216) Favart himself is also silenced, for the marshal has withdrawn his prodigal help and a *lettre de cachet* forces him to go into hiding. Hélène consoles him that he now fulfills the highest duty of his calling. In these times of trial, art is subservient to the artist's moral obligations. If the artist is not free to be a morally impeccable man, there is no alternative for him but silence, and his silence is of unequaled eloquence.

These remarks ring with autobiographical import. During the Occupation not a single play by Salacrou was produced. He was critical of those who questioned outright resistance as the only course of action acceptable to an honest Frenchman. He was displeased with Anouilh's *Antigone* because he felt that Créon represented another alternative: Créon, a thoroughly disillusioned man to be sure, accepts his humiliating human condition and tries to make the best of it, thus rejecting Antigone's categorical *No* in the name of some ideal purity and innocence which can only lead to death.

In *Le Soldat et la sorcière* these portentous thoughts of contemporary significance alternate with vaudeville flightiness. For the sake of mere scenic spectacle Maurice's entourage abounds in colorful minor characters: sycophants, informers, panderers, and pensioned mistresses. Burlesque situations arise as Maurice haggles with his garrulous and quarrelsome courtesans. Sénac appears at times as an obtuse academician, at others as a sorcerer mixing magic potions. Maurice's private detective spins villainous schemes which take all of Justine's ingenuity to foil them. As Sénac has decreed, two trumpeteers follow Maurice to remind him with blaring blasts that anger can be lethal to him. A typically farcical situation develops when the jealous lover is suddenly confronted with the naïve, unsuspecting husband. Music, dances, and poetry recitals are used to indicate lapses of time in the action. The merry-go-round scenes in Maurice's tent and at Chambord contrast sharply with the simplicity and austerity of the home of Favart's mother and sister.

Another perspective, offsetting the luxury, debauchery, and

pomp of the court, is added by the presence of two soldiers, Picardie and Provence, standing guard outside the marshal's tent. Never directly involved in the plot, they are living vignettes enframing the dramatic action. Choric commentators on the action from the point of view of the simple peasant conscript, they reminisce with nostalgia of their native villages, of the joys and misery of their folks back home. From the worm's perspective, they express their fears of death and defeat on the battlefield the next day. The marshal calculates his victories in terms of regiments and divisions, but seldom thinks of the suffering that each individual soldier has to face. While ballerinas dance a minuet in the tent, the two soldiers, thinking of tomorrow's battle, carve little wooden crosses. The contrast of the two perspectives, however, is not sustained long enough to elicit a moral judgment from the spectator. The presence of the two soldiers interpose between the spectator and the dramatic action. Their point of view is a serious and moving commentary on war, social inequities, and moral corruption. Yet the potentialities of this initial *Verfremdungseffekt* are not significantly exploited, and this perspective is lost in the jumble of the subsequent melodramatic events.

The action of the play encompasses a considerable span of time and the locale changes from scene to scene. Three brief interludes mark these spatial and temporal transitions. Serving also as expositions, these interludes are played on the proscenium before a curtain representing the geographical locale of the action. Thus, the first curtain is a map of the Low Countries, marking the famous battlefields of the marshal: Fontenoy, Lawfeld, Roucoux. In the second interlude, the characters move across the proscenium in front of a map of Paris. The curtain of the last act represents a view of Chambord. These dramaturgical devices suggest that Salacrou intended to place the play in a very definite historical and geographical context. They could have been meant to put the censorship off the scent, should it have suspected too obvious allusions to the contemporary political scene. On the other hand, they create another alienation effect to prevent, on the part of the spectator, excessive empathy and identification with the characters on stage. The illusion of reality thus destroyed, the spectator is expected to maintain a rational attitude to apprehend critically the message of the author.

Le Soldat et la sorcière, with all the poignancy of its underlying thought and situation, leaves an impression of incompleteness. In this play, the form fails to reinforce the idea. In *Histoire de rire*,

a farce, and *Un Homme comme les autres*, a *comédie rosse*, Salacrou had used these dramatic modes to accentuate by contrast the deeply pessimistic thought. Every farcical situation converges to produce a bitter afterthought. In *Le Soldat et la sorcière* the serious import becomes diluted by the vaudeville technique. There are too many distractions that are introduced for the sake of sheer amusement. The development of the main theme of freedom and slavery is stunted because the character of Justine is too frail and frivolous to support such a portentous conflict. Maurice appears too much of a cynical debauchee to bring out the polarity of life and death. Nor can it be thought that his whimsical indulgence in gratification of his desires is a concomitant of a universal determinism. The predicament of the artist in times of political crises is too briefly suggested in the sketchy character of Favart. But *Le Soldat et la sorcière* has its importance in the development of Salacrou's theater.

It is not difficult to see the translation of the hopes and anxieties which a Frenchman faced in 1943 into this historical vaudeville. With this more pronounced political consciousness, Salacrou's thought becomes markedly optimistic. The possibility of a meaningful political commitment overshadows the deep scepticism and the pessimistic metaphysical speculation which now recede in the background. The urgency of this critical time of violence and injustice implied new responsibilities and with them opened new vistas of human efficiency. In a sense, *Le Soldat et la sorcière* is a preparatory exercise for Salacrou's best play, *Les Nuits de la colère*.

With the completion of *Le Soldat et la sorcière*, Salacrou's sojourn at Lyon came to an end. In the fall of 1943 Salacrou returned to Paris to participate more actively in the political events of the time. In March 1944 he joined the Forces Françaises de l'Intérieur and was assigned to the same group as Michel Leiris, Jean-Paul Sartre, and Merleau-Ponty. After the Liberation he was asked by Edouard Bourdet, at that time Director of the Theaters, to take over the management of the Odéon. Salacrou invited Jean-Louis Barrault to work with him. In December 1944, while the war was still raging, Salacrou was given the task of organizing radio broadcasts. He saw an opportunity to counter the blasts of Pétain and his collaborators, who, accusing the Resistance men of terrorism and irresponsibility, justified the executions of some 150,000 hostages and saboteurs. Occasionally the imprisoned were allowed to write one last letter before facing the firing squad. Salacrou invited parents and relatives to send him these letters. The response was so

widespread that he was able to organize twelve broadcasts from December 1944 to March 1945. The letters were read by Madeleine Renaud, Lise Delamare, Julien Bertheau, and Jean-Louis Barrault in a neutral, emotionless tone, as advised by Salacrou. These broadcasts met with remarkable success, and Salacrou himself was swept by a wave of patriotism. It was during these broadcasts that Salacrou conceived of writing a play on the Resistance. But again, as it was with *La Terre est ronde*, when Salacrou grappled with the problem of transforming history into art, the choice of proper form and expression frustrated him. These last letters, written on the eve of execution, expressed the most heartfelt moments of the victims who had committed the crime of loving their country. Salacrou feared to betray this spirit, and the project made little headway.

While Salacrou was hesitating, various other activities engaged him. During the season of 1944–1945, *La Marguerite* and *Les Fiancés du Havre* were staged; *Un Homme comme les autres* was revived. During the early summer of 1945 Salacrou sketched out the first version of *L'Archipel Lenoir*. On October 29, upon the request of Jean-Paul Sartre, he presided at the famous lecture, *L'Existentialisme est un humanisme*. *Le Soldat et la sorcière* was first performed in December 1945. In February 1946 the Minister of Information offered Salacrou the management of radio. But Salacrou disliked the administrative chain of responsibilities, and being eager to start the composition of *Les Nuits de la colère*, he declined the offer. Later he came to regret this decision when he realized that he could have played an important political role in swaying the outcome of the referendum in favor of the new Constitution. The Socialists and the Communists supported the Constitution, but it was rejected by a narrow margin.

In addition to these politically oriented activities Salacrou was also busy publishing articles. A few days before the première of *Le Soldat et la sorcière* he published an article in *Les Lettres Françaises* explaining the appearance of an historical divertissement vis-à-vis the clamorous advocacy for a committed literature. The article in general echoes the vigor with which Jean-Paul Sartre outlines the responsibilities of the writer. To forestall misinterpretations of *Le Soldat et la sorcière*, Salacrou reminds his public that a committed author can never fully escape his own commitment, and his work will always reflect that. In other articles Salacrou expressed his deep concern over the present state of the theater. Some twenty years before, he had found most of the theatrical productions vapid and had dismissed them peremptorily. The present

theater is vestigial and stagnant. Most of the contemporary authors, nostalgic and retrospective, tell stories of another time. Topical subjects are eliminated from the postwar theater. Only a few of the more fortunate members of the working class can afford to go to the theater. And, precisely, this is the public which would be most interested in contemporary subjects, having participated so actively, for example, in the Resistance. Thus, Salacrou sees the future of the theater with the working class. But he does not take it upon himself to initiate a theater for the intellectually and socially underprivileged. Although he has always vigorously declared his sympathies with the proletariat, his theater remains basically bourgeois.

It is quite understandable that Salacrou, while contemplating or working on *Les Nuits de la colère*, pleaded for topical subjects, for treatment of contemporary political realities, which should be everyone's concern. Sartre says that bad faith begins when a writer lets himself be guided by what he thinks will be the judgment of posterity, or when he tries to give meaning, a kind of immanent finality, to his personal misfortunes and is convinced that they are there because a providential favor provides him with subject matter. Salacrou shares Sartre's insistence that every individual, especially if he is a writer, must become more and more a part of the national community. Sartre's vigorous advocacy of a committed literature was matched by his literary work. He himself could be the paragon of a committed writer. Salacrou's incursion into topical subjects was not less sincere, yet it remains a brief phase in his literary career. Salacrou has written only one play, *Les Nuits de la colère*, by many standards his best, on a truly topical subject; and the play is really an isolated instance among Salacrou's dramatic productions. But while this optimism and enthusiasm lasted, he was not merely paying lip service to the prevailing trends among French intellectuals immediately following the war.

It is not difficult to notice certain peripheral affinities of Salacrou's thought with the Existentialist theories which were rapidly gaining popularity in the postwar years. Salacrou repeatedly seeks explanation and reason for man's being in the world only to arrive at one of the basic tenets of Existentialism, that existence cannot be identified with necessity—to exist is to happen without reason. Salacrou himself observes that already in the 30's, when *Un Homme comme les autres* was composed, he had used "ce mot 'absurde' à la mode depuis quelques années et que l'on entend plusieurs fois dans le texte d'*Un Homme comme les autres*."¹⁸ Salacrou demands courage, honesty, and good faith, if existence is to be authentic, if

it is to be in accordance with a realistic grip of the ambiguous nature of the human condition. For Sartre, too, bad faith is flight from one or another dimension of human reality. Anguish and a crushing sense of absurdity are the inevitable concomitants to man who finds himself in the gratuitous and meaningless world. Salacrou and Sartre share the same convictions on the inalienable responsibilities of the writer. But these affinities cannot conceal the essential divergences of thought and temperament between Salacrou and Sartre. Salacrou's outward criticism of Existentialist ideas comes with his two subsequent plays, *Dieu le savait* and *Une Femme trop honnête*.

Salacrou had considerable difficulty with the composition of *Les Nuits de la colère*. The subject matter seemed to defy artistic form. The first version was written in the spring of 1946. During the summer months Salacrou reworked it at Luchon. Jean-Louis Barrault and Madeleine Renaud were the first to read the manuscript. Although they found "the play dangerous," they decided to produce it the fall of the very same year. The definitive version was written in the ruins of Le Havre. Salacrou anxiously waited for the première. "Jamais je n'ai tant souhaité le succès: pour Madeleine Renaud et Jean-Louis Barrault qui avaient pris de si gros risques et pour les camarades à qui je ne cessais de penser en écrivant *Les Nuits de la colère*." (V, 360) Salacrou's wish came true. The play remains his most enthusiastically accepted production.

Les Nuits de la colère marks a focal point in Salacrou's work. The play signifies a new phase, an unexpected turn in the search of the author for a set of values applicable in an effort to fathom the meaning of life. It may not immediately reflect its affinity with, let us say, *La Terre est ronde*. With the return of freedom to France, Salacrou seems to have envisaged new possibilities in man's efforts to gain salvation, to efface the stigma of absurdity from life. The same burning question, "Quel est le sens des hurlements d'un homme qu'on bat au fond d'une cave?" which has resounded throughout his work, would not linger unanswered in the profound silence of an absent God.

The dramatic nucleus of the play is a dispute, taking place in a timeless vacuum, among six men and two women representing two diametrically opposed ideologies. The dispute involves many ideas, with a gamut of shades between the two poles. Rivoire is a brave and valiant Resistance fighter who has never seen a shadow of doubt cross his path. At the other end of the scale is Pisançon, an unscrupulous petty quisling. Between them are the principal

characters: Jean Cordeau, the deceived and blinded saboteur, who seems to have resolved and left behind him a metaphysical conflict of grandiose proportions, and Bernard Bazire, the well-meaning friend of Jean, not measuring up to the heroic demands of his age. The wives of Jean and Bernard, Louise and Pierrette, add other nuances to the dispute: the former with her pathetic helplessness and inability to find life meaningful, contemplating the disintegration of her married life; the latter with her unabated egotism and unshakable maternal love, even when she faces the monstrous act of which she is not ashamed to be an avowed accomplice. Lecoq and Dédé, the two saboteurs, shade in between Rivoire's unwavering faith in the righteousness of his anger and the pensiveness of Jean in his search for meaning in violence, humiliation, and suffering.

The clash of these points of view and the personalities behind them is set in the timelessness of man's conscience. Much of the dramatic power is derived from the finality of the debate, since most of the characters are dead or in their agony. Death is so imminent that their lives, complete and immobile, have only retrospective values. Only the two women are expected to survive the carnage, and their attempts to circumvent their destiny appear puny and ridiculous. With no recourse to the promises of a future, with the exclusion of any chance for atonement, all acts have acquired a definitive significance in the perpetuity of human memory. In this atmosphere of eternity, impenetrable by the contingencies of life, its temporality and flux, all masks fall as useless props. Their destinies hermetically sealed, the characters can only retrace the chain of events—regret, like Pisançon, what they could have done but did not; vainly hope, like Bernard, to find justification and approval for what they did in the eyes of others; or proffer reassurances, like Jean, that the tragedy of their lives was inevitable for they could have honorably followed no other course.

The opening fusillade of the play leaves Bernard, Rivoire, and Pisançon dead. When the smoke subsides, all action stops and time is suspended. Pisançon and Rivoire start to argue about the possible meaning and values of life. With the conviction of an unscrupulous rogue, Pisançon doubts the overweening confidence of Rivoire. He insists that death has equalized his life and that of Rivoire, regardless of how divergent their aspirations and deeds may have been. Rivoire finds the meaning of life in his unabated, eternal wrath, for "*elle ne peut pas mourir, ma colère.*" (V, 266) With his certitude that "*un jour, les hommes seront heureux,*" a

certain tone of self-satisfaction rings through Rivoire's speech. "J'ai fait sur la terre ce que je voulais faire. Ma vie est parfaitement réussie." (V, 268) In the community of those happy people who will come after him, his will be a certain anonymous immortality in their happiness.

As Pierrette appears, the argument becomes more intense. Her entire life pivots on self-concern and on the well-being of her three daughters. Then Bernard rises from the dead to join Pierrette in the debate. Pierrette and he had hoped to lead a perfectly happy, sedate life, above and away from the eerie turbulence of the time in which they categorically deny any complicity. Admitting their failure, they must also ward off the vituperations of Rivoire who inveighs against their truancy in a time of great urgency and need.

The stage gradually fills with other characters to amplify the scope of the debate. The two Resistance fighters Dédé, and Lecoq, who, in the opening scene rushed out to stage the last desperate stand against overwhelming odds, return "dans un silence définitif avant que le tank envoie sa première dragée. (V, 271) Dédé had already been killed; Lecoq, as Dédé reminds him with the ominous omniscience of a choric personage, "va recevoir une grenade dans les pattes et ce sera fini, pour lui aussi." (V, 272) Lecoq's only hope is to be able to kill three or four of his enemies before the fatal grenade will blow him to bits. Pisançon quips with his usual impertinence: "Ce que ça peut être idiot, une bagarre vue de l'autre côté." (V, 272) Bernard and Pierrette deplore their failure to imitate in their life the fascinating tranquillity and majestic calm of the cathedral of Chartres in whose shadow they had hoped to spend a happy, carefree life. "Vous m'apparaissez comme une collection d'idiot," Pierrette snarls at Dédé and Lecoq, and Bernard echoes her insults by likening them to prankish boys whose Indian games ended with real bullets.

Louise, in search of her husband, also joins the company of wraiths, and the inquisition goes on. Now Bernard and Pierrette have to stand trial under Louise's accusations for having betrayed their friend. Louise seeks explanation of her husband's clandestine activities, of his affiliation with the Resistance saboteurs who must have inveigled him into joining the movement.

In response to Louise's call, Jean appears, lying in a dark Gestapo dungeon, exhausted after three days of torture, his eyes gouged out, his body overwrought with pain. Jean seems listless in face of the inquiries that greet him. With uneasy conscience, Bernard bemoans his shattered peaceful existence. Louise cannot divert her

mind from contemplating the lost happiness of her married life. Jean's thoughts circle around the strange aberrations of his mind while he was being beaten by men who were not ashamed of their job. He cannot forget the feeling of utter loneliness after he had disgorged whatever he knew of the movement. In his dungeon he was haunted by the one crucial question that every true hero of Salacrou's drama asks himself: "Je me demande quel est le sens des hurlements d'un homme qu'on bat au fond d'une cave." And Jean replies to his own question: "Eh bien! Voilà: j'ai trouvé: en 1944, en France, ces hurlements permettent à cet homme martelé de sauver de la mort sa femme et ses enfants." (V, 285)

On Louise's insistence that she be told of the events that precipitated her husband's death, Jean starts his story with the derailment of the train that led him to seek refuge in Bernard's home. Bernard, sensing that once again his conscience will put him on the rack if the incident is reenacted, interrupts Jean with his pathetic plea for caution: "Jean, reste chez toi. Comme moi, avec tes enfants." (V, 288) The remark is gratuitous and ironic for Bernard, as the spectator of the coming scene, knows that nothing can reverse the inevitable chain of events that had already happened.

The scene shifts to a railway embankment. Louise, the Bazires, and Pisançon step back to become spectators. The saboteurs are ready to place a bomb on the tracks to blow up an ammunition train. Lecoq admits that he is haunted by fear, yet he could not bear the humiliation of living solely for the security of his own existence. His fears and doubts are extinguished by the thought of the anonymous camaraderie that binds him with the heroic locomotive engineer who is aware that the derailment will bring sure death to him, and to his wife and children days of misery. Jean must explain his abhorrence of violence while waiting for a propitious moment to commit an outright act of violence. An unresolved metaphysical conflict is evident in his resigned acceptance of his existence as superfluous and incongruous in a world that can only be at best indifferent to his aspirations. Rivoire is content to find answers in his action, in the violent wrath of a rebel who refuses to submit to humiliation, injustice, and misery. With the prolonged sound of Jean's "Why?" a sudden image of Hitler, gesticulating and clamoring incoherent German words, appears on the moonlit embankment. The apparition serves to answer Jean's question and to evoke the mood of terror, fright, and fascination that held Europe during the madman's reign. His comrades realize that Lecoq's disguise as Hitler is one of his prankish ways of shaking off his fear.

The derailment scene fades out as the rattling sound of the oncoming train grows louder. Rivoire relates the rest of the incident, how Jean wounded in the arm by a stray bullet remembers his childhood friend Bernard and decides to seek temporary refuge in his house. A shower of caustic remarks, full of hatred and scorn, bursts upon the Bazires. As Pierrette eggs him on, Bernard begs for an opportunity to exculpate himself. Rivoire turns to the public, inviting it to listen to Bernard's story. Jean's remark, "Je t'écoute, Bernard . . ." concludes the first part of the play.

The second part of the play is set in the same infernal living room in the home of the Bazires; only time has moved backward to 1938 when the Lambeth Walk was a fad. Immersed in the complacent atmosphere of bourgeois respectability and tranquillity, Bernard, a successful businessman dealing in chemical products and a reserve officer expecting to receive soon his Légion d'honneur, appears as an amiable and honest person. Jean, on the other hand, cuts a somewhat pitiful figure of a misfit, with his refusal to elbow his way through life, with his intransigent antimilitarist stand, with his past metaphysical vagaries: "Je voulais être Dieu. . . . Maintenant? Je voudrais être un caillou." (V, 309) With a condescending smile Bernard recalls Jean's theory on the efficiency of man's will: "Les hommes sont libres comme les gouttes d'eau de la cascade. Mais il existe des gouttes d'eau optimistes qui disent à leurs voisines: moi, si je voulais remonter, je remonterais." (V, 311) And yet in this totally mechanistic universe, Jean has found room for a moral attitude: "Il y a sur la terre deux sortes de salauds, le salaud qui vit content de lui, le nez ouvert sur sa saloperie, et le salaud qui a tant de peine d'être un salaud." (V, 311)

In a quiet moment, when Jean and Pierrette have withdrawn to practice the Lambeth Walk, Bernard reminisces to Louise about his youthful love for her. Now he cherishes the hope that one day their children will be united. All of a sudden Louise, full of premonition and horror, bursts out: "C'est toi qui vas trahir Jean!" (V, 312) The sharp outlines of the décor blur and the two characters return to their timeless debate. Accused by Louise who suspects jealousy and malice as the real motives for betraying Jean, Bernard now pleads with her for understanding and pity. She is to witness the fateful evening in 1944 when Jean knocked at Bernard's door to seek shelter and refuge. As the lighting effects indicate the return to the living room, Bernard adds hopefully: "Tu vas me comprendre . . . Et me pardonner." While still pleading with Louise, he is tuning his radio to the BBC signals on the evening of Jean's arrival;

and Louise, who is only a spectator of his betrayal scene, bewails her widow's fate upon hearing the four destiny beats which herald the coming victory.

This third play-within-the-play contrasts with the preceding scenes by the accelerated pace of the action. Jean, wounded in the arm, arrives and satisfies Bernard's curiosity with a plausible tale of his unexpected visit. But then Pisançon drops in and informs Bernard of the derailment and the pursuit of a wounded saboteur. Bernard does not fail to piece together the arrival of Jean and the sabotage. This discovery of his inadvertent complicity in a perilous and illegal action is too much of a burden on Bernard's conscience. "Si le fils Pisançon n'était pas venu," he keeps whining, he could have comfortably fondled his tranquil conscience in ignorance. But now, knowing the real circumstances, he has to make a decision: either to deliver his friend, or to run the risk of endangering himself and his family. While Jean is resting, it is Pierrette who, feeling no scruples whenever the safety of her family is at stake, decides for him and leaves the house in order to get rid of the unwelcome guest on some pretext or other.

In her absence, Jean and Bernard once more come to exchange their views on their obligations. Reproaching Jean for having jeopardized his family through his inconsiderate visit, Bernard contends guilelessly: "Je m'efforce d'être un honnête homme dans mon métier, dans mon ménage, dans ma famille." (V, 330) He is not aware that this degree of honesty is insufficient to stand the test of the time which exacts uncompromising heroism. Anything less than that can lead to treachery, to ignominious acceptance of injustice, humiliation, and misery. Jean states his views in almost similar terms. But for him, honesty in times of trial cannot be equated with passivity and aloofness. Moral probity and integrity must go beyond man's immediate concerns and entail responsibilities toward one's country and even humanity. As Jean is lured into the trap to be betrayed into the hands of the Gestapo, Bernard seems to have grasped the implications of his action: "On a fait une bêtise . . ." (V, 342) Pierrette, however, appears immutable and untouched, encased in her egotism.

Jean's shouts of "Salauds, salauds," heard at the end of the scene coming from outside resound as his verdict on Bernard, who has now ended his argument without having rehabilitated himself in the eyes of his accusers. As if by inertia, Bernard supplicates again: "Si j'avais vécu sous Louis-Philippe, j'aurais été rigoureusement un honnête homme." (V, 343) The scene fades out, as Bernard's en-

treating voice comes from the dark: "Je n'ai pas vécu la vie que je voulais . . ." (V, 343) A pessimistic note is struck with the absence of compassion and condescension of the strong for the weakness of those who, inextricably caught in the maze of events, have made an erroneous judgment. The poignant performance of reliving their past experiences has been a futile task. The cycle is completed, a useless journey around a closed circle has ended at the point of departure. Jean and Bernard have failed to reach reconciliation and mutual understanding.

A short glimpse of the morning after Jean's capture shows Rivoire breaking the news of Jean's fate to Louise and announcing to her that his comrades are going to wreak vengeance on the informer. Simultaneously, on another spotlighted part of the stage, Jean is seen awaiting execution in his prison cell. Lecoq, who has escaped death in the skirmish in Bernard's house only to be executed with Jean, is writing, for Jean, a last letter to Louise. Although Jean and Louise are separated by distance, their soliloquies addressed to each other mesh into a moving dialogue of final parting. The two simultaneous scenes sum up the tragic themes of the play. Next to Louise's despair over the ruins of their love that has perished in the violence of the time, there is a gleam of hope that man may redeem himself in the confusion of our world through his own sincere efforts and gain his own peace and serenity through a duty well discharged.

The dramatic substance of the play is derived from the confrontation of the two irreconcilably opposed sets of values. The abstractness of such a demonstration, and therefore its unsuitability for dramatic treatment, is minimized by a very conscious effort on the part of the author to prevent the characters from losing their human qualities and becoming mere symbolic embodiments of ideas. Not driven blindly by a certain ideology, but accepting it with doubt, or as the only alternative open to them, the characters entangle the argument in a maze of pros and cons. Although at the end Jean sways admiration to his side and Bernard disappears amidst curses and imprecations, pity and terror admix for the two men who followed divergent paths in their attempts to cope with the exigencies of their time. In less tragic circumstances Bernard's ignominious end might have been a meaningful sacrifice for a less elevated, yet readily understandable and sensible cause: the welfare of his family. In less trying times, Jean would have remained a quixotic man with extravagant metaphysical ideas. Nobody could

fancy that these vagaries could generate in him an exemplary moral rectitude and unsurpassed heroic altruism.

The original dramaturgical form also derives its substance from the debate. It is on this forensic thread, which spans the entire play, that the episodes of action are strung. Since chronological sequence of these episodes would not always follow the development of the argument, the arrangement is based on the congruity of these scenes with the theme. One of the major difficulties of this construction may seem to be the transitions from timelessness to time, from imaginary situations to realistic accounts of action, from the limited perspective of the living to the all-encompassing view of the dead. The author has employed various devices to preserve a certain continuum throughout the scenes which sometimes vary in tone and mood. The entire play is written in a theatrical vein, fusing elements of objective reality and of fantasy into a new, forceful, and imposing artistic reality. This artistic reality is not significantly expressed by means of exterior trappings, but is sustained by the intensity of inner life with its contrasting mental states, moral attitudes, and emotional truths.

The reality of the flashback scenes, whose settings are concrete, is minimized by the fact that they are projected on the background of the debate which can be imagined taking place in man's conscience. The spectator is asked to accept both planes on an equal status. These flashback scenes are not merely dislocated expositions to help the spectator become acquainted with the events that preceded the opening fusillade. They exemplify a certain point in the argument. The Bazires and Pisançon must realize that the saboteurs are neither quixotic men nor prankish boys eager to play Indian games. Louise is to know what led her husband to his death. The play has no linearly developing action, heading toward a dénouement through a succession of objective facts set in time and space, effecting psychological evolutions and possible reversals. The action is purified of all but symbolic content, truncated and dislocated to the extent that it loses its customary importance in the advancement of the plot. After each retrogressive episode, the action returns to the impasse of the static debate.

The characters are cast in a theatrical mold. To elucidate a thought, to appraise and explain a situation, they occasionally detach themselves from their personal spheres to assume the dramatic functions of a choric narrator. The speeches *ad spectatorem*, in violation of the conventions of the realistic theater, are meant to enhance the communion between the spectator and the play. But

this formalism, employed with restraint, never buries the deeply human touches, never produces a ritual with ceremonial language.

The rapid succession of transitions from the realistic scenes set in time to the imaginary debates in the timelessness of man's conscience entails an intricate interplay of levels of reality and complex changes of perspectives of the characters. With each transition the poetic realities of the characters at one moment must overlap in order to maintain a continuity. Louise, while talking to Bernard in 1938, has concurrently the prescience of the events in 1944. Actors in the debate, they become spectators in the flashback scenes. The characters shuttle across the planes of imagination and reality with chronological leaps, retaining their psychological identities. Bernard, Louise, Pierrette, and Jean are easily recognized and need no reintroduction when time moves back to their prewar existences. So often isolated and incapable of communion with other human beings, they are impermeable by mutual influences. Instead of finding justification and sympathy they come to exchange only insults and contempt. Thus the debate brings no rapprochement between those who could not end their lives heroically and those who preferred death to acquiescence in injustice. If Jean has found the meaning of his suffering, Bernard fails to see what Jean's recognition could mean for him. Pierrette's sight remains restricted by the blinders of her maternal love, and Louise, bereft of the happiness of her conjugal life, envisages little consolation in the fate of a hero's widow.

The pessimistic undercurrent of human vanity and life's absurdity threatens to engulf the very possibility of the dignity of man that Jean believes to have found in his commitment. Thus, *Les Nuits de la colère* really does not detach itself from the rest of Salacrou's work, for basically the author's pessimistic outlook has not changed. The play must be regarded as a sincere tribute to the heroism of the Resistance fighters, not as the author's profession of a new faith. The author's personal sympathy gives to *Les Nuits de la colère* its emotional momentum. His own participation in the movement, and above all the emotional impact he received from reading the last letters of the condemned, authenticate the author's expression, but the optimistic tones and confidence come from the *maquis'* credo, not from the author's. Rivoire's affirmations of his belief in the merits of unflinching devotion to patriotism smack of angularity and self-righteousness. It is true that Jean answers the question with an unprecedented firmness for which Savonarola and the other heroes have no answer. But Jean's affirmation that life

can be meaningful on a political plane comes from his resigned acceptance that there is no justification for man's existence on a metaphysical or supernal plane. Such an ephemeral solution would not have satisfied Savonarola. And even this tempered optimism was to disappear from Salacrou's work as the later political re-orientations and expedients made Salacrou appraise more realistically the Pyrrhic victory that had first generated so much hope and promise. With the following plays his mood is as bleak and pessimistic as ever.

10 / *Indictment of the Bourgeois*

WHEN SALACROU conceived of the idea of rendering a tribute to the French freedom fighters, he was, for a while, at a loss for the proper dramatic form. He felt that conventional forms, the old tricks of the trade, would betray his gratitude and reverence. Thus, the original dramatic structure of *Les Nuits de la colère* grew out of his dissatisfaction with established methods which he judged inadequate to convey his most sincere sympathy. If, in the euphoria of the Liberation, Salacrou saw hope and promise in the political situation, the complacency and apathy of his bourgeois fellow man, compared to the idealism of the *maquis*, appeared to him so much the more ignominious. In *L'Archipel Lenoir*, his most bitter denunciation of the bourgeois, written almost concurrently with *Les Nuits de la colère*, Salacrou employs the most hackneyed devices of the bourgeois theater. Falsity as the thematic focal point of the play is also implied through the dramatic form.

The genesis of *L'Archipel Lenoir* dates back to Salacrou's collaboration with Jouvet. Salacrou had read a news item about a small merchant who, weary of his business, had decided to sell his shop and flee his family. But his plan was discovered. The family assembled for a trial, condemned him to death, and executed him with calm determination. Impressed by this account, Salacrou eagerly started to work on the material. He wrote two versions which he presented to Jouvet. Jouvet showed no interest. "C'était vraiment la fin de notre essai de collaboration." (VI, 100) The play remained unrevised, and from time to time Salacrou remembered it with sadness. After the Liberation, one afternoon Salacrou happened to meet Sartre who inquired about his literary activities. Embarrassed to admit that he had not been able to produce anything significant, he mentioned vaguely a project about a family which condemns its grandfather to death. "Excellent, je suis très content pour vous," Sartre said, concluding the conversation. On his way home, Salacrou worked out a plan, and the next day he hastily withdrew to his summer cottage to write the play. Having

almost finished the three acts of the play, he discovered that the divisions were faulty and he reorganized the subject matter into "a tragedy in one act." After its publication in *La Revue Théâtrale* in 1946, Salacrou's friends asked him when he was planning to complete the play. Salacrou had not thought of it, and it took considerable time and effort before he finally discovered a possible continuation of the play. Meanwhile Charles Dullin had been forced to leave the Théâtre Sarah-Bernhardt. Salacrou felt that he owed a sign of gratitude to his old-time friend and mentor and offered him the title role. Charles Dullin was pleased to accept it. But now Salacrou had difficulties finding a willing director to stage the play with Dullin. They were glad to take the play, but not Dullin. Finally, it was Gaston Baty who arranged the production at the Théâtre Montparnasse which was then under the direction of Marguerite Jamois. With *L'Archipel Lenoir* Dullin directed his last play and played his last role.

L'Archipel Lenoir is a comedy on contemporary bourgeois mores, a comedy where Salacrou's sarcasm is most vitriolic and contemptuous. In *L'Archipel Lenoir*, the bitter mood does not proceed from an aggressive sympathy for the masses. Neither is the play a condemnation of contemporary civilization by an aesthete who, in his artistic alienation from society, longs to identify himself with an intellectual elite. The outburst of anger and indignation comes from a man who, desiring to share his anguish and concern with other men, finds them, deaf, encased in complacency, hypocrisy, and moral atrophy.

The family council of the Lenoirs has been convoked: the grandfather, his son Victor, his daughter Marie-Thérèse and her husband Adolphe, their children Marie-Blanche and Guillaume, Adolphe's sister Hortense, and the latter's brother-in-law Viscount Charles-Auguste. A Rumanian Prince, Boresku, and his wife, the grandfather's niece, happen to call on them the same day. The occasion is the arrival of a police inspector to arrest the grandfather. Through the kind intervention of the Prince, whose social status had dazzled him, the inspector had granted an overnight stay. The grandfather, a septuagenarian, is accused of having violated Liliane, the daughter of a drunkard and poacher, once an employee at the Lenoir liqueur distillers. The grandfather's overtures to Liliane's father had been spurned, for the latter insists that the wealthy and respected patriarch stand public trial for statutory rape. The newspapers will undoubtedly feature the trial, and even if the grandfather is acquitted, such publicity will ruin the good reputation of the firm, and worst

of all, cut sales. There is only one solution possible: the grandfather must commit suicide before his arrest. But the grandfather is not in the least inclined to accept the verdict. During the ensuing see-saw battle of insults between the grandfather and his executioners, the masks of sincere human relationship, kindness, loyalty, affection seemingly uniting this respectable high-bourgeois family, are torn off to reveal greed, cupidity and frivolity.

All his life, the grandfather has lived under the fear of his wife. During the war she had driven her oldest son, a pioneer balloonist, to taking risks which were beyond his powers. After his death she had won, as a nurse, the Légion d'honneur which she had coveted for her son. The grandfather, in his own defense, cites examples of business ruthlessness and swindles that have enabled the firm to capture overseas markets. And lately he has organized an illegal transfer of funds to Switzerland to evade taxes.

The grandfather's son Victor, an apostate among the other members of the Lenoir family, lives "on the fringe of business." Only once in his life had he had the courage to revolt against the tyranny of his mother and that was when he refused to go along with her marriage schemes for him. After that Victor's mother had given her son-in-law the permission to adopt the name Lenoir. She had organized the Lenoir clan into an efficient ant hill. Among the diversified duties and responsibilities given to each individual member, Victor's assignment was to enjoy himself.

Victor's sister Marie-Thérèse is a perfect nonentity, getting her cues to exclamations of approval and indignation from her husband Adolphe. Presiding over the family council, Adolphe is more assertative. A ruthless businessman, he hides his greed behind rhetorical flourishes, a stock of well-rehearsed, high-sounding phrases on honor and duty. Adolphe's sister Hortense is a caricature of stale bourgeois piety. Widowed after six weeks of marriage, she lives under the fear of incurring her husband's wrath in heaven. To propitiate her "little husband" and assure herself a place in heaven by a gourmet's martyrdom, she eats dishes he liked most, but which she herself detests. Her brother-in-law, the Viscount, the fiancé of Marie-Blanche, is an inane, anemic scion of a degenerate noble family. He parrots once learned phrases about honor and pride. Like the placid bourgeois who lives only on the surface, he, too, is frozen into attitudes.

These characters create the impression of a puppet show. They go through certain gestures that are void of anything truly felt or sincerely said. They may be aware that the others play a comedy,

but they are never conscious of how ridiculous they look. As long as they act out their roles according to the norms and codes of society, their self-satisfaction is guaranteed. The family is not represented as a real unit bound together by mutual affection and respect, but as so many individuals who find this gregarious state most convenient for pursuing their own whims and impulses. Yet these ludicrous puppets act like a vicious flock of beasts of prey that pitilessly swoop down on the defenseless old man who vainly tries to elicit their sympathy.

In the gallery of these caricatures, only Marie-Blanche, the youngest member of the clan, has any genuine moral sense at all. Outwardly she has agreed to comply with the decrees of her family. She will marry the Viscount because the secret formula of the liqueur must be passed on to the next generation. But she has revolted against these social forms by denying them any meaning. She consents to wear a black dress at the grandfather's funeral if Adolphe is dressed in red, as becomes judge and executioner. She disclaims any complicity in the family affairs. For a moment she even threatens to give up this shallow life. But at the end her revulsion subsides, and she will marry the Viscount and raise children who will be worthy of possessing the secret formula of the Lenoir liqueur.

The family members had hoped that with persuasion, cajolery, or bullying the grandfather would agree to self-immolation. And for a while the grandfather tunes in. But pressed for a decision, he refuses to budge. To talk about death and honor in generalities is one thing, but to take a revolver and to point it to one's head is an entirely different matter, and the grandfather wants to live. The room gradually empties, and Adolphe is left alone with the old man. Adolphe hands him a revolver. The grandfather reluctantly takes it, and after a moment of hesitation he says thoughtfully: "Et si je tirais sur vous, au lieu de tirer sur moi?" (VI, 55) Adolphe grapples with the grandfather to get the revolver back, the curtain falls and a shot is heard.

The second act curtain rises on the same scene a few minutes later. Joseph, the valet, is tidying up the room. He opens the curtains and a bright morning sunshine floods the room. The mood and the pace of the play changes noticeably. After the macabre atmosphere which envelops the first act, the second act is vivacious, full of movement and hilariously comic situations. As if in a labyrinth à la Feydeau, the stage setting has many doors and recesses which make possible surprise meetings and the most unwanted en-

counters. The suspense with which the first act ends is maintained almost until the very conclusion. Those who most eagerly seek to find out the truth are kept in ignorance through skillfully timed entrances and exits. The Princess appears, disappointed in seeing neither a corpse nor blood. The other members of the family assemble again, presuming the grandfather dead and Adolphe meditating in his room. Guillaume, the son of Marie-Thérèse and Adolphe, arrives on a furlough from the military academy. Hortense is worried about how the grandfather is being welcomed by his wife in heaven. Victor, without a twinge of conscience, delivers a eulogy. The outrageous travesty moves everybody. When they have all gone about their business, except for the Prince and the Princess, the grandfather, hiding behind furniture, sneaks in. As a man reborn, the old man has a gargantuan appetite for everything—for food and drink, for comfort and pleasure, and above all, for life. The thought that during the wrangle with Adolphe he had killed him grieves the septuagenarian very little. The grandfather has lost all desire to pretend, to conform to the laws of propriety. When the Prince reminds him that he has killed Adolphe, he is not convinced that he is guilty of a crime. Upon learning the unexpected outcome, Marie-Blanche bursts into tears, and the grandfather orders Joseph to find the policeman to take him away. Unfortunately, the policeman had sampled several bottles of the famous Lenoir liqueur and has not yet recovered from his drunken stupor. Victor is full of indignation and despair. The scene becomes hilariously comic when the grandfather stumbles upon Hortense. The gullible widow thinks that the grandfather has just returned from paradise, and he sees to it that the *quiproquo* is not cleared up. Then Adolphe appears, gloomy, his arm bandaged. Guillaume, who still does not understand what had happened, hastens to assure him that, he, his son, would have done the same thing; whereupon Hortense reminds him: "Ne dites pas à votre père que vous seriez capable de le tuer sans hésiter." (VI, 85)

The *deus ex machina* function is taken up by Joseph, the valet, who saves the day. He skillfully blackmails the Lenoir family into granting him one million francs and the Lenoir sales management in Mexico. The bells toll the sudden death of the wronged girl's father. Joseph will marry the girl and make her deny all accusations against the grandfather. The crisis is over, and all complications are solved by this trumped-up dénouement. Even the money for the mass which Hortense precipitously had ordered for the grandfather will not go to waste, for now the village priest can say an additional mass for

the grandmother. As the head of the family, loved and venerated, the grandfather reinstalls himself in his easy chair, and the episode will be completely forgotten as soon as Adolphe's arm is healed. No justice need be meted out at the end, for there are no villains to be punished, nor does anyone deserve a reward. Incapable of judging in their moral atrophy the meaning of the monstrosity they were going to commit, the Lenoirs will perpetuate the turpitude in which they have lived before. Beyond the *coup de théâtre* of Joseph, which terminates the action, the comedy has no real moral dénouement. No character is awakened to recognize the lack of authenticity in his life, nor does anyone become aware of his own ridiculous existence. Thus, the comedy leaves the spectator with a poignantly pessimistic afterthought.

As a comedy of manners, *L'Archipel Lenoir* overflows with indignation at the complacent, shallow, and indeed, cruel bourgeois. The obtuse, hypocritical bourgeois is outwitted by the arch, unscrupulous servant Joseph who has the cunning to take advantage of the meaningless bourgeois code of propriety. The Prince, on the other end of the social scale, also stands apart and detaches himself from the Lenoir clan as an impartial observer. The dramatic functions of the Prince in the play are varied. To accentuate the puppetry of the bourgeois, the Prince acts as a choric interpreter, as an enunciator of what the bourgeois, out of feigned prudishness, are unwilling to express. Dispensing metaphysical wisdom with his adages, paradoxes, and cynical remarks, the Prince also echoes the author's own concerns and makes references to autobiographical episodes. From his boyhood memories Salacrou singles out the unique moment when he suddenly realized the superfluousness of his being in the world. The Prince mockingly consoles the condemned grandfather: "Vous souvenez-vous, monsieur Lenoir, de l'instant précis où, tout à coup, petit garçon, vous avez eu cette révélation: 'Je suis un vivant, j'aurais pu ne pas exister, et je vais mourir.'" (VI, 21) Since his youth, Salacrou has been pondering upon the consequences of the judicial error in the trial of the unionist leader Durand. As the Prince declares, a repeal of the sentence or an acquittal does not reinstate the innocence of the accused: "Le condamné par erreur implique l'acquitté par erreur." (VI, 37) While the Lenoirs worry about the detrimental image of respectability, the Prince generalizes the conflict between appearance and essence. Every man struggles for himself to counteract the unfair judgment that others pass on him. The grandfather insists that, all in all, he is a good man; the Prince answers: "A vos yeux,

c'est vrai! Mais aux yeux des juges, non. . . . Vous êtes aussi tel que les juges vous verront." (VI, 44) A consciousness is inclined to annihilate another consciousness, or to reduce it to a grotesque and mechanical puppet, and the judges will do just that. Thus, in the eyes of his own family the grandfather is no longer the same man that he was yesterday. And even God's judgment can only be erroneous, for, being divine, he cannot apprehend the nature of a human being. The judgment day will see an iniquitous travesty of justice, just as the grandfather's dearest relatives reverse their moral judgment on their once-respected patriarch who now appears to have suddenly changed his moral complexion.

The Prince picks up the theme so often present in Salacrou's plays that Christianity is essentially opposed to the bourgeois aims and aspirations in life. As man cannot expect justice from God, neither can he, and particularly the bourgeois, seek justification of his earthly endeavors and find refuge from life's adversities in an outdated religious doctrine that scorns wealth and terrestrial pleasure. Christian morality is incompatible with the ways of life of the bourgeois, who often poses as its staunchest defender. Success and happiness are hardly reconcilable with the concept that earth is but a marshaling yard before the eternal voyage, as the Prince puts it. He questions Victor: "Comment voulez-vous qu'un milliardaire de Chicago puisse vivre heureux avec la morale prêchée par un prophète de Palestine qui n'aimait que la misère?" (VI, 76) Man, with his commitment to life, is also constantly reminded of death, and death tends to overshadow everything else. Thus, the Prince calms down Marie-Blanche who is indignant at her grandfather's behavior: "Mais il n'y a pas de petits, il n'y a pas de grands scandales, Marie-Blanche, il n'y a qu'un scandale, un seul. . . . La vie. L'Existence. La naissance qui n'est qu'une promesse de mort." (VI, 67-68)

The philosophisms of the Prince who calmly watches the potter in the Lenoir family are so discordant with the pompous glibness or the excited jabber of the others that his presence and speech create a comical effect. And the purport of his remarks, serious and even poignant as they may be, is lost in the hilarious incongruity of the situation. His observations, offered as gratuitous interjections, with little relevancy to character or situation, have no dramatic necessity and interest, no emotional impact. The Prince, so often the author's mouthpiece, far from being a paragon of dignity and seriousness, appears, with all his wisdom and studied pose of serenity, as a bore seeking an escape from boredom.

At times the structure of the play is too fragile to support the

ponderous philosophical thought, and the serious social message may become lost in the vaudeville of the second part. The first part starts out as a naturalist play, a social satire, biting and sordid, on bourgeois mores. Although the characters are grotesque, unaware themselves how ridiculous they are, the impact is dismally grave and dreadful, for the prospect of a collective murder, contemplated by socially respected people, unconscious of their real purpose, makes the spectator shudder with disgust. The characters move in a milieu which is realistically represented, and the subject is discussed by the Lenoir family as if it were a serious business transaction which must be considered thoroughly from all angles, except that of sincere human relations. The social criticism in the first part is straight-forward and forceful. The Prince's disinterested musings tend to offset the egotistic villainy of the industrialist family but otherwise do not change the course of action.

The second part of the play rapidly develops into a farce. The change in mood and pace occurs quite naturally because the situation and the characters contain potentially farcical elements which were stunted in the first part of the play. The opening scene of the second part suggests that the contemplated parricide has been foiled. The spectator is conditioned to let his pent-up energy, in anticipation of the sordidly tragic event, seek release in explosive laughter. The first part unfolds in the forensic immobility of an immured conclave. The conclave cannot adjourn unless a decision is reached. Joseph, the conclavist, brings in food and drink, and the grandfather slumbers during the session. The second part is filled with movement. As if in a labyrinth, the characters come and go, look for each other, never see those whom they want to find but constantly stumble upon those whom they try to avoid. With these changes in the plot, and with a few colorful, exaggerated touches, the characters turn into figures of farce. The old man, freed from fear of death, crawls behind furniture to avoid being seen and frolics about in the joy of being alive. When the grandfather runs into Hortense who thinks him a celestial ghost the cunning old man takes advantage of the gullibly pious woman. The *quiproquo* is prolonged beyond plausibility to bring out all the hilarity such a meeting can entail. When, with deadpan understatement, the Prince consoles the discouraged Victor after the abortive murder, the sordidness is so disproportionate that it can no longer be taken seriously. The social criticism which is so bluntly set forth in the naturalistic first part loses its force of direct impact in the farcical second part. The play is on the verge of slipping into a cartoon

world, and the spectator may not take it seriously. The ending of the play also has the rapid, unexpected *dénouement*, implausibly happy, so characteristic of a farce.

Within this hybridization of forms borrowed from the naturalist play and the farce, Salacrou has followed his conspicuously idiosyncratic methods of dramaturgy. Especially through the development of the action and through the method of characterization, he accentuates his pessimistic view on the human condition. The development of the first part, like so many Ibsen plays, is based on the exploitation of a single, pared-down situation—a kind of court scene where the fate of the old man is decided. As the action progresses in the present and inches up to the moment of the verdict, the many digressions and retrogressions have not only expository values to give the necessary information about the initial situation, they are also the method of characterization. The characters gain perspective and relief, not so much through their present actions as through a merciless unveiling of their past. With the reduction of the characters to a contemplative attitude, it is the other person, the closest relative, the most intimate friend who, with gusto, recalls episodes that nobody would want to remember. For the sake of exactitude, or what sometimes seems to be a sadistic pleasure, no unpleasant detail is omitted. The past, as it is revealed by other people, imprisons the consciousness. The possibility of rectifying this judgment by other people through future actions is always too remote to modify the past patterns of cowardice and ridiculousness. The characters of Jean-Paul Sartre's plays are aware that the past, although out of reach and fixed forever, can change its meaning by a new future act which, with its weight, will counterpoise a past weakness or failing. The meaning of the past is as fluid as man's freedom. But in Salacrou's plays the past is fixed forever in its meaning.

After the static first part of the play, the characters are seen in a state of commotion as they carry on their activities on the assumption that the murder has been accomplished. When, one by one, they learn that the grandfather is still alive, the bustle and confusion increase, but they are too degenerate to react in a decisive way. It seems that with the murder or without the murder, everything would have amounted to the same thing. At the end, Guillaume, out of step with everything, asks, bewildered: "Il n'a plus besoin de mourir? . . . Mais que s'est-il passé?" The Prince sums up: "Il ne s'est rien passé. Il ne se passe jamais rien." (VI, 97) The Prince himself will relapse into his ennui. Marie-Blanche will marry the

Viscount, and the grandfather is reinstated in his respectable position as the head of the clan, having already forgotten the authenticity with which he had lived on his escape from death. For the others, of course, there will never be an awakening from the lethargic turpitude in which they have spent their lives. Viewed from a distance, it is a treadmill activity. People have moved about a lot, have almost liquidated one life, but nothing has been changed or accomplished. The circularity of the situation and the method of characterization are really the most eloquent means of accentuating the author's point of view.

Bleak in mood, like *L'Archipel Lenoir*, is Salacrou's one act *Pourquoi pas moi?* written during the summer of 1947 at Luchon. *Pourquoi pas moi?* is often passed over unnoticed. It constitutes a thematic link, echoing themes from *L'Archipel Lenoir* and prefiguring the philosophical preoccupations of *Dieu le savait*, where certain passages from *Pourquoi pas moi?* can be found transposed verbatim. Again Salacrou tricks the expectations of the spectator with a promise of a moving melodramatic development of the plot, but at the end the action of this psychological sketch only inches up to a disenchanting anticlimax.

The scene is laid in a small town on the Seine in 1945. Mme Sophie and her bachelor son Ernest have just resettled in their partly destroyed house. Ever since the death of Ernest's father, who was a jolly, robust innkeeper, the widow and her son have been moping in a self-imposed sequestration, nursing a vague hatred for each other. Apathetic, bored, and thoroughly disillusioned with his existence, Ernest, an insurance agent, for want of something better, has meekly submitted to his mother's dictates. Biting his fingernails and cracking his finger joints, he spends his time rocking on his chair and mulling over insurance policies. His mother, incessantly busy knitting things that nobody needs, nags him: "Tu n'as jamais eu d'ambitions. Tu n'as que des rêves. (VII, 34) They both had abnegated their other inclinations in order to perpetuate this intolerable symbiosis, which was meant to be a self-sacrifice for the happiness of the other. Mme Sophie, after the death of her husband, had refused all marriage proposals for she wanted to give undivided love to her son. Ernest had also repressed his ambitions, for he thought that his mother needed his company. Some twenty years before, he had had a liaison with a maid named Juliette. But Mme Sophie had sent him away and dismissed Juliette when it was discovered that the maid was expecting a child. A feeling of guilt

toward Juliette, a nostalgia for all the other unrealized possibilities, and an unavowed hatred for his mother are smoldering in him under his outer sluggishness.

It is Pascaline, their servant, who lays bare all the guilt and repression between mother and son. A foundling, haunted by the enigma that surrounds her parents, she likes to think herself the offspring of a priest and a duchess. Unkempt and sloven, she is tolerated by Mme Sophie only because she had saved the house from looting during the war years. Pascaline writes letters to imaginary friends telling them that Mme Sophie has accepted her as a full-fledged member of the family. Longing for attention and love, she approaches Ernest with a letter alleging that a girl had been born from his liaison with Juliette. This daughter of his had just died in childbirth, leaving Ernest with a grandson. Ernest is shocked and moved by the news. He is ready to shake off the matriarchal yoke to start his life anew, now invested with a meaningful and concrete purpose of bringing up his grandson: "Maintenant, j'ai quelqu'un à qui penser." (VII, 42)

At this point both mother and son realize the utter emptiness of what they thought had been a noble self-sacrifice. Mme Sophie's maternal affection has dissipated away uselessly. Her desperate clinging to Ernest was prompted by the gnawing sense of the superfluousness of her being in this indifferent egalitarian world where all alternatives come to the same thing, as existence abuts against meaningless death. Like Aubanel in *Les Fiancés du Havre*, Mme Sophie hoped to find a sign of immortality in her attachment to Ernest whose affectionate recollection of her would bestow a kind of eternity upon her existence. Her husband Oscar has already been completely effaced from people's memories and he might as well not have existed. Thus, when Ernest discloses that from now on he must think of his grandson, Mme Sophie's life, she feels, stripped already of meaning and purpose, has virtually ended.

For Pascaline, the servant girl, the prospect of eternal life is frightening, like a Sisyphean task, a Nietzschean "ewige Wiederkehr": "Oui, tenez, quand je balaie, je me dis: il y en a plus. Eh bien! Vous me faites rebalayer, il y en a encore. Et ça n'en finit jamais, l'éternité, c'est comme la poussière. Il y en a toujours, on n'en trouve jamais le bout."¹⁹

For Ernest, who lives with the regret of not having known his daughter, eternity is our infernal memories of others. When Mme Sophie says that the Good Lord will forgive Ernest, he answers: "Le bon Dieu n'y peut rien. Il ne peut pas me redonner mes vingt ans,

ni toutes les heures de la vie de ma petite fille." (VII, 33) In *Dieu le savait* this thought is pursued further. If there is a God, omnipotent and omniscient, in his eternity he has conceived man and his entire life. Man's future, determined and unchangeable, is already laid out in God's mind, just as the dead, in our memories, can only do what they have already done. Man's actions are mere tropisms, his will has no autonomy and becomes nothing but a predictable reflex to a given set of stimuli. Fortunately, man is placed on earth to discover with curiosity what the future has in store for him. Man can act so as not to be ashamed of his destiny. He can pretend that he is responsible for his actions, that he shapes his own future. "Il faut vivre comme si . . . comme si c'était le soleil qui tourne autour de la terre,"²⁰ explains Mme Sophie.

Daydreaming is Pascaline's escape from the adversities of life. Since she will never be able to unravel the enigma of the identity of her parents, every passer-by, every stranger, strikes her imagination. Any of them could be her parent. Having heard of Ernest's liaison and of the unknown fate of the pregnant girl, she invents the story of Ernest's daughter. When Mme Sophie discovers that Pascaline had written the letter, the maid defends herself: "Qui peut dire que ce n'est pas vrai? . . . J'avais même pensé à vous dire que c'était peut-être moi votre fille. . . . Ben! Pourquoi pas moi? Pourquoi pas moi?" (VII, 45)

But Pascaline did not realize what desolation, estrangement, and disillusionment await Ernest and Mme Sophie. They will have to go on living as before, yet the little lies and pretensions that had sustained their relationship are useless now that their true thoughts and inclinations have been avowed.

The playlet is too brief to develop significantly the themes that it suggests. The metaphysical musings clash with the otherwise realistic portrayal of character and environment, but *Pourquoi pas moi?* evokes a dominant mood. Salacrou's next play, *Dieu le savait*, picks up these thematic fragments of determinism, predestination, and free will to develop them more fully. Also the mood of postwar disillusionment and destitution lingers on in *Dieu le savait*. The brief prelude of these themes, *Pourquoi pas moi?*, is superior to the main work. The one act is compact and rife with dramatic intensity. *Dieu le savait* pursues many objectives and reaches none. After *L'Archipel Lenoir*, which gained immediate success, Salacrou's work seems to decline. But before the première of *Dieu le savait* disappointed everybody, his popularity was steadily rising and his personal life was full of diverse activities.

In 1947 Salacrou was offered the position of administrator of the Comédie Française. He invited Dullin, Pierre Dux and Barrault to work with him. But since Barrault refused to abandon his own company, Salacrou declined the offer. In the same year, the new Piccolo Theater in Milan was inaugurated with a production of *Les Nuits de la colère*. *L'Inconnue d'Arras* was staged in Hamburg, *Les Fiancés du Havre* in Brussels and Montreal, *Les Nuits de la colère* in Prague and Lodz.

In January 1948 Salacrou went on a lecture tour to the United States. In his message to the *Educational Theatre Journal* he sums up his impressions of the brief visit. "At the time of a recent trip to New York, I had the opportunity to study the conditions of theatrical exploitation on Broadway, and I must say that they terrified me. Those who know them and those who know what it was like in Paris before the war with the Cartel, will understand me. . . . Then I was given the opportunity of visiting the universities of the east coast. Concerned only with the theatre, I was astonished. Very quickly, I understood that the American universities would save the American theatre; better that they were already preparing a theatre of extraordinary vitality for the coming years!"²¹ Salacrou was especially impressed by what he saw at the Yale University theater. The message ends with a prophecy that seems to be added only for good measure: "In twenty years, the great American playwrights who reign over Broadway, will have learned their business in the university theatres. I won't be there to see it, but I know that I shall win my bet."²² Salacrou had never taken any considerable interest in America, and the trip did not bring a change in his attitude.

For a while Salacrou was associated with the International Theatre Institute of UNESCO. Elected President of the Executive Committee, he came to disagreement over the fiscal policies and resigned in 1949.

In 1948 René Clair invited Salacrou to collaborate with him in preparing a film scenario. The scenario, *La Beauté du Diable*, is based on the Faust legend, but in the version of Clair and Salacrou, the plot focuses upon the goodness of Mephistopheles. Salacrou found his new engagement of great interest and stimulation.

The season of 1948/49 can very well mark the apogee of Salacrou's popularity. His plays were being performed in different parts of Europe, from Cracow to Barcelona, from London to Bucharest, and even farther away—in Batavia, Tunis, Tel-Aviv, Mexico City, New York. In New York it was *Les Nuits de la colère*, staged by

Piscator, the first play of Salacrou to be produced in the United States. It was not a successful production.

In January 1949 Salacrou was elected to the Académie Goncourt to succeed Sacha Guitry. In the midst of these activities, Salacrou received the sad news that Dullin, who had been touring the provinces with *L'Archipel Lenoir*, had suddenly been taken ill. Brought back to Paris, Dullin fought a desperate battle with death. He died on December 11, 1949. Only now, when Dullin had died, did Salacrou grasp the full meaning of their friendship. Charles Dullin, with his encouragement and perseverance in the face of sure financial sacrifices, had helped Salacrou gain recognition and self-confidence. But Dullin was more than a mentor and patron for Salacrou. Their friendship grew out of certain affinities in their artistic destinies and aesthetic convictions. The note on Dullin concludes on a bitter tone of defiance provoked by the irreparable loss of a dear friend: "Lorsque mon tour viendra, je n'attends rien d'autre qu'un effacement comparable à l'effacement qui précéda ma naissance, mais si je me réveillais subitement à la face de Dieu, alors, c'est moi qui lui reprocherais ses silences, son absurde jeu de cache-cache et qui lui demanderais raison de son abandon, de mon aveuglement et de ma solitude." (VI, 122)

Paul Claudel responded to Salacrou's obituary with his usual fervor: "Chez monsieur Salacrou, vous accusez le Bon Dieu de se taire, mais voilà deux mille ans qu'Il crie à tue-tête du haut de la Croix. Ce n'est pas Sa faute s'il y a tant de gens qui se bouchent les oreilles." (VI, 208) For Salacrou, the presence of evil and suffering in the world remains the most cogent argument against God: "L'existence d'une création sans Dieu, sans but, me paraît moins absurde que la présence d'un Dieu existant dans sa perfection et créant un homme imparfait afin de lui faire courir les risques d'une punition infernale." (VI, 209) It is this ever present image of the Roman girl, raped in prison and awaiting her execution, that lurks behind every moment of euphoric mood, of lightness and happiness. Salacrou gave his profession of faith with *Dieu le savait*.

11 / *Apologia for Determinism*

AT THE apogee of his world wide popularity, amidst the culminating activities in his personal life, Salacrou produced a play which is perhaps his least successful one. With *Dieu le savait* Salacrou, no doubt, wanted to clarify, once and for all, his position in regard to the age-old controversy concerning free will and determinism, recently revived by the impact of Existentialist thought. With this ponderous surcharge of cerebration, the play can be considered as a summation of the author's metaphysical convictions. *Dieu le savait* reflects also some of the moral and political problems of the postwar scene. All these variegated ideas are grafted on a melodramatic love story.

The scene is set in the ruins of Le Havre in September 1944. Aziza Mathieu, a middle-aged woman whose husband has been executed by the Germans, has just returned to her native town with her two children, Thérèse and Maurice. With them is also Mathilde, Aziza's ninety-four year old grandmother—capricious, petulant and irritating. Aziza's former lover, a country doctor, calls on Aziza with the intention of renewing their liaison. Aziza had already broken off relations with him the day before her husband's capture, and now she violently rebuffs his advances. Daniel, an old friend of Aziza's late husband, has come from Paris to look up the family. Seeing Aziza reveling with American officers, Daniel reveals his never-avowed love for her. Without promises of reciprocation, Aziza accepts it as a condoling gesture on his part in her grief and solitude. The prospects of this unpretentious settlement are wrecked by the arrival of an unscrupulous senile hobo, Armand. In response to a newspaper advertisement inserted by Aziza to find a companion for the grandmother, Armand had decided to try his luck in the Mathieu household. To insure all the benefits to which Aziza is entitled as the widow of a Resistance fighter, Armand is determined to remove the threat of Daniel's marriage to Aziza. First he black-mails Daniel, then denounces him to Aziza as the real instigator of Mathieu's capture. On several occasions, Armand, imprisoned because of black market operations, had overheard his cellmate

Mathieu repeating in delirium that he had been betrayed. Disgusted with his mother and his godfather Daniel, Maurice leaves the home to volunteer for combat duty. Aziza violently inveighs against Daniel, who categorically denies his complicity yet refuses to substantiate his innocence. Thérèse, however, soon finds out from Daniel's Resistance companion Bonnet that her father, rummaging in the ruins of their house, had stumbled upon Aziza's love letters to the doctor. Mathieu had actually sought death in a daring mission which led to his subsequent arrest. Thérèse, who no longer sees Aziza as her mother but rather as the murderess of her father, abandons the loathsome household to marry Bonnet. His scheme foiled, Armand departs in a hurry, leaving the grandmother, who turned out to be his long lost passion, in her solitude to await her death. Aziza, with utter disgust for herself, turns to Daniel: "Aidez-moi à mourir." (VI, 312)

The melodramatic plot is designed with the ostensible purpose of creating situations in which the characters could be expected to expound on a wealth of subjects. Most of the themes are variations on motifs coming from Salacrou's previous works. Almost all Salacrou's plays have at least one character who, in his or her old age, when the absurdity of life is more evident than ever, revolts against the imminence of death. In the gallery of these characters, a certain family resemblance is quite pronounced. They are never surrounded by an atmosphere of patriarchal deference and serenity. In their revolt against the encroaching decrepitude and loneliness that precede death, they are bent on senile follies, mixed with blatant disregard or revengeful cruelty for others. The Countess in *Patchouli*, one of the earliest representatives of this senile pedigree, is disgustingly frivolous, a total negation of the beauty, charm, and passion that surrounded her youth. Adrienne is recklessly venomous in cursing her own destiny and ruining prospects of a possibly peaceful future for others. Mme Berthe, the most vivacious of these senile characters, is grotesque in her orgiastic debauchery and movingly pathetic in her final solitude and depravity. Paul-Albert Lenoir, the gamboling grandfather, at the age of seventy-two has violated a young girl. Without compunctions about what he has done, he only regrets the unforeseen complications. Under the crushing weight of their life's absurdity, so keenly felt, these oldsters are violent in their gestures and openly jealous of those who will continue to live after their death. In *Dieu le savait*, grandmother Mathilde and her love-lorn admirer Armand are even more violent in their refusal to languish in the backwaters of old age, since they

are considerably older than their fictional predecessors. Mathilde is petulant, egotistic, scorning the solicitude and kindness of her granddaughter and great grandchildren. At her age, when death remains the only reality, amenities, social codes, and moral principles have no meaning.

Armand is a senile parasite, a decrepit coxcomb. Unscrupulous, he seems to take pleasure in his wantonness. Out of petty selfishness, Armand and Mathilde weave their scheme of playing Aziza and Daniel against each other. To Aziza, Armand insinuates Daniel's complicity in her husband's murder, and Mathilde exposes to Daniel Aziza's love affair with the doctor. They congratulate each other on their success in alienating the two. And all this viciousness is a vain gesture of their grotesque amorousness to resume the love affair that absurd chance had cut short years ago. At the time of the World Exposition of 1889, Mathilde had been madly in love with Armand whose advances she had foiled out of sheer capriciousness and feigned prudishness. Discouraged, Armand had decided to commit suicide. To make sure that the news reached Mathilde, he had left his hotel room to mail the letter of parting. But once outside, he could not make himself go back to the hotel room where two loaded pistols were waiting for him. Mathilde, of course, had thought that her unrequited lover had carried out his threat. For fear of causing another suicide, she had yielded with indifference to the insistences of her later lovers. Chance has again prepared a preposterous meeting of the two lovers. As they reminisce about the old days, about the opportunities for happiness they had missed, the gruesome absurdity of their lives becomes unbearable. Like reunited lovers they execute gestures and strike attitudes of passionate love that in their senility can only be utterly ridiculous. Incensed over Mathilde's frivolity, Armand even lunges forward, tempted to kill her. This fit of jealousy of the doddering lover is a culminating image of their absurd and grotesque love affair.

Old age holds no promise other than frightening solitude and moral and spiritual vacuum. Mathilde and Armand are the most vicious, egotistic, and scurrilous of all their dramatic progenitors. With them, this pedigree of senile personages ends. Mathilde reappears in *Sens interdit*, but her presence is incidental and anticlimactic. Salacrou's reflections on old age in *Sens interdit* are noticeably less serious and poignant.

Dieu le savait touches also upon contemporary political realities, but the play reflects a more sober mood than *Les Nuits de la colère*. Jean Cordeau's engagement in the Resistance movement is

an act of faith, a revolt, detached from any personal interests, against the humiliations that the Occupation imposes upon Frenchmen. The horrors of solitude, the anguish of man's destitution, recede in the presence of the anonymous camaraderie that unites the freedom fighters. In *Dieu le savait*, the purity of this commitment, the motives behind this exaltation, are questioned. When Maurice announces that he is going to join the fighting forces, Bonnet reminds him: "Vous êtes un petit bourgeois. En vérité vous voulez vous engager dans une division blindée parce que votre mère danse le soir avec des Américains." (VI, 263) And Maurice's father himself was not acting in good faith. He accepted the risks of a dangerous mission because he could no longer live with the thought that Aziza was not faithful to him. For the Christians, the suffering in fighting against political oppression is identified with religious martyrdom. And Bonnet's own commitment, his endurance and discouragement, is tantamount to a declaration of a religious faith that one day man will be happy. This kind of simple faith is sufficient for Bonnet, a Communist, to explain all the contradictions that plague mankind. For Daniel, however, the communist's faith is but another escape from the fundamental issues, as are the Christian's visions of man. It is Daniel who presents the apologia of the determinist for whom a naïve political commitment is not sufficient to dissipate the problems that overwhelm man.

Daniel, who accepts his human condition with responsibility, without cheating, without recourse to myths, is the paragon of the determinist's faith. His *curriculum vitae* has obvious parallels to Salacrou's own spiritual adventures: "Quand j'étais petit garçon je croyais au bon Dieu. . . . Le petit garçon que j'étais a pensé que du moment que le bon Dieu sait tout, il sait aussi ce qui se passera demain. . . . En créant dans sa puissance éternelle la totalité du monde, il a aussi créé l'avenir du monde." (VI, 274) In other religions God wonders what will become of his creatures. But for a Calvinist "notre avenir est devant nous aussi immobile, aussi figé, aussi dur que notre passé." (VI, 275) Living becomes a process of gradual discovery of one's destiny, like passing through an unknown country where the traveler discovers with curiosity what was already there. "Ajoutez à cela que je ne crois plus à Dieu," (VI, 277) says Daniel. Thus, Calvinism without God becomes determinism. The fulfillment of God's preestablished destiny of the world can also be explained by assuming a mechanistic principle of causality at work. The unfolding of God's will equals the uninterrupted sequence of causally connected events.

Bonnet considers Daniel's theories dangerously amoral, for Daniel can never accuse men, only excuse and pity them. Daniel argues that a determinist is not necessarily amoral. Daniel's morality is based on his "désir profond de pouvoir approuver ma vie, de ne pas avoir honte de mon destin." (VI, 278) This desire leads him to accomplish noble acts of anonymous self-sacrifice. The two old people of whom everyone would expect wisdom and moral rectitude are the villains, while Daniel, who has seemingly no reason to be good, has the most rigorous ethical standards that exact humble self-abnegation in the face of false accusations. Only by accident is it discovered that he had carried out by himself the mission that Mathieu in his amorous despair failed to execute. He refuses to exonerate himself, for by vindicating himself he would have to inculcate Aziza. He even tries to burn the only proof of his innocence—Aziza's love letters to the doctor, which Mathieu had given him before his capture. But the overeager Armand saves them from the flames and Aziza realizes that it was her infidelity, not Daniel's jealousy, that drove her husband to death.

By this melodramatic turn, *Dieu le savait* becomes also a drama of frustrated love. Aziza's marriage to Mathieu had been a partnership of two human beings who, misunderstood by each other, had been leading two separate solitary lives. When the obtuse country doctor happened to come along, Aziza fell into his arms with a gesture of self-pity and masochism. When she, horrified with herself, had broken off her liaison with the doctor, Mathieu accidentally found her letters to the doctor, which by some freak of chance had been left intact in the totally destroyed house. That day Mathieu decided to seek his death. Thus, their marriage, the marriage of two strangers who loved each other but did not know how to communicate their feelings, was destroyed by preposterous coincidence and by a meaningless gesture of a frustrated woman in love. If Aziza had continued her relations with the doctor, she would not have reclaimed her letters from him and Mathieu would have been alive, perhaps even happy as an ignorant cuckold. Daniel has vindicated his theory that human beings are only witnesses to an absurd chain of events. Having found out the real circumstances of her husband's death, Aziza bursts out in an hysterical laughter: "La vie n'est pas sérieuse, Daniel." (VI, 310) Daniel, who can never accuse anyone, affirms that she is innocent, for she had not willed the events that engulfed her. Aziza agrees that, in his eyes, she could not have prevented her crime. But if no other person can rightly judge her, she will be forever condemned to live with her own consciousness

in horror at herself. Now Aziza has a more realistic grasp on human realities, when hopes and exaltation have vanished and even despair is meaningless, when man faces the bare absurdity of his life.

More than any other play, *Dieu le savait* sums up Salacrou's philosophical and moral ideas on determinism, predestination, and freedom. Salacrou's presentation of these ideas is simple and unpretentious. But these discussions have no close dramatic relation to the plot, for the situation fails to impregnate these metaphysical ideas with dramatic interest. The play becomes a rather synthetic demonstration of how a man who believes in a determinism of the most mechanical kind can retain moral rectitude and responsibility. But Daniel is not really involved in dramatic conflicts, because of his particular disposition, nor must he suffer for his convictions. As far as the plot is concerned, it is only of peripheral interest to know that Daniel is a determinist. Daniel simply disproves a certain prejudicial attitude that determinism makes morality impossible. This discursive theme is too incidental to be interwoven into the texture of the plot. The plot is too inadequate to give organic unity to the play with its great variety of themes. Within the melodramatic events of Aziza's personal misfortunes, the themes on the contemporary political problems and on Daniel's spiritual adventures in determinism remain marginal vignettes from the point of view of dramatic necessity. *Dieu le savait*, however, is of great importance as an expository summary of the author's beliefs.

Three years later, preparing Volume VI of his *Théâtre*, Salacrou reviewed his convictions in an essay entitled "Mes Certitudes et Incertitudes." Among the various topics discussed in the essay, he devotes several pages to explaining his idea of determinism. The discussion does not aim at a scientific disquisition on the subject. Salacrou simply reveals, in a somewhat emotional manner, this unwilling impasse of determinism as the only explanation his reason must accept, *faute de mieux*, to understand the world. Without questioning the basic tenets of determinism such as the concept of causality, Salacrou assumes the indispensable postulate that all phenomena occur according to the rigid sequence of cause and effect. He concludes that human activity cannot be excepted from this universal law of causation. It is surprising to note that, through the same kind of introspective analysis whereby some leading scientists have found ground for attributing a certain amount of freedom to human volition, Salacrou is convinced that his own decisions are determined by laws of cause and effect. The independence of human volition is unthinkable in a universe which is subject to the rigid

order of nature's laws. Because of our ignorance of all the forces, of all the determinants, we seem to pursue adventures among many possibilities. Actually there is always just one possible sequence of actions. Of course, Salacrou points out, we have the illusion of being capable of willing this or that alternative. But he does not even grant a modicum of freedom to human actions. He does not question the justification of using physical law as evidence against human freedom.

Salacrou's adherence to determinism is rigorous and quite doctrinaire. It does not proceed from a deep inner conviction, much less from scientific inquiries, rather from a *faute de mieux* attitude. Of course, Salacrou does not propose to solve the controversy. Sartre's contention that man is an unconditionally free agent leads inevitably to man's responsibility to exercise his free choice. Salacrou's conviction that man, determined as he is by all the complex molecular movements, must also feel responsible for his actions, imbues his heroes with a dramatically resourceful tension. They seem to oscillate between an impelling sense of moral obligation and a recognition of the futility of their efforts. They remain impaled upon this dilemma, for they also realize that any attempt to evade the predicament would constitute bad faith. This unresolved contradiction is again exemplified in *Le Miroir*, written a couple of years after *Dieu le savait*.

From the point of view of plot and conceptual content, *Le Miroir* adds little that is new to Salacrou's work. Conjugal infidelities and love triangles provide the opportunity for the author to elaborate on his favorite themes. A screen and stage celebrity Lucien Cazarilh is shooting a new film in a mountainous region of France. He is called upon by a girl, Claude, who turns out to be the daughter of Antignac, his old friend, now the Prefect of the département. Claude has set her sights on a film career and she would be only too pleased to become Lucien's mistress. Lucien's wife Maryse, a celebrated actress herself, reveals to him that she had always winked at his frequent extramarital relations, including the present one with Cécile, the wife of Lucien's assistant Laurent, but this time she begs him not to seduce their friend's daughter. Lucien reminds her that he had known all along of her past liaison with Antignac. He had sought to understand Maryse's aberration in the infidelity of other women. During this conversation Cécile is eavesdropping at their door. Driven by a sense of guilt and shame, Cécile flings herself into a ravine. Her naïve husband Laurent, a staunch Catholic, unaware that the child Cécile was expecting may not be

his, could attribute her death to a freakish accident. Lucien, however, will never appease his conscience, and the much celebrated conjugal fidelity of Lucien and Maryse could only be a publicity stunt.

As in *Histoire de rire*, the dramatic nucleus in *Le Miroir* comes from the recognition in the other person of a reflexion of one's loathsome self. Maryse must realize that in her rival Cécile she sees the very image of her own youthful infidelity. Cécile contemplates with horror the duplicity of the marriage between Lucien and Maryse, in which she sees the replica of her future life with Laurent. With all the hatred and contempt the two women have for each other, they recognize their reciprocal resemblance: Cécile mirrors Maryse's past, Maryse Cécile's future. Cécile breaks the unbearable mirror by committing suicide, for she, the younger, is still capable of a courageous act.

Like all Salacrou's adulteresses—Yolande, Adèle, Hélène, who are neither nymphomaniacs nor victims of their own gullibility—Maryse and Cécile really cannot explain their acts. Maryse had always regarded Antignac as an obtuse person whom she had never loved. It is as if from the darkest recesses of one's personality rose an irresistible desire for a masochistic gesture, for a revolting act against the ennui of conjugal happiness, a temptation of nothingness and death. Just as her act cannot be reduced to a simple intelligible formula, Cécile is frightened on seeing her distorted image in the eyes of others. Her true personality, sometimes incomprehensible even to herself, is always mutilated by others. Maryse, on the other hand, dodges the inevitable conflict between the conscious self and the false image that others try to impose on it. In her delusive hopes to hide her personality, her past, she exerts herself to resemble what is supposedly Lucien's image of her. For some twenty years Maryse's bad faith had preserved their love on the surface though it was tainted from its birth. But she is alone deceived by her own lies, for Lucien condescendingly feigns ignorance of her infidelity. When she finds out the truth and Cécile commits suicide, her pathetic plea, "mon amour, mon amour," is a mere sound, meaningless for Lucien and for herself.

Le Miroir reiterates Salacrou's pessimistic view that escape from one's past is impossible. Maryse had made frantic efforts to efface her past, yet at the end she must come to realize that the past act has its inevitable repercussions that extend to annihilate hopes and aspirations for the future. Future is nothing but the endless continuation of past patterns. As Lucien reminds Maryse: "Notre passé

ne meurt pas. Notre passé, c'est notre éternité, . . . Nous sommes condamnés à être celui que nous avons été." (VII, 206) The play ends on the same pessimistic note that no future act can rehabilitate man from his past failings. Salacrou has always evoked the injustice of offering believers the possibility of a primrose path achieved through confession and contrition. Maryse and Antignac advise Cécile to confess her adultery to her husband who should not fail to forgive her. Cécile feels that it is cheating: "Du diable ou de l'homme, le diable est toujours le plus fort si Dieu n'intervient pas. Et si Dieu intervient, le combat est truqué." (VII, 257) Maryse tries to console Lucien saying that he can always hope for God's forgiveness. Lucien, too, rejects intervention of some mythical divine justice, for man must be judged in human terms.

With one's vision turned toward the future, man's life in the world may appear in a totally different light when it is viewed retrospectively. Salacrou's hero is always turned to his past. Salacrou's meditations in his *Journal* reveal this pessimistic conclusion about man's freedom: "Il semble que chaque vie soit plus une sphère qu'une ligne droite sur laquelle défilerait notre présent. On vit enfermé dans sa vie comme dans une boule, dans laquelle tout se mélange: passé, présent, futur. Et, enfermé dans cette boule, on touche tantôt à son passé, tantôt à son futur, sans jamais sortir de soi-même."²³ The minutest accidents of man's life appear inevitable when correlated to the antecedent and the sequent. Void of any transcendental meaning, man's life becomes an absurd voyage along a causal chain of events. Thus, Salacrou's hero is wedged between determinism which drives him to a particular course of action and an acute sense of responsibility for every one of his acts. Of course, it may not be difficult to point out certain logical inconsistencies between this sense of moral integrity, which is an emotional attitude, and this mechanical, rigorous determinism, which is a morally untenable view but logically acceptable, *faute de mieux*.

This concept of determinism is also reflected in Salacrou's dramatic technique. As one lives "enfermé dans sa vie comme dans une boule," so the theatrical event is often presented in a hermetically closed sphere. The action of the play may return to its initial situation through a futile cycle back to the zero point, so that it would have made no difference if it had never happened. Or with the chronological sequence reversed or rearranged, the spectator knows in advance how the infernal machine will tick off the events. In *Le Miroir*, as the curtain rises, all the characters assembled on the stage, chattering among themselves, line up on the proscenium and

take a bow. The actor who plays the role of the reporter makes the introductions. He introduces Cécile saying that she is going to die. He warns the audience not to expect any political analysis or moral problems. God's name will be mentioned, but it is only because Cécile's husband is a sincere Catholic. The story will be sad, the reporter adds, but it must be told. With this prologue the spectator is reminded that the play is a reenactment of an already determined event. He will witness the gradual unfolding of a theatrical event, as he is curious to know his own destiny, for, as Daniel in *Dieu le savait* puts it, "il est passionnant d'apprendre ce que Dieu sait déjà et quel destin il nous a choisi." (VI, 275)

These two plays, *Dieu le savait* and *Le Miroir*, with their unequivocal intent of presenting the author's metaphysical beliefs and preferences, tend to become philosophical demonstrations. In the pursuit of these ideas, which contribute little dramatic value or aesthetic interest, Salacrou has almost converted the stage into a speaker's platform. The bluntness with which Salacrou delivers his message, especially in *Dieu le savait*, adds no originality or subtlety to these thoughts which had already been repeatedly propounded in his previous plays. Of course, Salacrou has never held his tongue in his cheek for fear of becoming overtly didactic, be it only through a merely negative, bitter denunciation of what he believed to be the evils of his society. His best messages have always been integrated into artistically valid, dramatically resourceful forms which authenticate the author's convictions and reveal the effervescence of his personality. *Dieu le savait* emits only vague echoes of the vibrant tones that resound throughout *Les Nuits de la colère*. Gone also is the sardonic outburst of anger that arouses the spectator of *L'Archipel Lenoir*. The love triangles and conjugal infidelities of *Dieu le savait* convey none of the intense despair and indignation that rack Ulysse, Silvio, Jacques, or Gérard. Aziza, Lucien, Cécile, and Maryse produce only gestures and hollow words, reiterating, as if by inertia, a once so spontaneous and authentic impulse that the author is now unable to regenerate. After *Dieu le savait* and *Le Miroir*, which appear as the last attempts of a period to treat the human predicament with all seriousness, Salacrou turned to caricature and parody.

12 / *Caricature and Parody*

AFTER THE completion of *Dieu le savait*, Salacrou worked alternatively on various dramatic projects. Four plays, *Sens interdit*, *Les Invités du bon Dieu*, *Le Miroir*, and *Une Femme trop honnête*, date from the period between *Dieu le savait* and the chronicle play, *Boulevard Durand*, which was started in 1956. Of the four plays, only *Le Miroir* is conceived in a serious mood. Salacrou had considerable difficulty writing the play and it enjoyed neither critical acclaim nor popularity. At one point the author was so dissatisfied with the results that he interrupted the plodding work in order to divert himself with a kind of puppet play, *Une Femme trop honnête*, which he finished in three weeks. Jean-Louis Barrault's remark that this impromptu work is perhaps his best play bewildered the author. *Le Miroir* rethreads many of the previously treated ideas, indicating a period of thematic depletion in Salacrou's work.

The other three plays, conceived in a facetious mood, have the common characteristic of transfiguring the protagonist's stature. Up to this period, almost all of Salacrou's protagonists retain certain family traits that hark back to the young man in *Le Casseur d'assiettes*. They may be placed in tragic circumstances that exact courage and ineffable suffering, or they may find themselves entangled in utterly ridiculous situations that are absurdly incommensurate with their lofty aspirations. In either case, it is through the protagonist, whose inner life is treated with seriousness and respect, that Salacrou has expressed his most pessimistic thoughts on the human condition. Even an outwardly ridiculous personage like Mme Berthe has deeply tragic touches. With these three plays the protagonist degenerates to the point of being only a caricature of his former self. Placed in farcical situations as had been done before, now the protagonist himself has become thoroughly ridiculous and contemptible. He utters the same phrases that used to come from a truly desperate being who could not assign meaning to his life. The protagonist used to be aware of the grotesque role he sometimes had to play. Now he turns into a mechanical puppet

that executes certain gestures and pronounces stock phrases. Below these burlesque features, Salacrou's thought remains as pessimistic as before. Without new sources of inspiration, this attitude can be the last possible variation on the original dramatic themes.

Sens interdit, the first of the three plays, is designated by the author as a psychodrama. Whatever merits the play may have in psychotherapeutics, it is quite evident that the author has ventilated his own obsessive thoughts and fears. The play has a purely forensic plot, without action or development. A kind of cosmic traveler à la Voltaire from the earth happens to intrude upon a strange world where people are born decrepit, grow younger, and die babies. Not only do these people live their lives backward, history also progresses toward a more primitive epoch. It is predicted that the secret of the atom bomb will soon be lost and that in a near future the Ptolemaic system will supersede the discoveries of Copernicus.

All activity on the stage is restricted to the discussion of the advantages and drawbacks of the two dissimilar systems. Salacrou borrows some of the characters from his earlier plays. Some are presented at the same age, with the same cast of mind as when they appeared previously. Others, although retaining their basic traits, are modified by age and experience. Their roles may be reversed so that the character who was the victorious cuckold now has become the deceived lover. The oldest person just born is Mathilde, the fretful and saucy great grandmother from *Dieu le savait*. Hustling everybody with her crutches, she is impatiently awaiting the birth of her companion who will show up at the age of eighty-five. Although she lacks the bitter experiences of life not yet lived, she is basically the same vain, egotistic and disillusioned senile that she was in *Dieu le savait*. Daniel, the exponent of a dogmatic determinism in the same play, has followed the inevitable pattern of evolution of Salacrou's characters. A middle-aged man, married to Yveline, he is whiling away his time in boredom with his wife, who, awaiting the time of her future infidelities, insists on playing cards. In this strange world Daniel reverently worships God, who is still called "the good Lord." Odile, aged twenty-eight, has reached the adulterous stage. She betrays her husband Raoul with a young man named Paul and longs for the purity of her love during the first years of their marriage. Raoul, powerless to curb her passions, suffers with submissiveness, and Paul anticipates his being cast off in preference to the husband. Adé and Gérard, the youngest couple, live in their final days of exalted love

before they become shy adolescents and part forever in the incoming unconsciousness of infancy.

Sens interdit gives a kind of synoptic view of the evolution of relationships among married people. With few exceptions, like Louise in *Les Nuits de la colère*, or the queen in *Le Pont de l'Europe*, these relationships in Salacrou's theater have become stereotyped. There may be certain circumstantial differences, yet they all—Adé and Gérard, Ulysse and Yolande, Raoul and Yveline, Jacques and Lucie, Aziza and Mathieu—must live to see the disintegration of their love. Masochistic impulses seem to drive them into adultery, without enjoyment, without any possibility of redemption, once the exalted sentiments are soiled and the ideals of pure love destroyed. Decrepitude and boredom await the mature couple, or the deceived lover or cuckold may choose suicide as did Achille, Ulysse, and Mathieu. In *Sens interdit* the couples have completed or expect to complete a rigorous cycle from boredom through infidelity to exaltation over their love. It is the same cycle that all Salacrou's lovers experience, only in *Sens interdit* its order is reversed. The couples are emotionally identical and interchangeable at the same age. Since only age differentiates them from one another, they see their past or their future mirrored in the other. The play becomes a simultaneous representation of the universal couple along its various stages of metamorphosis. Although the couples cannot discard their past and although they know exactly what the future holds for them, the prospect of gradually cleansing themselves of the stains of life, instead of sinking into its sloth, removes the stigma of absurdity and desolation. The sum total of life's experiences is the same, whether one grows older or life is lived in reverse, yet a small concession from God to rearrange the order of human experiences would have made man content.

To the inhabitants of this happy world, Joseph, the earthling, appears to have come from a place that has been created without rhyme or reason. They ridicule and tease him with their questions. Yveline is shocked to learn that in Joseph's world youth and beauty are entrusted to callow beginners, while she, with the rich experience of her past life, will truly enjoy them. "Dans votre monde, la vie est donc une descente aux enfers?" (VII, 71) Joseph finds no answer to counter their mockeries and questions. Daniel explains to Joseph the nature of their religious cult: "Or, notre vie est parfaite parce qu'elle nous vient du bon Dieu." (VII, 71) In such a world, God in his omnipotence is not only the dispenser of justice, he is also the source of all goodness and kindness. In this Utopian

vision, God is described as having the same attributes that Christianity uses when referring to God. While in our world attributes like justice and goodness can only be explained by resorting to theological subtleties, in Daniel's world the creation itself proclaims the goodness and justice of God. God's goodness and kindness are meaningless terms, if in his omniscience he still permits man to be visited by evil. The great mysteries of creation and life are not solved in this strange universe either, but, as Daniel counsels Joseph, anguish can be drowned in vice, and with friends and habits life is not entirely unpleasant, for it still holds promise of youth, beauty, and love at the end.

Sens interdit, once again, reflects the author's preoccupation with the inexorable advance of old age. For Salacrou, artistic creation has never been an attempt to claim special immunity for senescence or to experience rejuvenation. On the contrary, his work becomes a preparation for the coming years of old age. As early as 1932, Salacrou, in his "Note sur le théâtre," reminds his readers that he is no longer one of the "young authors," and the postscript to *Boulevard Durand*, written in 1960, sounds an almost valedictory note to his entire theater. The image of these grotesque miscreants such as Mathilde, Mme Berthe, or Lenoir had not come from observations of "real life," but rather from the contemplation of senescence when existence is very much pared down to the essential task of facing death.

Interesting as it may be in its form and conceptual content, *Sens interdit* does not convey the impression of being impregnated with the author's most sincere concerns. The mood of the play echoes only playfully his once anguished concerns. The fascinating idea of living one's life backward and retracing the history of mankind is treated discursively. The philosophically profound and emotionally rich potentialities remain unexploited. In *L'Inconnue d'Arras* and *Les Nuits de la colère* the disruption of chronological sequence is based on intrinsic dramatic necessities. In *Sens interdit* the inversion of time is merely a fanciful idea superimposed upon characters that have been first conceived as existing in the usual time order. The play lacks the poignancy and the farcically tragic humor that lace the incidental scenes of senile follies in Salacrou's earlier works. As another preparation against the surprises of old age and its absurdity, the play is anticlimactic. The author himself seems to have attained the serenity of reconciliation that his fictional characters struggle in vain to reach.

Salacrou's next play, *Les Invités du bon Dieu*, was conceived

as early as 1948, but it was not completed until the summer of 1953. Its première took place in the fall of the same year. Salacrou has always admired the work of Georges Feydeau and has often hailed him as the only true French dramatist of the nineteenth century. In his "Note sur le théâtre," Salacrou deplores the oblivion to which Feydeau's theater has been consigned. It would not be too far-fetched to surmise that with *Les Invités du bon Dieu* Salacrou gave free rein to his penchant, which he appears to have had to repress, for writing a true farce. In many respects, *Les Invités du bon Dieu* shows close similarities to Feydeau's farces and vaudevilles.

As with Feydeau's farces, it is almost impossible to recount the plot of the play because of the multitude of farcical stock situations which replace each other in rapid succession. Léon Virilouvet is marrying off his daughter Monique to François. To celebrate their engagement he has invited to his château many relatives whom he has never met before. When the minor mistaken identities are cleared up, the guests set about to promote their various personal ends. François' father Aurillon, a rich puritanical butcher, tries to win over his host to his special brand of ascetic Christianity. Aurillon's niece Marie attempts to wangle out of him a managerial job in his prosperous business for her husband César. Complications set in as two young women, identical twins, alternately show up among the guests. One pretends to be Léon's mistress, the other François'. Léon and François take turns in chasing their mistresses away and, of course, most of the time, the wrong one. Threats and cajolery, money and slaps, seem to be of no avail, for the twins keep showing up at the most inopportune moments. To avoid additional embarrassments, Léon introduces his mistress (or maybe François') as one of his cousins. Soon, however, it turns out that Léon and his future son-in-law have frequented the same woman, who, to maintain the front of an honest girl, had invented her identical twin sister. Aurillon makes her confess her sins before Monique and Léonie, Léon's wife. Léon justifies himself that out of sheer faithfulness for Léonie he had taken a mistress, for in her he found the replica of his first love and with her he could correct his youthful callowness. Léonie, who figures as a saint of conjugal happiness, wholeheartedly agrees and also explains away François' infidelities to Monique. François has not been unfaithful, he only precipitously sought Monique in the youthful image of her mother. With this absurd explanation everything is restored to order, and to heighten the betrothal festivities the young woman promises to marry one of François' distant cousins, a bachelor judge.

The dénouement is contrived in a sarcastically happy manner. With *Les Invités du bon Dieu* Salacrou has generously drawn from a copious farcical bag of tricks. With a liberal sprinkling of spicy language, the situations verge sometimes on sheer bawdiness. The puritanical Aurillon makes Léon's acquaintance as the latter is searching for a certain birth mark under the young woman's skirt, to make sure that she is François' mistress. Aurillon helpfully offers him his flashlight. There are references to the contemporary political scene, anecdotes on the cold war, the French retreat during World War II. The characters are schematically drawn to bring out their ridiculous eccentricities. It is a picturesque assemblage of the most disparate persons. Grandmother, in the boredom of old age, has developed a mania for picking up strangers. Thus, in the midst of the affluent bourgeois guests, a tramp scatters his adages on the virtues of simple primitive life. Thomas Lambert is an Englishman who feigns ignorance of French, and communication with him is carried on with signs, or the guests simply propose toasts to Lafayette. Léonie's hastily hired chef turns out to be the young woman's father, a crook. He had secretly followed his daughter, who did not know his identity, to help her blackmail Léon. With the money they together plan to organize schemes of international scope.

But the characteristic feature of farce is the primacy of action. In accelerated tempo, situations follow in swift sequence. The action is primarily presented from Léon's perspective. As the guests start to arrive, Léon grows more and more confused and overwhelmed. He must make presentations, answer the amenities of his guests, and watch with one eye for his mistress to intrude. He scurries to her to pacify her, returns to explain his absence, apologizes for his inattentions. As the first act ends, all his scampering has been in vain, for his mistress has been picked up by Grandmother and brought to his château. Aurillon is indignant and suspicious; his other guests are worried. At the château, the recurrent entrances of the young woman are like obsessive apparitions always thwarting and foiling Léon's efforts to restore order and peace. As François' mistress she is bribed with money to leave, but she is back in the following scene as Léon's mistress. Locked up in an adjoining room, she escapes through the window to harass her lovers with her inopportune presence. There is an acceleration of this frenzied movement, an intensification of a kind of madness. The author, however, is not endeavoring to build the action toward a logically necessitated climax and a final solution. Preposterous occurrences

accumulate to the point of paroxysm, and then, all of a sudden, the tension snaps with an absurd *coup de théâtre*.

Undoubtedly, the author has sought to underline with the absurdity of the plot the real absurdity of life. The vanity of human effort is reflected in the pathetically futile struggles of these grotesque creatures to change the implacable course of events. As each character is primarily preoccupied with his own personal concerns, there is rarely a truly dialectical exchange of thought between them. To create comical effects a deliberately contrapuntal relationship is frequently established between the antics of the characters and their verbal expression. Having just withdrawn his head from underneath the young woman's skirt, Léon stops Aurillon's prating on the values of eternal life: "Ne me parlez pas d'éternité, monsieur Aurillon, quand ma journée d'aujourd'hui est déjà si difficile à vivre." (VII, 120) A hussy who assumes two identities propounds ontological problems concerning the identity of the self and the nature of consciousness. Aurillon, the butcher, meditates on death and eternal life, condemns such earthly pleasures as the theater. Being himself a very conspicuous example, Aurillon comments on the incompatibility of Christianity with the bourgeois way of life. Amidst the frantic bustle around him, Aurillon with these grave reflections appears ridiculously out of place. His ludicrous stature adds to this effect. These same thoughts that permeate with poignancy and relevancy Salacrou's previous plays seem almost wasted in *Les Invités du bon Dieu*. The Prince in *L'Archipel Lenoir* manages to maintain his balance on the verge of the ridiculous, for the prospect of the collective parricide lends to his apposite choral comments certain portentous qualities. The preaching Aurillon, however, remains facetious, a travestied portrait of a twentieth century Savonarola. Having found out from the young woman's father, the crook, that Léon's mistress and François' are the same person, Aurillon announces that he has just heard God's voice proclaim through him His divine wrath and nemesis on these promiscuous men.

The real saint is Léonie who solves the preposterous entanglement with her absurd explanations. Human situations arising from so many gratuitous coincidences are totally void of meaning. Absurd as they are, they can only be explained in the same nonsensical manner. The ending of the farce is not just a decorative device of the author to terminate the action. The entire third act unfolds in a mysterious nocturnal setting. With the same precipitous movement on the stage, the verbal indulgences of the characters in metaphysical

sophisms imply a quality of pointlessness to their actions. Léon's final solemn speech resounds with bitter sarcasm: "Qu'il se lève tout de suite ce soleil, sur notre jardin et sur votre bonheur, mes enfants." (VII, 190)

With *Les Invités du bon Dieu* Salacrou has chosen farce, of an unadulterated form, as a vehicle for the same serious thoughts that are found in his plays of truly tragic human situations. In *Les Invités du bon Dieu* these situations are grotesquely distorted and reversed. Léonie rejoices that her husband has taken a mistress. Monique accepts François' premarital amours as a sign of her fiancé's exalted love for her. When the young woman's fraud is discovered, she defends herself saying that she could have had a twin sister. This appears as a plausible justification for her infidelity. The boulevard plot, the gags, the buffoonery, the deliberate illogicalities, the abundance of *quiproquos* and double-entendre, make up a hilarious spectacle. Most of the farcical elements are introduced as a pretext for creating the most amusing situations. The dialogue is used not to convey thought but to elicit laughter with its incongruous relation to character and situation. The author turns his once deepest anxieties and gravest concerns to ridicule. *Les Invités du bon Dieu* is almost like a parody of his own theater. In whatever form and mood the dramatic work may be cast, there are always present thematic repetitions of certain *idées fixes*, such as the failure of God to create a perfect world, the cosmic immensity and man's insignificance, the pointlessness of man's life in a deterministic universe. In *Les Invités du bon Dieu* these thematic strands that run throughout Salacrou's work appear in the most preposterous context.

Luchon had become Salacrou's regular summer retreat and the birthplace of many of his plays after *L'Archipel Lenoir*. At this mountain resort, in self-imposed seclusion, he spent interminable hours in conversations with his characters. From time to time his wife and daughter came from Paris to visit him. Salacrou remembers the time spent together in climbing the slopes of the Monts Enchantés or walking along the shores of the Lake San Mauricio as the perfect hours of his life. But after their departure it was all the more difficult to plunge back into solitude. In the summer of 1952, Salacrou had already completed the first act of *Le Miroir* when his wife and daughter came to see him. After their visit, Salacrou could not bring himself to go on. A piece of miscellaneous news struck his imagination. A woman had asked her husband to help

her reclaim her money from a man whom she had hired to assassinate him. Without meditation or forethought on the subject, Salacrou had no difficulty in finding the allegro mood and expression for this impromptu. Thus, *Une Femme trop honnête* was written in three weeks, but *Le Miroir* in its incipient version was never finished.

Robert's wife Marie-Madeleine, a *licenciée de philosophie*, has come to the conclusion that she can no longer go on deceiving her beloved husband. Although Robert, a eupeptic businessman, is too much interested in the promotion of car sales to look at his wife, Marie-Madeleine ecstatically declares: "Je ne peux plus vivre ainsi avec tous mes remords sous le regard calme de mon mari." (VIII, 21) Since suicide is no solution for her bad faith, she decides to arrange a truly unfortunate hunting accident. Jacques, her lover and an international crook, disqualifies himself for the job. After a long haggle, with the help of ten thousand louis d'or stolen from Robert's safe, Marie-Madeleine persuades Roger, Robert's best childhood friend, to carry out the accident. Roger, not denying that he badly needs the money, is also attracted by "le côté métaphysique de l'aventure. . . la vie et la mort sont les deux faces d'un même problème." (VIII, 31) Marie-Madeleine does not fail to give him moral encouragement when Roger again becomes wary of the practical side of his assignment. Of course, the ten thousand pieces of gold win the upper hand.

In the meantime Marie-Madeleine's father Georges, a retired lycée professor of philosophy, has his share of embroilments with his wife Guiguite and his mistress Renée. Georges had been very successful in gaining favors and admiration from his mistress with his explanations about the cosmic indifference and the absurdity of life. But he frets when Renée embraces him in front of Joséphine, the maid. Renée adores the idea that life is absurd, yet she faces certain contradictions because of it. "Et vous aimez cet homme parce qu'il pense comme vous qu'il n'y a rien à espérer de la vie sur la terre. Mais comme vous l'aimez, c'est le bonheur. Alors la vie n'est plus absurde." (VIII, 36-37)

When the two friends have left for the hunting party, Jacques and Marie-Madeleine anxiously await news from the police headquarters. Jacques is concerned about Marie-Madeleine's prospects in regard to her life hereafter. But Marie-Madeleine is unperturbed. She had only transposed the story of David and Bath-sheba into a contemporary setting. In the eyes of the Church, she could, with little effort, be in the clear: "la honte du péché me conduisait à

confesse, la confession à la pénitence, la pénitence à l'absolution, et je pouvais recommencer le lendemain avec une nouvelle pureté!" (VIII, 52) Marie-Madeleine finds out about her father's amours, and she is indignant at the duplicity in which he has been living for many years. When Georges gets to know about her adultery, with a superb gesture he offers to kill the seducer. But Marie-Madeleine is not interested in such a solution. Informed of the extramarital dealings in her family, Guiguitte is ready to fume, but Georges helps her remember her own youthful infidelities. Marie-Madeleine profits from their quarrel to strike a noble attitude: "Mon œuvre, j'en suis fière, quand je vous regarde trébucher parmi vos mensonges et vos suspicions." (VIII, 62)

Meanwhile, the two friends return. Unfortunately, it is Roger who has by accident received the buckshot in the arm. Marie-Madeleine demands the money back from Roger, but he had already entrusted it to Jacques. Robert is so disconsolate at the loss of his money that he is ready to facilitate Marie-Madeleine's plans by taking his own life. Of course, Marie-Madeleine must play to the hilt. Her moral integrity cannot permit such a thing to happen, and she explains to him in plain terms the confused situation. The money remains with Jacques, because Robert would have given it to him anyway for black market investments in Tangier. As for "cet accident qui s'est répété" between Marie-Madeleine and Jacques, Robert agrees with her that she was violated. Marie-Madeleine still thinks that this imbroglio calls for a death and proposes to shoot Jacques, then herself. But the others manage to placate her to the point that she would leave with Jacques and the money. And they disappear. When Robert exclaims that it is not possible, Joséphine explains: "De nos jours, tout est possible avec de l'instruction." (VIII, 108)

As Salacrou indicates in the introduction, *Une Femme trop honnête* is a farce, a kind of puppet play. In this world of distorted external facts, the adventure of adultery is ingeniously trumped up. As in the silent film farces, sledge-hammer blows are received as pin pricks, the cops shoot bullets that seem to pass through people, heads are rammed inside street lamps without harm, and people scurry along with rapid, jerky movements. In *Une Femme trop honnête* the stock situations, such as adultery, betrayal of one's bosom friend, that in Salacrou's other plays end in tragedy, produce only bewilderment and irritation. The adulteress leaves with the seducer, and the cuckold will wait for her return. Guiguitte will probably accept George's next mistress, and Roger will be reinstalled as Robert's bosom friend. The whole situation is viewed

as if from the expanses of the Milky Way, and the characters talk a lot about man's cosmic loneliness, his anguish in his metaphysical destitution, the absurdity of life. Marie-Madeleine suffers from being what she is not, that is, innocent in the consciousness of Robert. By a feat of logical deduction she concludes that this consciousness must disappear in order that she may regain purity and become what she really is.

Throughout the play a kind of Existentialist jargon is used for comical effects. Renée experiences *nausée*, because she has eaten uncooked mushrooms to prove to Guiguitte that she did not intend to poison her. Joséphine, caught at eavesdropping, complains that she feels herself *de trop* in the world. For Jacques, in view of his black market operations, it is preferable to insist that "everybody is guilty." Roger bewails his being caught in an *engrenage*. By having him murdered, Robert's Samaritan wife Marie-Madeleine will eliminate for him the pains of living. The play has also Salacrou's undisguised digs at the Church for its all-accommodating doctrine, at the legal system and the pretensions of justice, at the practices of businessmen in their commercial transactions, at the ethical standards of educators, at the patriotism of the military.

Again Salacrou parodies his own theater. The characters pronounce phrases that have become stock commodities in his plays. Ulysse's anguished cry "j'aurais tant voulu être heureux," turns ludicrous when Robert utters it, having discovered the loss of his gold. "Life and death are the two facets of the same problem" is a statement of profound implications by Nicolas in *L'Inconnue d'Arras*, but it becomes sheer *Galgenhumor* as Marie-Madeleine and Roger rationalize the murder of Robert. Marie-Madeleine who makes a show of taking her own life is a parody of the conscience-stricken Cécile whose disgust at herself leads to suicide. Salacrou contrives an easy solution for Marie-Madeleine's problems whereby she retains both her lover and her husband's money.

Salacrou's work, in its form and mood, has oscillated between the realistic and the theatrical, the tragic and the comic, without essential changes in its thematic content. The themes of conjugal fidelity and moral purity permeate many of Salacrou's plays so contrasting in form. *L'Inconnue d'Arras* resembles the Expressionist drama; *Un Homme comme les autres* has a hybrid form of *comédie rosse* and naturalist drama; *Histoire de rire* is a typical boulevard bedroom farce. *Les Invités du bon Dieu* is an almost unadulterated vaudeville, and *Une Femme trop honnête*, at the farthest point from naturalism, comes close to being a Punch and Judy show. *Une*

Femme trop honnête was written at the moment when Salacrou could not proceed with the composition of *Le Miroir*. Jean-Louis Barrault's high praise of the play is quite understandable if one prefers its flighty freshness and spontaneity to the wearisome wistfulness of *Le Miroir*. While his theater during these years lacked authenticity and seriousness, Salacrou's personal life was marked by new experiences.

In 1956 Salacrou published *A Pied, au-dessus des nuages*, a meditation on his mountaineering experiences. Salacrou discovered the joys of mountain climbing in 1941 when, after the long flight across the country with his army unit, he finally reached Luchon. Since then he had made numerous ascents including one of Mont Blanc, another of the Nethou, the highest peak in the Pyrenees, and a crossing of the difficult glacier of the Maladetta. Mountaineering for Salacrou became more than a pleasant diversion from the artist's toils at his desk. In many ways mountain climbing duplicates artistic creation for Salacrou. It offers a possibility of escape from the fog and dust, from the human throng on the street. And yet, once up there, in the dazzling immobility of the silent mountain landscape above the clouds, the solitary climber is seized by panic: "Reverrai-je jamais un vivant? Suis-je le dernier vivant? Le soleil éclaire un ciel vide où la vie des hommes n'a plus de sens. . . . Je descends très vite vers la vallée humide, au fond des nuages, retrouver les autres hommes, oublier cette aventure qui fut intolérable d'être le dernier vivant."²⁴ The mountaineer is torn asunder by the same contradiction that makes the artist proclaim his contempt for the crowd and try to communicate in art his most intimate self to his fellow man. Like the artist, the alpinist enters into an unreal magic world that eventually becomes more real and true than reality itself. Mountaineering perhaps even gave to Salacrou what he failed to reach in the theater. In the immobile, lethal silence on the mountain peak, away from the minds of men versed in theology and eschatology, the solitary mountaineer is suddenly aware of the awe-inspiring proximity of God: "On se retient de respirer pour mieux entendre, pour enfin tout comprendre, et l'on s'immobilise lentement dans cette immobilité, . . . encore une fois Dieu s'est tu . . . mais on a entendu le silence de Dieu!"²⁵ Up there even death, which is repugnant and absurd among men, has its tempting charm. In the theater Salacrou's relentless search for the meaning of God and death had always ended with disillusionment. Among men, God and death are absurd and pointless, but on the mountain peaks above the human throng

Salacrou has felt the mystical fusion of God and death in an exalted experience of living.

Salacrou's later plays, most of them written since 1947 at the foot of the mountains in Luchon, are vague reverberations of the once vibrating intensity of expression of a man who sought at all costs to find meaning in life, death, and God through his art. With the intuitively apprehended divine presence in the majesty of nature, the search for God in the theater has given way to sarcastic jibes at his nonexistence or inefficiency. A kind of reconciliation with death has come with the acceptance of its reposeful nothingness, the same nothingness where infancy begins. Life had offered meaningful, though ephemeral, political and social commitments, and even if devoid of transcendental purpose, it is still a challenge, a challenge to spend it honorably. "Mais qu'est-ce que l'honneur? . . . Alors, disons plus simplement une règle de vie supportable, une façon d'accepter avec lucidité et sans tricherie la condition humaine."²⁸

Thus, with so much already earnestly said before, with the new personal experiences, Salacrou's later theater almost seems to be sapped of its vigor to the point where only parody and satire can significantly contribute a new nuance. Yet this apparent thematic depletion turned out to be only temporary. While convalescing from a serious skiing accident in the winter of 1958-1959, Salacrou took up his pen to finish *Boulevard Durand* for which he had already gathered notes some time before. *Boulevard Durand* can be ranked among Salacrou's best plays.

13 / *A Proletarian Epic*

WITH *Boulevard Durand*, Salacrou returns to his childhood days in his beloved city of Le Havre. The subject of the play had not grown out of a meditation on some aspect of the human condition but was ingrained in his memories through a direct personal experience. Because of this close contact with the subject and because of this feeling of having acquitted himself of a debt, the author gives a unique distinction to the play: "Pour la première fois dans ma vie d'écrivain, j'ai le sentiment d'avoir écrit ce que j'avais exactement envie d'écrire, et c'est l'esprit apaisé que je termine ce livre." (VIII, 271)

Salacrou has scrupulously tried to preserve the historical veracity of the event which extends over a period of several years and whose circumference encompasses broad social, political, and economic segments of the milieu. He had to find the appropriate form for the spatially and temporally sprawling subject matter. Consequently, as he remarks in the postscript of the play, "*Boulevard Durand* n'est pas une comédie, ni un drame. C'est une chronique qui n'est pas romancée." (VIII, 259) The scene shifts from the conceited and artificial upper world of financiers and industrialists to the sordid lower depths of the dockers, to the quiet simple domestic life of the Durands; from the meeting place of the hopeful and indignant strikers to the court room where justice is travestied, to the prison dungeon where Jules Durand sinks into dementia.

The prologue is reminiscent of Salacrou's early imaginary interviews with his characters, to whom he revealed his duties as an artist and his anxieties as a man. An anonymous character announces the purport of the play: to revive a tragedy which those who witnessed it preferred to ignore. Four workers, victims of the tragic event, come to the fore to remind the anonymous person of the futility of such an undertaking. Rather than recommence all the suffering and despair, they would prefer to remain in oblivion. As Savonarola once interrogated the silent sky, as Jean Cordeau, blinded and humiliated, asked himself, Jules Durand questions the

sense of retracing the old story: "Est-ce pour me dire à quoi peuvent servir les cris de souffrance d'un homme enfermé, seul, dans une prison perdue?" (VIII, 142) The answer comes from the anonymous announcer saying that Jules Durand's tragedy belongs to all mankind. It is reenacted every day and everywhere by different people, but there are men who refuse to hear it and turn their eyes away from it in the hope of thus declaring themselves innocent. Julia, Jules' common-law wife, appears to tell him that her love for him is never-ending, but Jules sinks back into dementia and her voice is drowned by the sweet strains of the Merry Widow waltz that burst out with bitter irony.

With this sentimental melody the first scene opens on a garden party given by the industrialist Buggenharts for the benefit of an anti-alcoholic drive. This is the upper world with its ambitions, concerns, and anxieties. Coal merchant Luc de Siemons confides to his friend Olivier Buggenhardt that, to solve his financial difficulties, he must commit suicide. The New York stock market, in order to destroy its rival in Le Havre, has created an artificial low and Luc has been singled out to be the first victim of this merciless struggle. He asks Olivier to settle his affairs, to console his wife after his death. The mayor of the city, sympathetic to the misery of the workers, exhorts the industrialists and merchants to consider the workers' lot. But his philanthropic idealism is rejected by Olivier and Luc. The rich as well as the poor, in their struggle for survival, are subject to inexorable rules that permit no pity in this competitive business world. Wealth exacts unflinching loyalty to its principles, deprives the rich of their free choice of action more than misery restricts the freedom of the poor. It is in this rigorous fanatic pursuit of his destiny that Olivier can find life meaningful. Olivier's destiny is bound up with Le Havre and with his prosperous coal business. As if under a curse, these men feel that they must fulfill an inexorable destiny allotted to them, a destiny that is not of their choice and making. They are eager to justify their status of social and economic superiority with a theory of determinism. Insensible to the suffering and misery of others, they hide their egotism behind a belief in the unchangeable, perpetual patterns of economic and social conditions. Luc, once he knows that he will be dead the day after tomorrow, looks at the activity around him with indifference and incomprehension. Detached from life by his coming death, he sees only absurd agitation. As the two friends embrace for the last time, the scene fades out. A prolonged note of the Merry Widow waltz is transformed into the shrill sound of a siren.

Longshoremen return from work having finished unloading a collier. Covered with coal dust, weary and discouraged, they argue with their foreman Delaville about work conditions. The union has ordered stiff resistance against management's demands, but most of the workers distrust the union. The longshoremen walk over to a bistro to drown their dissatisfaction. A green absinthe light floods the scene. The bistro owner, an unscrupulous money-grabber, refuses to give them drink on credit when they are out of money, and the workers go back to the wharf to sleep there, huddled together, in the pelting rain.

From the gratuitous superabundance of the patricians, through the squalor of the proletariat, the scene shifts now to the warm simplicity of the Durands. Jules Durand, the secretary of the Longshoremen's Union, with the anguish of a frustrated reformer, fulminates against the industrialists and blames himself for his helplessness to improve the lot of his fellow workers. His parents see only quixotic efforts in all his activity. His mother advises him to submit to the inevitable and accept his status. His father, always well-liked by his superiors, has been promised advancement for Jules. But unless he can make Jules renounce his ambitions he will be dismissed in spite of the father's thirty years of devoted service. Word comes that the workers have forced the employers to accept their conditions. A neighbor worker's wife, Mme Capron, comes in in the hope of catching her husband before he has a chance to leave his pay at the bistro. Capron, as usual, comes home drunk, abusive, and without money. Jules' mother reproaches her son for sacrificing his future and the modest contentment of his parents for these drunkards and despicable creatures. But Jules has not assumed leadership simply to lead them to a better economic future. His loyalty to these miserable men is more than partaking of their squalor. He is bound to them by a mystical fraternal communion, by a Christ-like assumption of all misery. For him, life can become meaningful only in so far as it can be lived for others. Jules' account of his childhood is imbued with the author's own reminiscences of his early experiences as he, for the first time, discovered the misery of man, the injustices perpetrated in society, and as he dreamed of a happier future for mankind in the fraternal community of all men. Jules had sought to allay his solitude by a total commitment to the cause of justice and happiness for all men. And he had almost succeeded: "*Je ne vis plus seul.*" Only deep in his consciousness there is always that irreducible feeling of solitude, the metaphysical solitude of man before his unknown destiny.

This scene at the Durands' house, so rife with sincere hopes and feelings of a mystical altruism, is abruptly replaced by a view on a boulevard. Here in this puppet-like world everything is artificial, pretentious, or downright wicked. Financiers, merchants, industrialists exchange inane amenities as they greet each other with hypocritical smiles and bows. Olivier and Roussel, his shipping manager, devise a strategy whereby, with ruses and demagogic duplicity, they hope to sway public opinion to their side. The strike, unanimously voted by the union members, will be denounced as an unpatriotic act. By contrast, the next scene shifts to a street in a populous district where strikers take up collections for the unemployed workers. While the rich band together in danger and dissolve their differences, there is no solidarity among the lower social rungs. The small bourgeois, although dependent on the sous of the proletariat, show little sympathy for the strikers' cause.

At Jules' house again, the first repercussions of the strike are felt. Jules' mother complains that Jules has little regard for his own family, sacrificing himself for an illusory image of the happiness of others. For her, a humble modesty is the lot of the unfortunate. Julia, however, is quite content to efface herself before Jules' self-imposed mission. Jules is a saint who will never cease to long for martyrdom, for death, however humble its cause may be. Once he had risked his own life to save a nasty cat. Now, during the strike, Jules refuses to accept a bowl of soup from his mother, for he knows that there are many strikers who do not have even that. Although without religious faith, he quite unconsciously identifies himself with Jesus.

A union representative from Paris has come to bring moral encouragement to the strikers, but no money nor a promise to call a general strike. He accepts with pleasure Mme Durand's soup. He advises Jules to employ all devious means. He reprimands Jules for having once given testimony against a worker thief. He scoffs at Jules' insistence on honoring his promise to the mayor to observe the strikebreaker's freedom to work. The relationship between means and ends is quite clear to the representative: "Tout ce qui sert une cause juste devient juste." (VIII, 193) For him, the dignity of man is a luxury that the unionists cannot afford. For Jules, these terms are unacceptable. The two points of view are diametrically opposed. The representative is a practical, ruthless revolutionary who will not desist from any expedient measure, regardless of its moral value, that would bring the proletariat closer to victory. For Jules, "la fin est l'unité synthétique des moyens employés,"²⁷ as

Jean-Paul Sartre puts it. Jules is the impractical, austere reformer-saint, doomed to failure in his lifetime, but whose martyrdom will inspire his more practical followers to carry out his unfinished mission. Tomorrow he must announce to his fellow workers that it is useless to continue the strike.

After this digressive debate, the story resumes its fast pace. On the wharf, at night, four strikers searching for food happen to find a keg of rum. They tap it, and in their drunken stupor attack and murder Capron, a homeward-bound strikebreaker, pounding his head against the pavement. While policemen lead them away, the bistro owner finishes siphoning the spoils. The murder comes as a windfall for the worried coal merchants.

The second part of the play opens on a meeting of the strikers. Jules announces the end of the strike and the longshoremen sing the *Internationale* as they disband in dejected spirits. Roussel and Olivier call upon the examining judge to point out to him that Capron's murder was premeditated. According to their informers Capron's death had been voted on at a union meeting and, upon orders from Jules, Capron had been executed the previous night. In a highly stylized manner, sham witnesses emerge from the dark, one by one, to give false testimony against Jules.

Jules blames himself for not having convinced Capron to join the strike. A crushing sense of guilt for every one of his comrades weighs on his conscience. He feels guilty for Capron's disloyalty and he also cannot forgive himself for failing to prevent Capron's murder. He almost physically experiences all the suffering of the famished children and wives of the strikers. He suffers for the mute anxiety in Julia's look, and he cannot brook his helplessness seeing his parents' worries. Jules' mother had withdrawn her savings and she now proposes that they all go to the country. Jules welcomes the idea, but of course he himself will stay behind because he could never abandon his comrades. Suddenly two bullying policemen brutally break into the house. Insulting Julia with their obscenities and with disregard for the older Durands, they take Jules away.

While Olivier and Roussel take a walk on the boulevard, on another part of the stage, Jules' mother and father wait at the prison gate. They offer Jules a cab to avoid the humiliation of being led to the examining magistrate in full view of the passers-by. But Jules refuses to let anything ease his path to Golgotha. In a department store, the obsequious foreman Delaville and three witnesses for the prosecution, with their families, all dressed up, are standing before the toy shelf. Luc's widow Lise offers presents to the children, who

have been instructed to tell a certain story in court. The workers are assured that they can keep their Sunday clothes even after the trial. When they have left, Roussel and Olivier congratulate themselves on their future success and hope that with the collusion of these witnesses Jules will be given a five-year prison term. For them, in terms of long-range business justice, Jules is guilty.

The assize court scene is presented in a highly stylized manner. The personages are schematically grouped: three judges to the right, framed by two armed soldiers; the five accused—Jules, his two closest associates, and the two men who actually murdered Capron—are on the opposite side; in the middle is the witness stand, brightly lit when occupied by a witness, invisible in the dark when empty. Dark and brightly illuminated spots alternate across the stage. The witnesses for the prosecution file by, with each false witness repeating like automatons, “je le jure.” The presiding judge, like a stuck record, reiterates: “Messieurs les jurés apprécieront.” The prosecutor fiendishly distorts every sincere and honest declaration of the defense to his advantage. Every effort of the defense comes to naught in the face of the bureaucratic insensitivity and the revolting travesty of justice. The effect of this schematism and wickedness is a nightmarish helplessness and unreality. While Julia pleads, “his heart was overflowing with love,” the prosecutor enacts the murder scene, pounding an imaginary head against the pavement. Her plea meets only with hostility when the prosecutor points out that she lived with Jules in common-law marriage. The jury, composed of country people, has no understanding for the urban workers. Frightened by the disturbances of Jules’ agitation, they return the verdict of guilty. Jules will face the guillotine. The scene ends with the ominous roll of drums, which continues with undulating force throughout the rest of the play.

The action now shifts quickly from one stage level to another. Roussel is utterly dismayed at the severity of the verdict. With a prison term, Jules would disappear, broken and forgotten; dead, he will never die in the memory of his workers. Another brief scene shows Jules’ father, in disgust for society and its injustice, trying to commit suicide by throwing himself under an oncoming train. Julia abominates the crowd of curious, insensitive viewers, while Jules’ mother prays, “Que votre volonté soit faite.” His head shaven, his feet in irons, Jules is seen in his cell, begging the guard to turn off the lights. On a raised structure, the workers’ meeting demands an immediate repeal of the sentence. Messengers arrive announcing that solidarity strikes are being organized in many ports. Julia in-

forms the workers that Jean Jaurès and Anatole France have demanded the prisoner's release. In a corner of the sumptuous Bughenart living room, Olivier and Lise discuss the crisis. Roussel fears a world-wide revolution which only a war could prevent. Jules is seen in his cell as the first signs of dementia appear. The sadistic guard attacks him with a whip. Another brief view of the stage level shows the workers rejoicing at the news of Jules' acquittal. Julia and Jules' mother and father are waiting at the prison, with anxious expectations, for Jules to be released. But the cell has become Jules' tomb, as the doctor explains to them. "Pour supporter dans sa solitude l'idée de son exécution, il s'est comparé à Jésus-Christ et il s'est enfermé dans cette idée." (VIII, 256) In Jules' sacrifice, that of Christ is repeated. Like Christ, Jules Durand suffers and is crucified out of love for man who betrays him. But while Christ ascended to heaven, Jules descends into insanity. Perhaps other saints will continue his work, but he himself must come to the bitter realization that all human suffering, hope, and ideals are vain, purposeless—absurd. Recognizing no one, Jules refuses to see his parents and Julia. The world is meaningless suffering and he no longer desires to face it: "Eteignez la lumière. N'éclairez pas la souffrance, elle est absurde!" (VIII, 256) Jules' last words are heard on the prolonged question: "Et la misère des hommes, qu'en font-ils ceux qui vivent heureux, de la misère des hommes?" (VIII, 258)

Jules Durand embodies Salacrou's idea of a meaningful Christ figure in the twentieth century. His previous attempts to present sainthood and sacrifice did not attain the universality of the great myths. Savonarola remains essentially a fanatic individual concerned mainly with his personal salvation, which he tried to gain through ascetic mortification of his flesh and mind. Daniel, with his pessimistic skepticism, although he is less self-centered than Savonarola, lacks the warmth and love, the exaltation and mystic faith, of a true saint. With *Boulevard Durand*, Salacrou presents to his audience a myth-like, though historically authenticated, story that the spectator can understand and feel deeply through a projection of an enlarged and enhanced image of his own suffering. As Sartre puts it in his article, "Forgers of Myths": "As a rule, an audience is made up of the most diverse elements: a big business man sits beside a traveling salesman or a professor, a man next to a woman, and each is subject to his own particular preoccupations. Yet this situation is a challenge to the playwright: he must create his public, he must fuse all the disparate elements in the auditorium into a single unity by awakening in the recesses of their spirits the things which all men

of a given epoch and community care about."²⁸ A myth, as well as the Passion, "is by its very nature ambiguous, polyvalent, susceptible of ever renewed, ever changing interpretations in all directions."²⁹ *Boulevard Durand*, a story of a proletarian saint, presents these eternal and universal values that remain meaningful and valid for all ages.

In *Boulevard Durand* Salacrou has borrowed elements from the medieval drama. One of the most conspicuous features is the simultaneous representation of the various localities, side by side in full view of the audience. As on the medieval stage where *mansions*, little raised structures, suggested Heaven, usually at left, and Hell, at right, in *Boulevard Durand* the workers' meeting takes place on an elevated platform and underneath it Jules is seen in his cell, while on the opposite side of the stage the décor represents the sumptuous living room of the Buggenharts. Because of the complex action of the play, actors at times simply went directly from one mansion to another, each representing localities distantly apart. As in the Passion plays, there are violent flagellation and buffeting scenes involving the sadistic executioner who rejoices volubly in his ugly calling.

Because of its form and theme, *Boulevard Durand* also elicits comparison with Bertolt Brecht's theater. Quite obviously, the segment of affinities between Brecht and Salacrou is relatively narrow compared to the differences that separate them. Salacrou's philosophical preoccupations with man's place in the universe, with eschatological and metaphysical problems, have often relegated social problems to minor roles. Salacrou's social criticism, restricted to moral aspects, does not have the naïve didacticism of Brecht's message which, with unmitigated bluntness, shows the economic exploitations, class inequities, political oppressions. Although Salacrou is highly critical of the injustices and the moral vacuum in his society, his plays reveal a disenchanted bourgeois author, while Brecht poses as a revolutionary, a spokesman for the proletariat.

There are, however certain affinities between the two authors, affinities that are perhaps more characteristic of the literary climate than of the two personalities. Both Brecht and Salacrou join hands in condemning the principles of the well-made play, the precepts of French Classicism, the theater of character. Brecht denounces the artificial dramaturgical manipulations to enhance the plausibility of the plot. Salacrou turns against the psychological play where characters are studied along the approved lines of psychology. There are certain dramatic devices that both authors have employed,

although not always to the same end. The audience of Salacrou's plays is often submitted to a kind of shock effect in order that the drama be cleansed of the stamp of the familiar and the stage no longer be a bedroom with one wall missing. Shielded from the vicissitudes of our daily lives, the spectator is deliberately placed in a strange atmosphere.³⁰ Brecht wants to awaken the spectator's social consciousness with his *Verfremdungseffekt*. Salacrou destroys the illusion of reality to distill the anxiety of man before his destiny, before his human condition. The ironic *deus ex machina* dénouements are frequently found with the plays of both authors. While Brecht urges the spectator himself to supply the quite-implicitly-suggested true solution of the problem, Salacrou emphasizes his pessimistic view that there are no solutions for man's metaphysical destitution. Of course, these peripheral similarities between the two authors are of incidental nature and can be found in the plays of many contemporary playwrights who, likewise, have no close ideological and aesthetic affinities. With *Boulevard Durand*, however, it is possible to establish a certain rapprochement from the point of view of dramatic form between Brecht's epic theater and this chronicle play.

The Durand affair is treated in its broad social and political context. This historical event is viewed from three different angles: the industrialists and coal merchants are concerned about the repercussions of the strike on their personal fortunes through which they feel that they fulfill their duties toward the city and the country; the longshoremen see an opportunity for ameliorating their conditions; Jules Durand is waging a battle to liberate man from all indignities and injustices. As if seen through the camera's eye, the world of the workers is viewed from a distance: individual personalities are submerged in the mass of mutilated humanity; partly atrophied in their misery, only half conscious of their suffering in their physical and moral degradation, the workers do not realize the strength of their class solidarity. Their habitat is the sordid absinthe-green bistro. The bourgeois sphere is approached more closely. The symbol of bourgeois wealth and complacency is the cane with a golden knob, and the characteristic setting for this class is the boulevard and the living room. The Durand family is focused upon at close range. Each individual member is revealed in his intimacy with his particular concerns and aspirations. The domestic peacefulness and frugal simplicity of the Durand family contrast sharply with the squalor of the workers and the vain affluence of the bourgeois.

As in many of Brecht's plays, the action moves forward in a succession of contrasting scenes that follow each other with the flow of cinematic montage. No rigorously causal necessity determines the sequence of the scenes. There are interludes that have no direct function in making the plot progress. Although it is possible to discern a dramatic intensification as the play unfolds, no scene possesses a climactic supremacy over the others. The account of the episode stops with Jules' acquittal and his foundering into madness. It is the end of his self-assumed mission, but the other problems and conflicts which are raised in the play remain unsolved. In the relentless class struggle for social and economic emancipation of the workers, neither side has gained a definitive victory. The play could go on. In this respect the development of the plot suggests what is called open dramaturgy, a term frequently applied to Brecht's plays. The play is only a fragment of something bigger than itself. It is not hermetically sealed off from anything outside the characters' field of preoccupation. Without a *dénouement* it is not an organic whole, limited by itself, existing in its own autonomous world. In so called closed dramaturgy, the play does not transcend the *proscenium* which serves as a transparent fourth wall separating the autonomous artistic world of the play from that of the spectator. The characters are not restricted to dialogues or monologues with others or themselves. The unionists' harangues from the platform are really speeches directly addressed to the audience. Thus, the speakers go beyond their artistic reality as characters and intrude upon the world of the spectator. It is interesting to note that Salacrou, in search of the appropriate dramatic forms for the historical event which he wanted to present in a chronicle-like play, has adopted devices so characteristic of Brecht's epic theater.

Although the various thematic elements are well blended in the play, it is possible to detect the different layers of inspiration. Through careful selection and ingenious condensation of historically authenticated sources, Salacrou has succeeded in presenting a panoramic tableau of the complex economic, social, and political forces. It is upon this vast background that the personal tragedy of Jules Durand is grafted. The figure of Jules Durand shows obvious parallels to the author's own spiritual adventures of mature age. But the trial, the judicial error, and its repercussions are presented as recollections of his boyhood experiences. Thus, it is quite true that the play, dedicated to the working class, a reminder to the eyewitnesses of the event, appears at times quite naïve in its unsophisticated directness. But there is no reason to find it wanting

because of this naïveté. Compared to the four plays which precede it, *Boulevard Durand* surprises with its spontaneous freshness and authenticity of expression.

Although the postscript to *Boulevard Durand* has a kind of valedictory note, the chronicle play was not Salacrou's farewell to the theater. The composition of his next play, *Comme les chardons* . . . , progressed slowly during 1960–1964. The play was produced at the Comédie Française in 1964. The critical reception was generally cool. Few reviewers failed to point out that *Comme les chardons* . . . adds no new facets to Salacrou's thematic preoccupations. Some critics regretted Salacrou's return to bourgeois drama.

The plot of *Comme les chardons* . . . unfolds along certain well-established patterns of improbabilities and coincidences which are so frequently found in Salacrou's theater. Two middle aged women, Juliette and Jeanne, have lived for almost thirty years in an apparently harmonious companionship in the latter's country estate. Their uneventful existence is suddenly disrupted by the arrival of a young man, Antoine, the son of a famous painter, Antoine Grandidier, who has just died. The younger Antoine has come to verify certain facts about his father's life whose biography he is currently preparing. His prying questions make the two women reluctantly reveal their past with all its sordidness, tragic misunderstanding, and infidelities that marked their relations with the elder Antoine, who had been in turn Jeanne's suitor, Juliette's husband and then the former's lover before he disappeared forever. The two companions see scenes from their past surge up from the memories of this preposterous triangle. The two former rivals vie with each other in disgorging the ugliest details that they had so solicitously kept from each other in order to maintain a fragile semblance of peace and contentment. At the end, when all pretensions and conciliatory gestures must be dropped as useless masks, Jeanne is left with the certitude that there will be no escape from the haunting memories of a past that can only evoke poignant regrets of a life lived for nothing. Juliette, however, is never awakened to accept the futility of her life. She will go on with her search for an annual love affair and will gullibly insist: "Je n'ai pas de passé." (VIII, 293)

Comme les chardons . . . restates Salacrou's fundamental assumption of man's inability to slough off his past with impunity and to start life anew. Existence is a progressive incarceration in the perpetuity of memories. One's memories are like thistles: ". . . les chardons—ça dure, ça dure—, on les cueille vivants, et ils durent en-

core sans qu'on les ait jamais vus mourir. Ils passent, sans changer de couleur, comme si après être devenus une fois pour toutes ce qu'ils sont, vivre leur était inutile." (VIII, 306) The relentless reiteration of the obsessive themes that have become the trademark of Salacrou's theater saps the play of dramatic interest. With all the violent gestures and verbal outbursts, the characters appear to be frozen into certain patterns of redundant attitudes that fall short of conveying an impelling sense of their pathetic destinies. Since the action is almost completely immobilized in the present, the play must derive its dramatic import from the reexamination of the past—which is accomplished by means of flashback scenes. The flashback technique, whose successful originator Salacrou could very well claim to be some thirty years ago, seems to be nothing more than an arbitrary dramaturgical device. It fails to infuse the characters with the much needed authenticity.

With *Comme les chardons* . . . Salacrou's theatrical career seems to be repeating the phase in the mid-fifties that intimated a kind of thematic depletion and repetition. From this period of crisis and reevaluation marked by auto-parody and satire, Salacrou emerged with a highly original work—*Boulevard Durand*. It is useless of course to speculate on the quality of works which will follow *Comme les chardons* . . . , but there is no reason to believe that *Boulevard Durand* is Salacrou's last significant play. Whatever the future may have in store for Salacrou, his place in the development of the French contemporary theater is firmly established. His plays enjoy continuous interest in France. A great number of them have been broadcast or televised, and the Comédie Française has revived many of his best known works. The production of *Les Nuits de la colère* by the Madeleine Renaud—Jean-Louis Barrault Company has met invariably with success in New York, London, and many other places. During the troupe's 1962 tour to the Soviet Union, the author had grave concerns before the performance. But the play's universal appeal was confirmed by the enthusiastic reception. The success is not only another vindication of Salacrou's belief that a topical play created for the French public of 1946 should not necessarily be doomed to oblivion. The success may very well be indicative of the future of much of Salacrou's work.

Conclusion

SALACROU'S CAREER in the theater coincides with profound changes in the *Zeitgeist*. In form and mood, his early work gives evidence of certain Surrealist influences. His mid-career plays prefigure the themes that were to become prevalent toward the end of World War II with the rise of Existentialism, and the postwar political and social preoccupations are sometimes reflected in his later plays. But whatever fluctuations and developments may have occurred in literary tastes and trends, Salacrou's theater has essentially remained the same inner dialogue of a man who tries to determine the meaning of his life and of his place in the universe. The angry shout of the young man in *Le Casseur d'assiettes*, "Je veux un Dieu bon ou je n'en veux pas," echoes in Jules Durand's question, "A quoi peuvent servir les cris de souffrance d'un homme enfermé, seul, dans une prison perdue?" The question has been raised many times before. With it, a religious fanatic, awaiting his execution, hopes to provoke a divine answer, and the silent sky, the absence of God, lays bare all the futility of human ambitions and aspirations. As the author proceeds with his interrogation, a tortured Resistance saboteur in his solitary cell, waiting to face the firing squad, asks the very same question, and his answer would hinge on the possibility of a meaningful political commitment. But when the author puts it before his fellow bourgeois, who only shrugs his shoulders with unconcern, the result is a virulent social satire on contemporary mores. Or, when the hero's stature has diminished to the point of becoming a caricature of his former self, when a grotesque puritanical butcher asks it in a boulevard bedroom farce, the author amuses himself with the ludicrous incongruity of such a quest. Formulated on the pessimistic premise of man's utter deprivation of transcendental values, the question is never answered to prove the fallacy of the basic assumption. Yet it becomes evident, as the author continues to unravel the enigma of life, that this very quest is the honest man's most important vocation. The young man in *Le Casseur d'assiettes* has not in vain expended his

energy in raising the question. It is not the answer, after all, but the quest itself that counts, and the very conclusion that there are no comforting answers is by itself a meaningful answer.

Salacrou's theater is a quest for the meaning of life. It is also in constant search for a mode of expression. Oscillating in mood between the tragic and the comic, or very often combining the two, Salacrou's plays range, in their modes of expression, from a rather faithful realism to extremes in theatricalism, from the Surrealist dream world and the Expressionist willful distortion of objective reality to the Shakespearean all-encompassing perspective and to the Brechtian epic theater, from vaudeville and *comédie-ballet* to psychodrama, from the Pirandellian interplay of planes of reality to tight psychological realism. As with many modern plays, a strict classification of Salacrou's plays according to well-defined formulas is almost impossible. In the same play, lines of demarcation intersect and fuse to make precise labeling entirely meaningless. A play may start out as a musical comedy, *Prince Charming* and all, only to turn into a realistic psychological portrayal of characters and their passions. Or a play may develop in the other direction from naturalism to farce. But whatever dramatic genre Salacrou has chosen, his plays bear the distinct mark of the author. With all these fluctuations in the mode of expression, the function and interpretation that Salacrou assigns to his theater remain constant. As he has repeatedly stated, the theater is a contemplation of the meaning of the human condition in relation to ultimate realities. It must go beyond mere mirroring of social relations or presentation of character analysis and moral questions. It is from this attempt to enlarge the scope of his work that Salacrou's most significant achievements and some of his more obvious shortcomings result.

The purely verbal display of his eclectic metaphysical notions, such as his most doctrinary kind of determinism and his speculations on human freedom intrude too forcefully upon the essential organic cohesion of the work. The philosophical inquiry fails to generate dramatic interest within the work and lacks originality and subtlety as a philosophical lesson. In his farces and vaudevilles, the serious philosophical dialogue stands in sharp contrast to the frivolousness of the situation. Salacrou's "farce métaphysique," as some critics have preferred to call it, may have pointed the way to a new approach to this genre which is presently so eminently utilized by Ionesco. But Salacrou's attempts to invest his farces with functions that extend beyond mere amusement have not succeeded in integrating the conceptual content into the dramatic situation

or character. With the exception of his better plays, the verbal presentation of the author's metaphysical concerns produces only dramatically useless vignettes that sap his work of its artistic values.

On the other hand, this same concern has stimulated in Salacrou a quest for new dramaturgical techniques. It is through these technical innovations that Salacrou has given a new amplitude of meaning to his work. The treatment of time, plot, and character gives a more eloquent expression of the author's dreams and desires, anguish and obsessions, than the discursive speeches, which, divorced from experience, have no immediate impact.

From the early experiments with cinematographic flashback scenes in *Les Frénétiques* and with compression of historical events of twenty-five years into one scenic day in *La Vie en rose*, Salacrou proceeded to develop a very characteristic way of handling the theatrical time. Generally, time is a negative category in Salacrou's theater. With the emphasis on exploration of possible human attitudes in a given situation, rather than presentation of a series of actions in time, Salacrou very often places the theatrical event in a chronologically sealed sphere. Plays like *L'Inconnue d'Arras* and *Les Nuits de la colère* begin with what could have been in chronological sequence the last scene and proceed with retrogressive examination of the immutable past. To whatever results the inquiry may lead, and it is mostly a painful discovery of life's absurdity, time does not go beyond the initial impasse. It is said that Giraudoux's characters are completely open to their futures and Sartre and Camus, although their vision of the world is different, present much the same attitude. "What counts for them is the project an act represents or its meaning in the present—a meaning which changes according to the agent's choices and the interpretation of other people."³¹ Salacrou's characters are incarcerated in their pasts and totally bereft of any future.

Nothing significant is revealed through time. Time manifestly confirms the elemental absurdity, the purposeless patterns, of life. Any moment of man's existence is as ineffectual as any other moment, therefore almost identical and interchangeable. Many of Salacrou's plays are not immersed in a strict chronological continuum. Time becomes a viable medium which can be extended, compressed, disarranged, or reversed at will to bring out the pessimistic thought of the author. Ulysse relives episodes of his life strung together in an incoherent sequence as they emerge from his subconsciousness. Compromises, deceptions, and defeats are as constant as his aspirations are incommensurate with his achieve-

ments. In *Les Nuits de la colère* time does not progress beyond the initial impasse, which is the never-ending debate between those who could live honorably and those who were unable to meet the demands of their times.

If time does progress, the theatrical event essentially remains without development. Time brings no possibility of rehabilitation and liberation from the past, and the future promises but a repetition *ad absurdum* of past patterns. Salacrou's theater, not a theater of meaningful action, exploits a situation which is static and immutable. The furious gestures the characters expend lead nowhere, and as the final curtain falls, the exalted passions, the emotional entanglements, turn out to be just another "laughing matter." The Prince's dictum, "nothing ever happens," is best exemplified by the very ending of the play when, for want of anything better, everything slumps back into the same moral turpitude, as if nothing had happened. In *La Terre est ronde* an entire human existence, with all the suffering and striving, is seen only as a cycle in the endless universal purposelessness and its infinite circularity.

In this theater of action of inconsequence, the characters tend to become pure human attitudes locked in conflicts of emotions and ambitions. Stripped of accidentals and inessentials, they are without the psychological finesse of the well-rounded personalities of the naturalist drama. The protagonists expose a motley collage of psychic facets without shades and nuances, without a carefully worked out scheme of motivation. Simple, naïve girls suddenly become flaunting demimondaines, and a complacent middle-aged man is faced with the image of his intransigent, fervent youth. With all their seemingly unflinching determinations and vigorous decisions, Salacrou's protagonists fail to translate their attitudes into effective action. Life with its compromises and frustrations nibbles away the once sacred ideals and illusions and reduces the protagonist to a disillusioned spectator of his own defeat. Minor characters are assigned roles that are meant to complement the setting. Or they may be choric commentators, a kind of Kafkaesque attendants, who, from the distanced point of view of an outsider, remind the audience of the ubiquitous shadow of absurdity that is cast over the futile exertions of the protagonists.

Salacrou's technique in presentation of time, plot, and character is another refutation of the concept of realistic playwriting. Dilating, compressing, or reversing the chronological time, Salacrou has created a new poetic image of human realities. Without well-developed and logically progressing plots, his plays reflect a force-

fully pessimistic vision of the human predicament. Salacrou's method of characterization, not meant to confirm some psychological truisms or to present interesting character studies, produces an immediate and powerful impact on the spectator. With his unique dramatic techniques, Salacrou has abandoned many a consecrated trick of the traditional theater, and yet, on the whole, Salacrou's work still remains rooted in the tradition. In his search for new dramatic forms, Salacrou has not gone far enough to blend his innovations into a new, authentic mode of expression. To bring the plot back to the initial impasse, or to arrest it at the endlessly circular situation, Salacrou relies on well-timed mishaps and derailments whose plausibility, as if it were a question of a well-made play, the author asks us to accept. With nauseating repetitions Salacrou exploits love triangles, conjugal infidelities, and the kind of poignant sex that is so closely associated with run-of-the-mill French plays. The absurdity of these relations may prefigure the universal absurdity of human existence, but these frivolous entanglements are not valid poetic images of the deeply tragic predicament. The hero's infatuation with the invariably unfaithful woman makes him a rather ridiculous creature. His lofty ambitions and metaphysical anguish are jarringly offset by his conventional gullibility as a cuckold. The spectator is continuously faced with the strange juxtaposition of the trite and the deeply tragic which fail to blend and to generate a dominant total impression.

As a rebuke of the tradition-ridden theater, most of Salacrou's work may be successful, but too often it falls short of its primary goal of creating a theater that would infuse the spectator with a sense of mystery and of reverent awe in facing his own existence, his metaphysical destiny. Salacrou's work may be that of a dramatic virtuoso who has not dared go far enough to break away from the tradition and to initiate a distinctly new movement in the theater. Salacrou is a transitional figure, denouncing the forms in which most of his work is steeped and heralding the rise of the new iconoclastic theatrical generation.

Salacrou has hailed with interest and encouragement the new avant-garde group. When Ionesco's *La Cantatrice chauve* opened at the Théâtre des Noctambules on May 11, 1950, it was coldly received by the public. Only Salacrou and Jacques Lemarchand, at that time the critic of *Combat*, gave it favorable notices. As Martin Esslin points out in his study, *The Theatre of the Absurd*, the avant-garde playwrights in France, notably Beckett, Adamov, Ionesco, and Genet really do not represent a totally iconoclastic, un-

precedented movement, cut off from tradition. The novelty of the movement lies in an unusual combination of old, archaic traditions, in an expansion, revaluation, and development of procedures that are familiar and acceptable in slightly different contexts. Among the various components that constitute this so-called Theatre of the Absurd, Esslin discerns the literature of dreams and fantasy, of nightmare and obsessions, of inconsequence and free associations, represented in the works of Jarry, Apollinaire, the Dadaists, and some of the Expressionists and Surrealists.³² Other writers outside the official Surrealist circle such as Cocteau and Salacrou, during a certain phase in their literary careers, have also exemplified this type of literature. Salacrou's early plays for reading, *Les Trente tombes de Judas* and *L'Histoire de cirque* combine the tradition of clowning and the dream. In these plays for reading, Salacrou conjures up an incoherent flow of weird images: oranges spout blood, birds hatch eggs thrown at a lovesick boy, Judas hangs himself and turns into a flabby rag, a circus tent suddenly vanishes and a lover dies in the midst of a snow storm. Salacrou's *comédies-ballets*, *Poof* and *La Vie en Rose*, with their stylized action, with their movement and sound serving as instruments for expression of meaning, suggest an attempt to return to the age-old traditions of mime plays and abstract scenic effects.

Of course, the Theatre of the Absurd has developed these elements of "pure," abstract theater much farther, but there are certain conspicuous features in technique and form that are common to Salacrou's work and to the avant-garde theater. In plays like *L'Inconnue d'Arras*, *Les Fiancés du Havre*, or *L'Archipel Lenoir*, there is no progression of action, or if there is any movement the action returns to its starting point with the initial situation more destitute, sordid, and absurd than before. *En Attendant Godot* explores a static situation. The second act of the play is only a repetition of the first, except that everything has deteriorated: Pozzo has gone blind and Lucky has become dumb. *La Cantatrice chauve* has the same dialogue at the beginning and at the end. If Salacrou's simultaneous representation of a character at two different ages, showing the immense gulf that exists between the purity of youth and the degradation of a more mature age, is extended farther, we arrive at the non-identity of Ionesco's characters. In *Victimes du devoir*, as Choubert descends into the bottomless well of his subconscious he turns into a bewildering variety of different, inconsistent selves. Salacrou's later farces, *Les Invités du bon Dieu* and *Une Femme trop honnête*, display this frenzied intensification of action, this mad

acceleration of frantic movement leading nowhere, or at least not to a logically built-up climax that is so characteristic of Ionesco's plays—*Rhinocéros* with the growing number of transformations, *Le Nouveau Locataire* with the progressive proliferation of furniture, *La Leçon* with the arrival of the forty-first pupil to be murdered.

There are also thematic affinities between Salacrou and the avant-garde playwrights. The sense of metaphysical anguish, of the absurdity of the human condition, which permeates many of Salacrou's plays, also marks the work of Beckett, Adamov, and Ionesco. The protest against the leveling of individuality, against the acceptance of ready-made ideas, is quite frequent among contemporary dramatists. Yet there is something common in tone, in the pugnacious spirit, when both Ionesco and Salacrou launch their vitriolic attacks on the bourgeois world of routine and inauthenticity. The world of the Smiths and the Martins is identical to the world of the Lenoirs; these people are social automata without identity, without capacity for feeling, without conscious desires. The characters of the bourgeois world are almost interchangeable. In the plays of Salacrou and Ionesco, the satire of the emptiness of polite conversations, the mechanical exchange of platitudes, the deeply tragic themes of the incommunicability of human experiences and the futility and failure of human existence are permeated by *humour noir*. It is this black humor, bitter, farcically tragic, horrifying and yet laughable, poignant and always true, that makes the spectator conscious of the desultory condition of man, of the malaise of being. It is the hallmark of the better plays of Salacrou and Ionesco.

It is not my intention here to suggest that Salacrou's work directly influenced or inspired the Theatre of the Absurd, particularly Ionesco. But it can be pointed out that Salacrou's search for new forms has been in the direction of the innovations of today's avant-garde theater. Striving for a more thorough integration between the subject matter and the form, the Theatre of the Absurd has developed, extended, and deepened the tendencies that are so prominent in Salacrou's work. Martin Essling remarks very pointedly: "The theatre of the Absurd has renounced arguing *about* the absurdity of the human condition; it merely *presents* it in being—that is, in terms of concrete stage images of the absurdity of existence."³³ Of course, Salacrou is not divorced from his generation and still uses much discursive thought and many rational devices to express this content of the irrationality and senselessness of

the human condition. But all in all, Salacrou stands closer to the new movement than many of his contemporaries.

Salacrou shares with the iconoclasts an unflinching desire to create a "pure" theater: a theater that would wield all its means of expression, especially scenic effects and all that is unique to the theater; a theater that would not shun, for the sake of plausibility or theatrical convention, the use of old forms and techniques proscribed as improper by critics and aesthetes; a theater that would not first of all serve as a vehicle of verbal communication of a philosophical system, a religious belief, or a lesson on morality and political virtues. Jean-Paul Sartre's incursions into the theater have produced excellent elucidations of his philosophy. Through the theater, Paul Claudel has given a magnificent expression of his faith and of the Catholic interpretation of the world and man. Giraudoux's superior intellect and verbal acrobatics are best displayed in his plays. Compared to the productions of these great contemporaries, Salacrou's work may appear to be wanting in originality of thought, consistency of argument, or intellectual inventiveness. But Salacrou, more than anyone of his generation, has contributed to the development of the theater to make our time one of the "great theatrical periods" of which he so nostalgically speaks in his writings. Of all of his concerns and desires, one has remained uppermost throughout his work—the desire to create a good theater, and therein he has been highly successful.

Notes

Notes to Introduction

1. Quoted in Oreste F. Pucciani, *The French Theater since 1930* (New York: Ginn and Company, 1954), p. 145.
2. Armand Salacrou, *Les Idées de la nuit* (Paris: Fayard, 1960), p. 24.

Notes to Chapter 1

3. Armand Salacrou, "Note sur mes certitudes et incertitudes," *Théâtre*, VI (Paris: Gallimard, 1954), p. 196. Hereafter quotations from the Gallimard edition of Salacrou's *Théâtre* will be indicated by the volume number in capital Roman numerals followed by the page number, e.g. (VI, 196).
4. Quoted in Paul-Louis Mignon, *Salacrou* (Paris: Gallimard, 1960), p. 21.
5. Quoted in René Clair, *Comédies et commentaires* (Paris: Gallimard, 1959), p. 100.
6. Armand Salacrou, *Tour à terre. Le Pont de l'Europe* (Paris: Nouvelles Editions Françaises, 1929), p. 150.
7. *Les Idées de la nuit*, p. 11.
8. *Ibid.*, p. 9.
9. "Armand Salacrou," *Problèmes*, XXIII (1955), 47.
10. *Loc. cit.*
11. *Tour à terre. Le Pont de l'Europe*, p. 151.
12. *Les Idées de la nuit*, p. 49.
13. *Ibid.*, pp. 49-50.

Notes to Chapter 2

14. *Tour à terre. Le Pont de l'Europe*, p. 137.
15. *Ibid.*, p. 156.

Notes to Chapter 6

16. *Les Idées de la nuit*, p. 119.
17. Jacques Guicharnaud, *Modern French Theater* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1961), p. 115.

Note to Chapter 9

18. *Les Idées de la nuit*, p. 132.

Notes to Chapter 10

19. Armand Salacrou, *Pourquoi pas moi?* (Paris: Bordas, 1948), p. 26.
20. *Ibid.*, p. 21.
21. Armand Salacrou, "A Message to the American Educational Theatre," transl. Paul Hahn, *Educational Theatre Journal*, III (1951), 1.
22. *Loc. cit.*

Note to Chapter 11

23. *Les Idées de la nuit*, pp. 128-129.

Notes to Chapter 12

24. *Les Idées de la nuit*, p. 255.

25. *Ibid.*, p. 251.

26. *Ibid.*, pp. 8–9.

Notes to Chapter 13

27. Jean-Paul Sartre, *Situations*, II (Paris: Gallimard, 1948), p. 308.

28. Jean-Paul Sartre, "Forgers of Myths," *Theatre Arts*, XXX (1946), 324–335.

29. Jean Boorsch, "The Use of Myth in Cocteau's Theatre," *Yale French Studies*, V (1950), 75–81.

30. J. Fauve, "Drama of Essence," *Yale French Studies*, XIII (1954–1955), 30–40.

Notes to Conclusion

31. Guicharnaud, pp. 133–134.

32. Martin Esslin, *The Theatre of the Absurd* (Garden City, N. Y.: Anchor, 1961), p. 254.

33. *Ibid.*, p. XX.

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