

SOCIAL DRAMA IN FRANCE  
IN THE NEW SUBSIDISED THEATRES  
(1946 - 1968),  
WITH SPECIAL REFERENCE TO THE WORK OF  
GABRIEL COUSIN

A thesis presented by David William Jeffery for the degree of  
Ph.D., Bedford College, University of London, 1980

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ABSTRACT

Social drama in France in the new subsidised theatres, 1945-1968, with special reference to the work of Gabriel Cousin: by D. W. Jeffery

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A fresh impetus was given to the development of provincial theatre in France immediately after the Second World War by the establishment of five subsidised Centres Dramatiques Nationaux in Colmar, Saint-Etienne, Toulouse, Rennes, and Aix-en-Provence. Largely influenced by the proposals of the prewar Cartel group of theatre directors for decentralising and democratising French theatre, the directors of these new Centres set about capturing audiences hitherto unfamiliar with the theatre in the culturally barren provinces. During the nineteen-fifties, more experimental forms of theatre, frequently based on the recently-experienced Brechtian epic drama, were gradually introduced into the otherwise traditional repertoires of the new companies.

With the creation of a Ministère des Affaires Culturelles under the Fifth Republic in 1958, a further expansion of the decentralisation programme was planned. In the following decade, four new Centres Dramatiques, eleven Troupes Permanentes, and nine Maisons de la Culture were set up, thus bringing the majority of the French population within reach of some form of theatrical activity for the first time. A corresponding increase in the output of plays by a new generation of young dramatists led to a spate of works dealing predominantly with socio-political themes.

Typical of this new generation is Gabriel Cousin, whose career as a dramatist began with an intense love of sport and an interest in the art of movement. Like many of his contemporaries, Cousin became inspired by both the theoretical writings and the practical theatre of Artaud, Copeau, and Brecht. His own plays - on such themes as racism, Third World famine, the nuclear threat, and the alienation of Man by his work - show him to be a key figure among the group of social dramatists who sought to arouse in their audiences a 'prise de conscience' of contemporary social ills. Cousin's theatre is thus characteristic of much of the work produced in the new subsidised provincial theatres of France in the postwar era.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I should like to thank Dr. Dorothy Knowles for all the advice, help, and encouragement she has given me on numerous occasions during the preparation of this thesis.

Je tiens à témoigner ma profonde gratitude à Gabriel Cousin tant pour l'aide efficace qu'il m'a apportée dans mon travail de recherche que pour son accueil chaleureux et sympathique lors de mes visites.

Contents

PART ONE : THE NEW SUBSIDISED THEATRES AND THEIR REPERTOIRES

|                    |   |     |
|--------------------|---|-----|
| <u>CHAPTER I</u>   | <u>PHASE 1 : 1945 - 1952</u>  |     |
|                    | (a) Origins of the decentralisation of postwar French theatre         | 6   |
|                    | (b) The Centre Dramatique de l'Est                                    | 10  |
|                    | (c) The Comédie de Saint-Etienne                                      | 15  |
|                    | (d) The Grenier de Toulouse   | 21  |
|                    | (e) The Centre Dramatique de l'Ouest                                  | 27  |
|                    | (f) The Comédie de Provence   | 32  |
|                    | (g) Characteristics of the repertoires                                | 35  |
| <u>CHAPTER II</u>  | <u>PHASE 2 : 1952 - 1958</u>  |     |
|                    | (a) The Centre Dramatique de l'Est                                    | 42  |
|                    | (b) The Comédie de Saint-Etienne                                      | 46  |
|                    | (c) The Grenier de Toulouse   | 50  |
|                    | (d) The Centre Dramatique de l'Ouest                                  | 54  |
|                    | (e) The Comédie de Provence   | 58  |
|                    | (f) Characteristics of the repertoires                                | 62  |
|                    | (g) External influences on the repertoires of the Centres Dramatiques | 70  |
| <u>CHAPTER III</u> | <u>PHASE 3 : 1958 - 1968</u>  |     |
|                    | (a) Expansion of the decentralisation movement                        | 80  |
|                    | (b) The Centres Dramatiques Nationaux                                 | 82  |
|                    | (c) The Théâtre de l'Est Parisien                                     | 90  |
|                    | (d) The Troupes Permanentes   | 104 |
|                    | (e) The Théâtre Quotidien de Marseille                                | 105 |
|                    | (f) The Maisons de la Culture   | 113 |
|                    | (g) Other developments in French theatre up to 1968                   | 117 |
| <u>CHAPTER IV</u>  | <u>SOCIAL DRAMA IN THE NEW SUBSIDISED THEATRES: AN EVALUATION</u>     | 127 |

|                     |     |  |     |
|---------------------|-----|--|-----|
| <u>PART TWO</u>     | :   | <u>GABRIEL COUSIN</u>                                |     |
| <u>CHAPTER V</u>    |     | <u>FORMATIVE INFLUENCES ON COUSIN AS A DRAMATIST</u> |     |
|                     | (a) | Childhood  | 142 |
|                     | (b) | Work and Sport                                       | 143 |
|                     | (c) | War, Marriage, and a change of direction             | 146 |
|                     | (d) | Literary awakening                                   | 147 |
|                     | (e) | Les Compagnons de la Saint-Jean                      | 153 |
|                     | (f) | Mounin and Monnet                                    | 165 |
|                     | (g) | Cousin and the Parti Communiste Français             | 168 |
|                     | (h) | Discovering Brecht                                   | 171 |
| <u>CHAPTER VI</u>   |     | <u>THE PLAYS</u>                                     |     |
|                     | (a) | L'Officina   | 175 |
|                     | (b) | L'Aboyeuse et l'Automate                             | 185 |
|                     | (c) | Le Drame du Fukuryu-Maru                             | 217 |
|                     | (d) | Cancer sur la Terre                                  | 241 |
|                     | (e) | Le Voyage de derrière la Montagne                    | 250 |
|                     | (f) | L'Opéra Noir   | 270 |
|                     | (g) | Vivre en 1968  | 294 |
|                     | (h) | La Descente sur Recife                               | 305 |
|                     | (i) | Le Cycle du Crabe                                    | 315 |
| <u>CHAPTER VII</u>  |     | <u>COUSIN'S THEORY AND PRACTICE OF THE THEATRE</u>   | 343 |
| <u>CHAPTER VIII</u> |     | <u>THE THEMES OF THE SOCIAL DRAMATISTS</u>           | 371 |
| <u>CHAPTER IX</u>   |     | <u>COUSIN'S PLACE IN THE SOCIAL DRAMA MOVEMENT</u>   | 384 |
| <u>CHAPTER X</u>    |     | <u>CONCLUSION</u>                                    | 397 |
|                     |     | THE NEW SUBSIDISED THEATRES                          | 407 |
|                     |     | BIBLIOGRAPHY   | 408 |

PART ONE : THE NEW SUBSIDISED THEATRES AND THEIR REPERTOIRES

CHAPTER I PHASE 1 : 1945 - 1952

(a) Origins of the decentralisation of postwar French theatre

That a theatrical decentralisation movement should emerge at all in postwar France was no accident: it came about as a result of the fusion of three distinct, but complementary, philosophies.

First, the prewar theatre directors, the Cartel group of Dullin, Pitoëff, Baty and Jouvet, themselves the inheritors of Jacques Copeau's ideas, had left an artistic legacy difficult to shake off, both in terms of its rejection of naturalistic themes and styles and in its concentration on directors' theatre. Dullin and Copeau had, moreover, produced philosophies of drama which bore directly on the renewed hopes of their successors in the new subsidised theatres in the provinces after the war.

Charles Dullin's prophetic but unheeded Rapport of 1937, republished in 1969 under the title Ce sont les dieux qu'il nous faut, envisaged a decentralised theatre which lent to regional theatres an autonomy and a style developed from the personality of their directors. Dullin saw the rôle of the theatre as an educational one and the dissemination of dramatic art essential to the civilisation of France. His hopes, and those of fellow members of the Cartel, were to be realised when the decentralisation movement began in 1946. In a sense, therefore, this movement may be said to be the extension of the ideas of the Cartel directors themselves.

Jacques Copeau's pamphlet Le Théâtre Populaire, written in 1941, advocated a return to the popular dramatic festivals of Ancient Greece or Medieval times. His experiences in Burgundy had led him to conclude that the greatest appeal in theatre for the masses was to be had from an unemphatic kind of poetry expressed in mime, song, and dance. Copeau's philosophy of the presentation of drama was to be re-adopted later by itinerant companies both within and outside the scope of the decentralisation movement.

These considerations of the form and organisation of the theatre in the provinces are not inapposite, since the physical decentralisation of theatrical talent and ideas is indissolubly linked to the content of the drama presented. In starker terms, the propagation of culture was only made feasible through the multiplication of outlets for that culture. It was the enlargement of the network of theatres which preceded the broadening repertoire of the companies, and not a contrary movement, which characterised the decentralisation era.

The second major influence upon postwar decentralisation policy was an administrative one: it was the result of individual inspiration and dedication on the part of one government official, whose efforts during the war years set the movement into stable and permanent operation after the war. Jeanne Laurent, an ex-deputy mayor from Alsace, had developed an interest in theatre affairs while working for the government in a minor capacity from 1939 to 1944, and when, in October 1945, she assumed the responsibilities of Directeur des Spectacles et de la Musique à la Direction Générale des Arts et des Lettres - a post created only in August 1945 - she brought to the job an objectivity and a perspicacity that earned her the respect of all the directors of the future Centres Dramatiques until her removal from office in 1952.

Jeanne Laurent's enlightened attitude towards theatre expansion extended even into the field of repertoire. As Gontard has pointed out<sup>1</sup>, she was aware in 1943 of the necessity for a cosmopolitan outlook by theatre companies, thus avoiding any narrow or chauvinistic approach to dramatic presentations. In her article L'administration des Beaux-Arts et le théâtre parisien en 1941-2, she indicated that even the great subsidised theatres of Paris could, if they wished, "accueillir des auteurs vivants, même révolutionnaires, et confier la présentation de leurs oeuvres à des metteurs en

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1. D. Gontard, La Décentralisation Théâtrale, S.E.D.E.S., 1973, p.144.



scène audacieux".

The third phenomenon which helped create the whole movement and philosophy of decentralisation was that of the Liberation itself - an indefinable force which acted both upon men of the theatre and on the public at large. It inspired in them a common desire for new dramatic expression, in a universalised form, for the whole population. It was a force which struck at cultural elitism, at administrative centralisation, and, what is more relevant still to this study, at theatre repertoires themselves. It was a cause taken up by theatre directors on behalf of the public, interpreting the public's wish for innovation.

Raymonde Temkine has remarked on the concurrence of contemporary aspirations by both theatre public and theatre directors:

Dès 1945, le public va à la rencontre des artisans du théâtre populaire...il y avait convergence dès la Libération entre ses aspirations nouvelles canalisées par les plus conscients, et les ambitions des nouveaux animateurs de la scène.<sup>2</sup>

Jean Dasté's own account of this immediate postwar period supports this notion:

Cet éclatement de la vie théâtrale hors de Paris correspondait, après les années de guerre, au retour exaltant à la liberté.<sup>3</sup>

Dasté's aim was to:

Continuer en province un effort de rénovation dont jusqu'ici Paris avait bénéficié, de rompre avec le théâtre réaliste ou commercial et, suivant l'orientation donnée par Jacques Copeau, de retrouver avec un public neuf, le sens universel et social du théâtre.<sup>4</sup>

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2. Raymonde Temkine, L'Entreprise Théâtre, Editions Cujas, 1967, p.179.

3. Jean Dasté, Voyage d'un Comédien, Stock, 1977, p.33.

4. Quoted by Temkine, op.cit., p.182.

Dasté's chance to fulfil these ambitions came in the spring of 1945 when Georges Blanchon, President of the Maison de la Culture in Grenoble, invited Dasté to join him with a troupe of actors in developing theatrical activity within the framework of the Maison's policy of coordinating "l'ensemble des activités culturelles, de régler le programme et le plan de grands cycles annuels, culturels et artistiques de Grenoble."<sup>5</sup> This invitation by Blanchon to Jean Dasté caught the imagination of the latter, who had dreamt for several years of leaving Paris and joining a touring company in the provinces, using a large tent as a theatre. His reaction to the invitation was therefore highly gratifying:

C'était une occasion de quitter Paris, de participer à une action qui faisait partie d'un grand espoir né avec la Libération.<sup>6</sup>

It is not without justification that Dasté has been identified as the prime mover of the decentralisation movement; given the official encouragement of Jeanne Laurent, Dasté saw to it that it was the culturally deprived of the population who benefited most from the presence of his troupe. In a letter to Jeanne Laurent later in 1945, Dasté speaks of his work "dont l'essentiel consiste également à jouer dans les milieux ruraux et ouvriers, généralement dépourvus de théâtre."<sup>7</sup>

So these three philosophies - the historic, the administrative, and the emotional - form the basis of the postwar decentralisation movement in French theatre. A closer study of the new subsidised theatres will reveal how social drama became the natural ingredient of their repertoires because it fulfilled the aspirations expressed in those philosophies.

In the period under consideration, from 1946 to 1952, five Centres Dramatiques Nationaux were created. These were, in order of their foundation:

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5. Gontard, op.cit., p.192.

6. Dasté, op.cit., p.33.

7. Letter from Dasté to Jeanne Laurent, quoted by Gontard, op.cit., p.394.

1946 : The Centre Dramatique de l'Est at Colmar  
 1947 : The Comédie de Saint-Etienne at Saint-Etienne  
 1949 : The Grenier de Toulouse at Toulouse  
 1949 : The Centre Dramatique de l'Ouest at Rennes  
 1952 : The Comédie de Provence at Aix-en-Provence

This period also marks the term of office of Jeanne Laurent at the Direction Générale des Arts et des Lettres.

(b) The Centre Dramatique de l'Est (C.D.E.) was originally scheduled to have Louis Ducreux as its artistic director. Ducreux, whose experience with the troupe he had founded called Le Rideau Gris extended to touring the provinces from 1931 to 1943 and playing in Marseille and Lyon, seemed an ideal person for the task of establishing both a permanent theatre in Alsace-Lorraine and a repertoire which could be guaranteed to attract audiences. It was clearly of first importance to secure audiences for these incipient provincial theatre centres, not merely for financial reasons, but as a form of compensation for the cultural deprivation which the French provinces had suffered for so many years.

It had been Ducreux's intention to fill the opening season of the new C.D.E. with the successes of his Rideau Gris company, namely: André Roussin's Am-Stram-Gram, Molière's Les Fourberies de Scapin, Ducreux's own La Part du Feu, Roussin's Une grande fille toute simple, and Jean-Baptiste le mal-aimé. For the future, Ducreux proposed some foreign authors, Pirandello, Eliot, Shakespeare and Lorca, and he also intended to ask contemporary French dramatists to allow the Centre to première their new plays. Unfortunately, Ducreux fell ill and was not able to undertake his duties as artistic director, the post was now offered for one year to Roland Piétri. One of Ducreux's ideas for the Centre was to be taken up later, in 1951, by the then director André Clavé: a second troupe was formed to ensure that there would be continuous performances of plays throughout a season.

It was ironic that Ducreux had not been able to bring his years of experience to Colmar at this initial stage in the development of a dramatic centre, for Piétri encountered several problems with the repertoire he introduced. What had been suitable in terms of repertoire in Paris - Piétri had been the

co-director at the Comédie des Champs-Élysées - was evidently inappropriate for the new C.D.E. audiences. In an effort to promote the talents of the region, Piétri ambitiously attempted a production of Le Survivant, by Jean-François Noël, a Lorraine dramatist, with décor and costumes by a Strasbourgeois, Stoskopf. The play attracted poor reviews. The next production was a double bill, consisting of Molière's Le Misanthrope and Reynard's Les Folies Amoureuses which, almost predictably, was highly successful. The third play of this first season in January 1947, Shaw's Candida, also failed to attract the critics who preferred the subsequent productions, notably the triple bill of Racine's Les Plaideurs, Musset's Un Caprice and Courteline's La Peur des Coups. What is perhaps most remarkable about this first season under Piétri is that he put on a total of ten plays in the short period of four months: this intensity of production and variety of repertoire was by no means comparable with the early seasons of the other four Centres, but it did remain a feature of the C.D.E.'s work under André Clavé who took over the artistic directorship in 1947. Although the C.D.E. did not play to full houses in this first season, the press were favourable to the majority of its productions. Mauriac's Les Mal Aimés, Passeur's Je vivrai un grand amour, and Arnoux's Huon de Bordeaux, all plays of the inter-war years, received progressively better notices as the season continued, but in general it was the classical plays which were most favourably received. They constituted the double and triple bills and reached an average of over five hundred spectators per performance. The least appealing play as far as audiences statistics can indicate, was Arnoux's Huon de Bordeaux, the popular medieval epic, constructed in a succession of short tableaux. Despite good notices in the press, provincial audiences were obviously not yet ready for such experimentation and innovation in their theatre.

André Clavé slightly tempered the ambitious repertoire of Piétri in the second season by retaining French works for the large majority of his programme. The valuable and extensive experience which he had gained in the provinces with his touring

company, La Roulotte, taught him to rely on such 'safe' dramatists as Molière, Anouilh and Courteline. However, he chose to begin his C.D.E. season with Daudet's L'Arlésienne and Mauriac's Asmodée, two plays which did not unduly excite the enthusiasm of the press. The first noticeable improvement in audience reaction came with the foreign play, R.C. Sheriff's Journey's End (Le Grand Voyage), the drama of the First World War. But the climax of that season was undoubtedly reached with the two consecutive productions of Molière's Le Bourgeois Gentilhomme and Le Tartuffe.

Clavé's third season opened a period of considerable experimentation; he introduced many foreign works into the repertoire and presented only one Molière play: Le Médecin malgré lui, which ran for the lowest number of performances - only eight - that entire season. The C.D.E.'s audience was thus introduced to Shaw, Ibsen and Dostoievski, while the highest number of productions was allotted to Shakespeare's Hamlet. The adaptation of Dostoievski's Crime and Punishment, Salacrou's Les Nuits de la Colère, Sherriff's Journey's End, and Shaw's Saint Joan were all successful, thus demonstrating the audience's capacity for appreciating new plays in the repertoire. The Centre Dramatique de l'Est was the most successful in attracting audiences to new productions in this early stage of the decentralisation era; it was the first time that Dostoievski, Salacrou, and Sherriff had been performed in the new subsidised theatres; Clavé's production of Saint Joan was the only one put on in the decentralised theatres in the nineteen-fifties and nineteen-sixties; the first Lorca play to be staged by a Centre Dramatique was The House of Bernarda Alba the following season, and this, too, met with success. However, there was not unqualified acclaim for all these foreign plays: Ibsen's Rosmersholm in 1949 and O'Casey's Shadow of a Gunman in 1952 proved to be failures with both the press and the public. Nevertheless, it is to Clavé's great credit that he should introduce such a high percentage of modern foreign plays into the repertoire.

The fourth season, 1949-50, was considerably more

traditionalist, consisting almost exclusively of French dramas, Clavé concentrating heavily on increasing the number of performances of each work, and enlarging his touring circuit. This expansion was complemented by broadcasts on the theatre from Radio-Strasbourg, and lectures by prominent practitioners of the theatre in the major towns of the region.

The 1950-51 season brought eight new plays into the repertoire and two revivals from the previous season, Molière's Le Malade Imaginaire and Claudel's L'Otage. In 1950 too, there had begun the system of exchanges between the Centres Dramatiques which had resulted in two visits: the Comédie de Saint-Etienne presented Molière's Les Fourberies de Scapin and Suzanne Bing's adaptation of the Japanese Ce quæ murmure la Sumida; in 1951, le Grenier de Toulouse brought their highly successful production of Plautus' Le Carthaginois. What is of equal interest to this expansion of the repertoire is the development of the area of influence of the C.D.E. : written into its statute was the requirement to tour in the whole region of Alsace and Lorraine, and its production of Shakespeare's Macbeth played a total of thirty-one times in nineteen different towns. Another stage in the extension of the C.D.E.'s repertoire in this season was the presentation of the world premières of two plays: Gilbert Cesbron's Il est minuit, Docteur Schweitzer! and Max Campserveux's Les Centaures.

The final season in this first phase of the development of the C.D.E. was characterised by the emergence of the successful second troupe of the centre and its highly praised production of André Obey's Noé of which it gave fifty-two performances, the highest number of any production that season. The Centre Dramatique de l'Ouest was invited to tour in the region with its production of Ben Jonson's Volpone, thus completing a series of visits by all three of the existing Centres Dramatiques of this period. At the end of this 1951-52 season, Michel Saint-Denis became the new administrative director of the company; André Clavé remained the artistic director, but, at the suggestion of Jeanne Laurent, the company's repertoire was reduced from an average of eight plays per season to four.

Certain aspects of the development of the C.D.E. during this initial six-year period emerge from this study of its repertoire. First, the predominance of works by French dramatists in the six seasons indicated a desire on the part of the administration to compensate for the overwhelmingly German-orientated culture which had permeated the region during the Occupation years. Second, and complementary to this policy, the rapid extension of its activities into many towns and even villages of the region, is particular to this company and encourages the view that the inhabitants of the region were eager to welcome the French cultural influence once again. Third, neither Piétri nor Clavé had hesitated to introduce rare or unknown works into their repertoires; indeed, their persistence in their choice of a diversified repertoire stands to their credit. Finally, despite the perhaps predictable emergence of Molière as the most appealing author to audiences, Clavé showed that plays dealing with topics of social conscience and import were sometimes equally successful. Salacrou's Les Nuits de la Colère (1948-9 season), Chauffard's Un Cas de Conscience (1949-50), and Cesbron's Il est minuit, Docteur Schweitzer! were all plays concerned with dilemmas of social conscience. The Salacrou play, which had been first performed in Paris as early as 1946, was perhaps the most topical of the three, and dealt with questions of personal liberty and collective loyalty within the Resistance movement. It is interesting to note here that this Salacrou play was preferred to the Antigone of Anouilh or the L'Etat de Siège of Camus, two plays in which the didactic content is concealed in classical legend and modern symbolism respectively. It is also to be noted that audiences were attracted by plays on topical themes, and this remained a feature of the later repertoires by the decentralisation theatres. The Cesbron play was the first of the productions of the Centre Dramatique de l'Est to tour in the smaller villages of the region around Colmar. It finally transferred to the Athénée in Paris in 1951.

In this initial phase, the C.D.E. had above all contributed

to destroying the assumptions about Parisian theatrical hegemony, about the value of Boulevard theatre, and it began the process of rejuvenation in the provinces which would eventually lead to an even more vigorous assertion of their cultural individuality.

(c) The Comédie de Saint-Etienne

Like André Clavé of the Centre Dramatique de l'Est, Jean Dasté had had considerable experience of provincial theatre touring before he was invited to direct the second of the new Centres Dramatiques Nationaux. He had been a former member of Jacques Copeau's group Les Copiaus, an affectionate name given to them by their country audiences; he had married Copeau's daughter, and had continued working with the remaining members of the Copiaus, renamed La Compagnie des Quinze, under Michel Saint-Denis. This group performed most of the works of André Obey. Before the war he had helped André Barsacq to found the Compagnie des Quatre Saisons, which pioneered provincial tours with productions specifically designed for them, and he continued his work during the German Occupation.

Through Dasté and Saint-Denis, Copeau's nephew, a direct line can be traced from the prewar attempts at provincial theatre inspired by Copeau to the postwar decentralisation movement of which Dasté has rightly been adjudged a major influence and leading practitioner. His work with the Comédie de Saint-Etienne lasted almost a quarter of a century and the new theatre completed in 1969 would never have been built but for Dasté's efforts to promote popular theatre in Saint-Etienne.

What characterises Dasté's early work and sets him apart from the other directors of the Centres is his zeal as a cultural evangelist: he played on makeshift stages, in large tents and in schools and factories, he brought to light new authors and new production techniques; in short, he was the true successor to the revolutionary Copeau of the nineteen-twenties. His first two productions with the Compagnie des Comédiens de Grenoble in the season 1945-46 were André Obey's Noé and the composite piece, Sept Couleurs.



Noé, first performed by the Compagnie des Quinze in the 1931-32 season, consisted of a dramatic, poetic fresco on the story of Noah, accompanied by dancing, mime, and music. It was given an enthusiastic reception both in Grenoble and in the many towns and villages in which it toured. It is of course conceivable that the play's simple plot based on a Bible story, together with its accompanying visual elaborations, made it an ideal Christmas entertainment for spectators of all ages. Yet the fact remains that the play was one of the first, and perhaps unexpected, successes of the decentralisation movement. Dasté repeated his Grenoble production later in the 1951-52 season in the new, officially recognised Centre Dramatique National, la Comédie de Saint-Etienne, to which he moved after financial problems and local political differences drove him away from Grenoble. Noé was also produced in 1951 at the C.D.E. by Hubert Gignoux and at the Comédie de l'Ouest in 1957.

Sept Couleurs, an eclectic concoction of farces, playlets, poetry, dance, and pantomime, drawn together by Dasté and his wife, Marie-Hélène, in conjunction with the Comédiens de Grenoble, was another prodigious success. One part of Sept Couleurs, the pantomime entitled L'Exode, depicts the effects of war upon a small but happy village community and the subsequent destruction by bombing of the homes of its inhabitants. One of the playlets presented was called Le Retour du Soldat.

Two conclusions may be drawn from these two presentations by Dasté in Grenoble: the topical content of Sept Couleurs, relating to war, appeared as attractive to the Grenoble audiences as did the theme of Siegfried, Giraudoux's play of 1928, to the Alsace audiences at the C.D.E. in 1951; secondly the form of both of Dasté's productions intrigued his public. These two plays were given a total of seventy-one performances, that is to say, a considerably higher number than the seven productions of the C.D.E. in their first season.

Dasté's second and last season at Grenoble, 1946-47, brought a highly successful production of Anouilh's Le Bal des Voleurs, a well-attended and applauded Molière, L'Etourdi, a Japanese Nô play Ce que murmure la Sumida, and a Labiche/Molière double bill, Les 37 sous and Le Médecin Volant. As with the C.D.E.'s production of Le Misanthrope, Molière proved to be a favourite author and both of the first two productions were well received by the press and the public. Drawing on his past experience with Copeau and the Ecole du Vieux-Colombier, Dasté decided to attempt the medieval Nô play, adapted by Suzanne Bing and produced by his wife Marie-Hélène Dasté, with music composed by René Lafforgue, both an actor and musical director with the company. Ce que murmure la Sumida ran for twenty-seven performances and brought a good press both from the provinces and from Paris. On tour in Switzerland, it received the following notice:

Ah l'étonnant, l'admirable spectacle qu'on vient d'avoir là. On se trouva en face de quelque chose de si curieux, de si prodigieusement dépouillé, de si saisissant, de si parfait enfin que l'on en fut tout à l'émotion de reconnaître l'une des premières compagnies dramatiques en France.<sup>8</sup>

Despite relative financial failure, the play showed Dasté as an innovatory director and one who would be prepared to take some risks during a season's repertory. He repeated the play two seasons later at Saint-Etienne and introduced another Nô play into the repertoire in the 1950-51 season.

The first season at Saint-Etienne, 1947-48, was a 'safe' season: out of a total of seven plays, three were by Molière, two by Labiche, and one by Anouilh. The only 'stranger' to these well-tried and popular authors was Cervantès, and his Le Retable des Merveilles was billed with Molière's Les Fourberies de Scapin. By presenting an almost exclusively comic repertoire, Dasté was taking no chances with his new audiences; in this respect, he differs noticeably from Clavé,

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8. La Tribune de Genève, 12 avril 1947.

whose constant experimentation produced a considerable financial strain on the C.D.E. in its early years.

By contrast, the 1948-49 season showed some innovation and experimentation within the otherwise 'classical' repertoire of Molière, Musset, and Marivaux. Dasté again reverted to his Copiaus days in introducing Les Noces Noires by Jean Lescure, a contemporary poet. Like the Burgundy-based Copiaus who exploited the dramatic situations inherent in the lives of local country people, Dasté now used the experiences of the Saint-Etienne miners to produce a play appealing specifically to their community: Les Noces Noires was a joint production by Dasté and Lescure.

En certains cas la troupe a puisé son inspiration dans la vie même de son public, par exemple Les Noces Noires, action chorale, inspirée par la dure vie des mineurs, continuation des recherches et essais faits dans le même sens par l'Ecole du Vieux Colombier, les Copiaus et les Comédiens Routiers.<sup>9</sup>

It was the first of many such experiments by Dasté, constantly aware of the need to identify with his regional audiences. Again unlike Clavé, Dasté did not risk producing this new play by a relatively unknown author in a programme of its own, but coupled it with Molière's George Dandin, to ensure its appeal. Proof of his astuteness in compiling his repertoire in this way is shown by the twenty-six performances given of this double-bill, six more than any other production that season.

Ce que murmure la Sumida was brought back into the repertoire for this season with considerably more success than at Grenoble. The other innovatory piece that year was Synge's Playboy of the Western World (Le Baladin du Monde occidental) which, although more poorly attended than the rest of the season's plays, ran for a total of twenty performances. Dasté produced the play himself in memory of Saint-Exupéry who had recommended it to him in New York just before the war. This

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9. Le Théâtre Moderne, Hommes et Tendances (études réunies et présentées par Jean Jacquot), C.N.R.S., 1965, p;31.

season marked a turning-point in the fortunes and the philosophy of Dasté's Comédie de Saint-Etienne. Not only do the statistics show the company's receipts, the number of performances per play, and the average attendance increasing after this season, as Gontard has pointed out,<sup>10</sup> but the repertoire reveals some subtle changes which were to become more significant in later seasons. Les Noces Noires, for example, was followed by the same author's La Nuit in 1949; another Nô play was tried out in the 1950-51 season - Suzanne Bing's adaptation of Motokiyo's Kagekiyo was received with as much enthusiasm as the same author's La Sumida had been; the Synge play was followed by another - Riders to the Sea (A cheval vers la mer) in 1951. Dasté's overall policy was thus taking shape by 1950: while relying on Molière, Musset, Marivaux, and Anouilh to draw his audiences, he also provided some surprises and introduced his public to new authors from both France and abroad.

As the repertoire of the Comédie de Saint-Etienne expanded, so did the number of towns and villages visited by the company. An important mission was therefore being accomplished in two directions: theatre was being transmitted to communities which had hardly known live performances before, and the repertoire, at first tentative and traditional, was becoming more adventurous and experimental. By comparison with the C.D.E., Dasté's troupe performed relatively few plays per season: in 1949-50, for example, there were only four presentations in the repertoire, one of these being a Marivaux/Lescure double bill. Dasté introduced his first Shakespeare into the repertoire: Measure for Measure (Mesure pour Mesure) played for twenty performances and attracted the largest audiences of the season. It is interesting to note that in this first period from 1945 until 1952, Shakespeare was the author which drew the greatest number of people per performance, both in 1950 for Measure for Measure and in 1952

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10. Gontard, op.cit., pp.217-224.

for Macbeth. The latter production had a triumphant provincial tour but was subsequently written off by the Paris critics. During the whole period of Dasté's direction, from 1945 until 1970, he put on five productions of Shakespeare's plays at regular intervals until 1959, but none thereafter. This was not to be the case with Molière who was performed almost every season until 1970. Of his production of Le Bourgeois Gentilhomme, which was the most performed play of this initial period of the Comédie de Saint-Etienne, Dasté said:

A Firminy, nous avons donné une seconde représentation du Bourgeois Gentilhomme, uniquement pour les ouvriers. Les billets avaient été vendus dans les usines. Une satisfaction nous attendait: celle de constater que les spectateurs - écoutant et regardant avec une attention absolue - n'étaient pas seulement soulevés par le côté comique et divertissant de la pièce, mais étaient pris par ce qu'elle porte en elle de sérieux, par la satire violente et presque dramatique des caractères. La grande comédie portait à fond et en profondeur.<sup>11</sup>

As if to acknowledge publicly his debt to Copeau, Dasté adapted the latter's L'Illusion in 1950. This successful 'jeu dramatique' was revived by Dasté for his 1959-60 season. Dasté's only production of a Corneille play was produced in 1950: Polyeucte drew an average audience of some five hundred spectators; likewise, Dasté's only production of Lorca - La Savetière prodigieuse - was performed in the same season. As if to offset the mild experimentation in the 1950-51 season, Dasté chose to revert to a more traditional repertoire the following year: he put on four productions, including one Molière, one Shakespeare, one Marivaux, and a revival of Noé from his first season at Grenoble.

Dasté's selection of a repertoire followed some simple principles: apart from the financial considerations involved in running an enterprise such as his Centre Dramatique - although his appeal to audiences was apparent from the start both in Grenoble and Saint-Etienne - , he constantly attempted to broaden his dramatic range while at the same time presenting

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11. Jean Dasté, Voyage d'Un comédien, Stock, 1977, p.123.

forceful plays which would have instant popular appeal. He made no excuses for putting on the 'classics'; indeed, these appeared to be most appropriate for the time:

Dans l'élan créé par la paix, on avait besoin d'un théâtre représentant des actions fortes, des 'caractères' peu communs, des sujets pouvant évoquer une actualité exaltante, angoissante ou passionnée: Molière, Beaumarchais, Shakespeare, Synge, Pirandello, Tchekhov, Lorca, Claudel, Sophocle.<sup>12</sup>

However, Dasté required no other motive for putting on certain plays than a pure desire to help his audiences appreciate and enjoy their freedom after the Occupation; he saw his rôle as the continuation of the work begun by Copeau a generation earlier, and in this sense he was a true pioneer, for he used his knowledge of provincial cultural conditions to establish a close rapport with his public before embarking on the much more arduous task of attempting to change theatre tastes through gradual innovations in the repertoire. His contact with his audiences made him the true popular man of the theatre among the directors of the new Centres Dramatiques Nationaux.

Jean Dasté s'est soucié, dès l'origine de son action, d'amener au théâtre un public qui a souvent tendance, par sa condition, à se sentir déplacé lorsque dans une salle de spectacle, il est mêlé aux spectateurs habituels. Pour conquérir ce public, La Comédie de Saint-Etienne joue devant des salles entières d'ouvriers et parfois même à l'intérieur de l'usine. Avant le début de la représentation, afin d'établir le contact entre la salle et la scène, le chef de troupe explique la pièce et le sens du travail des comédiens, de sorte que deux communautés ouvrières, celle de l'usine et celle du plateau, se trouvent prêtes à participer à ce que Louis Jouvet nommait "la cérémonie théâtrale".<sup>13</sup>

(d) The Grenier de Toulouse

What differentiated the Grenier from the previous two Centres Dramatiques was that its founders, three young Toulouse drama students, Maurice Sarrazin, Jacques Duby, and Pierre

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12. Jean Dasté. op.cit., p.35.

13. Le Théâtre Moderne, Hommes et Tendances (études réunies et présentées par Jean Jacquot), C.N.R.S., 1965, p.31.

Nègre, lacked any experience of touring or of provincial theatre. However, the five seasons which elapsed before the Grenier was designated a Centre Dramatique National provided the young team with a sufficient knowledge of drama production and management to validate their claim to be the premier company of the region.

The first performances given by the small group who had called themselves Le Grenier de Toulouse did not properly constitute a 'season' but were more in the nature of repeat productions of some of the one-act plays and extracts which they had rehearsed at their drama school. However, the financial failure of the half dozen performances of the five plays chosen, which were presented in three different shows in 1945 in Toulouse and some surrounding villages, so disappointed the troupe that they soon broke up.

Sarrazin's bold but risky initiative in inviting Louis Jouvet to give a lecture in Toulouse later that year ensured three things: it redeemed the group's debts which had accumulated after their hasty performances that spring, it provided much-needed publicity for future productions, and, more significantly, it produced the active support from Jouvet himself who found the enthusiasm - and perhaps the audacity - of Maurice Sarrazin most appealing. A month after Jouvet's lecture, the Grenier was reconstituted and performing in a hired cinema; they played André Roussin's Am-Stram-Gram, Anouilh's Eurydice, and Plautus' The Carthaginian (Le Carthaginois). The first two of these plays were given twelve and nine performances respectively, while Le Carthaginois, after little success in Toulouse, triumphed in Paris at the first Concours des Jeunes Compagnies in June 1946. The Paris press admired the ability of the Grenier actors to rejuvenate a classical text and the company gave a further hundred performances in the capital.

The Roussin play was by no means a traditional Boulevard piece, but a stylistic exercise in baroque comedy. As a genre, comedy dominated the early repertoire of Sarrazin's Grenier. There was a simple reason for such a tendency: the youthful

troupe - the average age of the actors was not much more than twenty - sensibly chose plays which were appropriate to their vigorous enthusiasm, and comedy fitted their purpose best.

The following year, three one-act plays were produced, including one on Machiavelli by Maurice Sarrazin himself, but again it was Le Carthaginois which brought them the greatest success, this time at the festival of Vaison-la-Romaine where they made the acquaintance of Charles Dullin. The company also revived the series of one-act plays which they had given in 1945 and performed very briefly a play by the English author Ewan MacColl, Uranium 235, and Hemingway's Today is Friday (C'est aujourd'hui vendredi). A revue by Courteline, La Cinquantaine, completed the list of productions for the season 1946-47.

The Grenier's motives for choosing its repertoire were not based on any economic considerations; their aim was to transmit the company's enthusiasm to potential audiences:

Tentative de monter les oeuvres qui nous  
plaisent, absolument comme nous avons envie  
de les monter. Possibilité d'erreur, certes,  
mais avantage de voir se dégager lentement un  
esprit qui nous soit propre.<sup>14</sup>

This was not adequate as a policy, however, and the Grenier was struggling to survive by the beginning of their third season in 1947; nor could there be said to have been a great deal of progress in terms of their repertoire: Le Carthaginois and Eurydice were revived, the former principally for a tour in Germany - an arrangement made possible by Dullin's intervention in their affairs - and the company again put on a multiple bill of Achard, Musset and Giraudoux one-act plays. The only significantly new step taken that season was the production of their first Shakespeare play, Romeo and Juliet which was performed a total of twenty-five times, and met with some success. However, Sarrazin's own account of that

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14. Maurice Sarrazin, Comédien dans une Troupe, Grenier de Toulouse, 1970, p.22.



production reveals his state of mind vis-à-vis the Grenier's situation in general:

Je n'avais plus l'amour pour ce que je faisais. Je sentais proche de moi l'idée de tout laisser tomber. Etait-ce une chose qui depuis longtemps cherchait à se cristalliser? Etait-ce maintenant que j'allais comprendre les vraies raisons pour lesquelles j'avais fondé le Grenier et que la fatigue soudain mettrait en lumière?<sup>15</sup>

Sarrazin's problems were aggravated by the uncertainty over the company's future: like Dasté before him, he had had no official backing from the municipality, nor any promise of a permanent home for the troupe. The numerous tours which the company had undertaken were exhausting the actors: the stultified repertoire reflected this lassitude.

The beginning of the 1948-49 season saw the introduction of a new Courteline play, Les Gaîtés de l'Escadron, and further revivals of one-act plays from previous seasons. However, in January 1949, after discussions between Jeanne Laurent and Maurice Sarrazin - and with the positive intervention of Charles Dullin who proposed himself as co-director of the Grenier - the company was pronounced officially the third Centre Dramatique National. The subsequent grant from the State not only allowed Sarrazin to tour the immediate region of Toulouse with a variety of productions, but it also enabled the troupe to expand its repertoire. A new double-bill, comprising Molière's Les Précieuses Ridicules and Gogol's farce The Marriage (Les Epousailles) played for twenty performances in ten different towns in the region as well as in Toulouse itself, and in Paris at the end of the season. The same year, Sarrazin brought a Swiss play into the repertoire, Guillaume le Fou, by Fernand Chavannes, another of whose plays appeared in the Grenier's programme for the 1950-51 season.

The next three years brought a marked change in the form of the repertoire at the Grenier: despite the many revivals of earlier plays, including the one-act plays, there were some major productions, and these were performed a far greater number of times than the vast majority of previous plays. Thus, in the first full season as a Centre Dramatique National, 1949-50, six new plays were added to the repertoire,

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15. *ibid.* p.24.

all from traditional French sources except for the last production, Aristophanes' The Parliament of Women (L'Assemblée des Femmes). The following season, a new Shakespeare production was added and revived in the 1951-52 season. Apart from this, however, the whole repertoire was French in origin.

From the Press reports of the new productions of 1949<sup>16</sup>, it would seem that local audiences appreciated both the quality of the performances and the evident homogeneity of the troupe. One conclusion to be drawn from the successes of Giraudoux's La Guerre de Troie n'aura pas lieu, Molière's Les Fourberies de Scapin, and Cocteau's La Machine Infernale, however, is that the public were intolerant of the whole series of one-act plays, Boulevard plays, and comedies which the Grenier had hitherto presented and they now welcomed more incisive and thoughtful pieces. These constituted a well-known and well-loved repertoire, unlike the shorter, often unfamiliar plays of previous years. The production of Aristophanes' L'Assemblée des Femmes met with mixed criticism: the local press found it too vulgar for provincial tastes and Pierre-Aimé Touchard, recognising this factor, called it a mistake on the part of the company, who would have done better to put on The Birds. This comment underlines the supposition that the Grenier was an altogether immature theatre company, a fact which was undeniable. However, Sarrazin had learnt from his previous mistakes and in his next season he played safe by introducing Molière's Le Dépit Amoureux and Shakespeare's The Taming of the Shrew (La Mégère Apprivoisée). These two plays received particularly good notices from the Paris critics who were especially appreciative of the playing of Daniel Sorano and Simone Turck, two former fellow-students of Maurice Sarrazin who helped the Grenier gain its reputation far outside its native Toulouse.

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16. see: Gontard, op.cit., p.247.

Two plays not yet mentioned are noteworthy: Fernand Chavannes's second play at the Grenier, Abraham, produced in 1951, was Sarrazin's first attempt at 'total' theatre, the text being accompanied by music and ballet scenes; this 'choréodrame' met with considerable success and attracted some sixteen hundred spectators. Jovet was enticed from Paris to advise on the lighting for this production; it was his last effort for the Grenier: he died a few weeks later at rehearsal in Paris. The other production was by the unknown author Charles Lude; called L'Age Canonique, it ran for twenty-three performances in nineteen towns outside Toulouse and was, with Le Dépit Amoureux, The Taming of the Shrew, and a Feydeau/Giraudoux double-bill, the mainstay of the touring season of the Grenier.

Certain aspects of the repertoire of the Grenier in these early years set it apart from the other Centres: the reliance on revivals, the predominance of one-act plays often by unknown or untried authors, the rarity of 'social' drama as such. Had Maurice Sarrazin been an older man, no doubt he would have selected his repertoire on entirely different principles. What characterised his troupe above all was a zeal to experiment rather than to 'play safe' - as Dasté did - ; unlike Dasté too, he was initially obliged to tour in areas well outside his native Toulouse region, and hence suffered the charge that his was not in any way a properly decentralised, that is to say regionally-orientated, theatre; unlike the other directors, Sarrazin was helped considerably in the early years by the former Cartel members Jovet and Dullin to whom he probably owed his ultimate survival. For his repertoire Sarrazin had relied heavily on the traditional French dramatists throughout the nineteen-fifties, and not until the next decade did he introduce many twentieth century playwrights' works to his public.

Certes, dans les premières années, le répertoire n'a pas encore notablement changé... Ce qui a changé c'est: 1. l'homogénéité des distributions. 2. que les acteurs se

réalisent en jouant, quel que soit l'endroit où ils jouent, et les conditions dans lesquelles ils jouent. Ce que j'appelle la ferveur. Tout cela implique une troupe. C'était pour nous une idée simple, rudimentaire presque: la capitalisation d'un certain nombre de talents mis au service d'une communauté et que le chef de troupe a le devoir de faire fructifier.<sup>17</sup>

(e) The Centre Dramatique de l'Ouest

The establishment of this company in 1949 was the de jure recognition of the de facto efforts of the amateur group which called itself Les Jeunes Comédiens de Rennes and which had existed in Brittany since 1940. Among their number were Georges Goubert and Guy Parigot, who eventually became the directors of the Centre Dramatique de l'Ouest in 1957 after the initial period of its existence under Hubert Gignoux.

The repertoire of the early years resembles that of the Grenier de Toulouse before its recognition as a Centre Dramatique: two plays of the inter-war years, Claude-André Puget's comedy Les Jours Heureux, and Paul Géraldy's Les Grands Garçons were both performed at the Grenier, and, together with Courteline's plays, constituted a proportion of the repertoire of the Grenier and of the Comédie de l'Est, as well as that of the Jeunes Comédiens de Rennes in the nineteen-forties. The tendency to stage comedies in this period is attributable to the public's desire to compensate for the grim realities of the Occupation years. During the war the Jeunes Comédiens also played La Dame aux Camélias and Le Barbier de Séville and, at the Liberation, Les Fourberies de Scapin. At the Concours des Jeunes Compagnies in 1946, their production of Miguel Mañara by Milosz, a Christian Mystery play written in 1912, brought them second prize and critical recognition. The following year saw two plays by Anouilh in their programme and Jean-Louis Bertrand's

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17. Sarrazin, op.cit., p.30.

Merlin et Viviane, a Breton legend updated by the author, one of the troupe. This piece, too, received some acclaim at the second Concours des Jeunes Compagnies.

The next season saw more ambitious productions: Oscar Wilde's The Importance of Being Earnest, adapted by Georges Goubert, was followed by J.B. Priestley's Dangerous Corner and Cocteau's La Voix Humaine. These works, together with some shorter plays by Giraudoux and Valéry, filled the repertoire until the last presentation of the season: Jean-Louis Bertrand's Ça ne sert à rien de tuer un homme which received first prize in the amateur section at the third Concours des Jeunes Compagnies. It brought the company further complimentary criticism from Paris audiences and critics. The nature of this play, of which the original title had been Ecce Homo, is interesting because it resembles some of the work of later social poets and dramatists such as Gabriel Cousin. Gontard describes the work, quoting from a conversation with Georges Goubert and Guy Parigot, as

Une méditation sur l'homme, 'une sorte de grande parabole sur un Christ moderne, une sorte de passion'. 'Non plus le Christ, mais l'Homme actuel'.<sup>18</sup>

Guy Parigot, one of several members of the Jeunes Comédiens de Rennes who hoped to become a professional actor, met Hubert Gignoux at a drama course in 1948 and there proposed the formation of the Centre Dramatique de l'Ouest in Rennes. Gignoux's career had taken shape under the influence of Léon Chancerel and the Comédiens-Routiers, themselves the successors to Jacques Copeau's Copiaus in Burgundy. The Comédiens-Routiers, of which Gignoux had been a member for the eight years which preceded the Second World War, had sought to impose a theatre of the commedia dell'arte type, and this had a regenerative influence on provincial repertoires. In German captivity during the war, Gignoux continued to put on all sorts of shows, including marionette theatre, a form of theatre which he resumed after

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18. Gontard, op.cit., p.262.

the war in founding Les Marionnettes des Champs-Élysées.

The first season of the newly constituted Centre Dramatique de l'Ouest in 1949-50 comprised five works. Labiche's Un chapeau de paille d'Italie was chosen to provide a gay inauguration for the new theatre; it played twenty-three times in twenty different towns and met with enthusiastic, if not numerous, audiences. It was particularly successful in Rennes itself, where it played to full houses. J.M. Synge's The Playboy of the Western World (Le Baladin du Monde Occidental) was a near disaster for Gignoux who quickly changed the rest of the season's programme to ensure large audiences for the new company, bringing in Molière's L'Avare and George Dandin, the latter being given a total of forty-seven performances in forty-five towns and villages of the region. For their first season, the C.D.O. had reached a remarkable number of spectators, thanks to Gignoux' simplified production methods which allowed their plays to be performed in ill-equipped halls or local cinemas. Simultaneously, four of the troupe were performing Claudel's L'Echange, one of the plays most frequently performed in the new subsidised theatres. The experience of the failure of Synge's piece taught Gignoux to avoid complicated or controversial texts, while even Un Chapeau de paille d'Italie could not be the guarantee of full houses in Brittany - although it would no doubt have attracted many more Parisians. This first season consisted largely of comedies, then, and out of a total of 135 performances, the two Molière plays accounted for 73 performances and the Labiche 23 performances.

The second season brought an alternation of classical plays, both French and foreign, with two works of the inter-war years: Les Gueux au Paradis by Martens and Obey and Jean Cocteau's Les Chevaliers de la Table Ronde. The first classical production was a double-bill: Musset's Barberine and Marivaux' one-act play La Méprise which reached thirty-one performances, more, that is, than all the productions of the first season except George Dandin. The repertoire of the C.D.O. was admittedly still relatively conservative, but

one of the aims of the decentralisation movement, namely, to reach the widest audience possible with good quality theatre, was being fulfilled. Les Gueux au Paradis is an interesting example of popular theatre: it had already been produced in 1945 by Maurice Jacquemont, Gignoux' co-director, and required vivid scenery and lively music for the actors who had to be capable of dancing, singing, mime, and music-hall techniques. The success of the whole production which reached an average audience of nearly four hundred people, the highest of any production hitherto by the C.D.O., lent weight to the argument, already witnessed with the production of Dasté's Sept Couleurs, that good popular theatre often took the form of such frescoes, half drama, half variety; which clearly appealed more to the audience's desire to be entertained than to be instructed.

After the next classical production - of Molière's L'Ecole des Femmes - , Gignoux himself produced Cocteau's Les Chevaliers de la Table Ronde, which had not been revived since its première in 1937. Cocteau himself, in a letter to Hubert Gignoux<sup>19</sup>, admired the producer's courage in attempting such a difficult play which required a sober, intelligent production in preference to a picturesque or over-imaginative interpretation. By contrast, the final big production of the season 1950-51 was the adaptation - as a farce - of Shakespeare's The Taming of the Shrew. In conclusion, Shakespeare's Cymbeline was performed six times as an open-air spectacle at summer festivals.

The 1951-52 season of the C.D.O. was limited to four productions, with the addition of fourteen performances in the region of a Marivaux/Molière double-bill by the Centre Dramatique de l'Est. As reported by Gontard<sup>20</sup>, the C.D.O. had been criticised for introducing too many plays into its repertoire with a basis in farce or fantasy - the final

19. Quoted in Gontard, op.cit., p.278.

20. *ibid.*, p.283.

production of the 1951-52 season was Giraudoux's fantasy Intermezzo, - yet this partiality stems less from the director's own whim, than from his understandable concern for success at this early stage of the C.D.O. Success meant, in the first instance, the ability to attract audiences and to continue to attract them throughout a season and in a multitude of outlying towns and villages on the circuit of the company. Gignoux's repertoire steered a steady path between the predictable favourites of the French classical heritage - primarily Musset, Marivaux, and Molière - and the ambitious foreign authors. In the latter category can be placed Synge and the 1951 production of Ben Jonson's Volpone, the former a box-office failure, and the second a considerable success, reaching the highest number of performances during that season. The other two plays presented in the 1951-52 season were Molière's Le Malade Imaginaire, and Henri Ghéon's Oedipe which were performed in fewer centres than the other productions, but which nevertheless attracted a good average audience at each performance. Oedipe even attracted the Paris critics, thus testifying to the enhanced value of the repertoires of the new subsidised theatres by the early nineteen-fifties. This phenomenon was to become more prevalent as the next decade in the history of these theatres progressed; indeed, the critics' concern for the welfare of the new Centres Dramatiques appeared to go hand in hand with their appreciation of their productions - a healthy state of affairs both for the individual Centres and for the theatre itself, especially in terms of its decentralisation. However, a measure of critical disparity was frequently evident between the local and the Paris press: what pleased the latter often found incomprehension or even hostility from the former. Henri Ghéon's Oedipe avoided such a conflict, for it was quite well received by the Paris press, by the 'home' critics of Rennes, and also by the newspapers of those towns it reached on tour.



There was no doubt at the end of this season that the C.D.O. had established itself in the region and was able to rely on a certain following in the coming seasons; moreover, the municipal authorities had procured vast new premises for the C.D.O. and this was to bring about a considerable expansion of its activities, not least in terms of its repertoire.

(f) The Comédie de Provence

Of all the first five Centres Dramatiques Nationaux, the Comédie de Provence was the one which was linked the closest to the Cartel and which reflected the inspiration of that prewar group of theatre directors. It was thanks to Gaston Baty's convalescence in Aix-en-Provence in 1950 and 1951 that this Centre Dramatique du Sud-Est was created. Baty's offer to Jeanne Laurent to be the director of the new Centre not only demonstrated his enthusiasm for provincial theatre - he had been highly impressed by the touring productions of the Grenier and the C.D.E. in Aix- but also confirmed him as solely and directly responsible for the continuation of the Cartel's policy after the wartime hiatus in its activities. In short, the provinces offered the opportunity to the ageing Baty - he was sixty-six years old when he began his campaign to institute a Centre in Aix - to finish the task begun by the Cartel.

Lorsque les quatre directeurs du Cartel créèrent, en 1926, ce mouvement qui rénova tout le théâtre français, ils prétendaient séparer l'art dramatique des fabrications dites boulevardières. Il faut bien reconnaître que le Boulevard qui, à la veille de la guerre, semblait définitivement vaincu, a repris l'offensive... Comme il fallait, en 1926, rompre avec le Boulevard, il faut maintenant, puisque le Boulevard a reconquis Paris, rompre avec Paris. La mission d'un centre n'est plus d'être un théâtre 'à l'instar' de Paris, mais de réaliser ce théâtre professionnellement loyal, placé sous le signe de l'art seul, et non plus du commerce, que les circonstances ne permettent plus d'espérer faire vivre à Paris. 21

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21. Gaston Baty, Projet pour le Centre Dramatique de Provence, reprinted in Gontard, op.cit., p.419.

However, as far as repertoire was concerned, Baty was not intending to implant the stereotype of a Cartel programme in his projected new Centre, but to draw on traditional art forms from the region, notably melodrama and pantomime.

On pourrait s'appliquer à renouer ce fil (du mélodrame) et adopter pour les théâtres de plein air ce répertoire des drames populaires romantiques, qui est sans doute celui qui leur convient le mieux. L'autre tradition à sauvegarder serait celle de la pantomime marseillaise...Il serait intéressant de s'en souvenir, notamment pour animer les comédies-ballets de Molière, en leur ajoutant une saveur locale.<sup>22</sup>

Baty also envisaged including in his repertoire the dramatic works which were being studied by students at the Faculté des Lettres in Aix. Finally, one determining factor in his choice of the future repertoire of the Comédie de Provence, and one that was unique in the history of the first five Centres Dramatiques, was the existence of the scenery and costumes from most of his pre-1943 productions at the Théâtre Montparnasse - where he had been since 1930, - all of which he had transported to Aix. This most remarkable acquisition led to the selection of all of the first season's productions: Musset's Les Caprices de Marianne, Racine's Phèdre, and Molière's Le Médecin malgré lui, and of one of the two productions in the 1952-53 season, Arden of Faversham, for which forty-three costumes were ready, imported by Baty from Paris.

Financial limitations and lack of time were responsible for the ultimate selection of the Musset play to inaugurate the new Centre; Baty's own production of the play dated back to 1935. At the new Comédie de Provence, a one-act Strindberg piece Le Paria completed the bill, which had its première on March 18th.1952. Les Caprices de Marianne corresponded ideally to Baty's desire to present romantic drama at Aix, particularly as his production placed the

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22. *ibid.* p.420.

play in an Italian setting contemporary with Musset's age, and not, as was the custom, at the time of the Cinquecento. The whole presentation was an enormous success, both at the time of its first three performances in Aix and during its subsequent tour in a score of towns in Provence. This region, which was the traditional home of music and musical comedy, welcomed the Musset production with open arms. The second play of the repertoire was, likewise, a former production of Baty's in 1940: Racine's Phèdre, also set by Baty in the time of its author, was another triumph. It toured in only a dozen towns outside Aix but attracted an average audience of over five hundred. Molière's Le Médecin malgré lui, which Baty intended playing as a farce, was scheduled as the third and final production of the first season. Another of Baty's Théâtre Montparnasse productions, it had to be adapted for open-air performance this time, and was presented four times, at Marseille, Pézenas, Perpignan, and Aix. It was well received by public and press and, at each performance, reached an audience of several hundred, thus concluding a most successful first season for the Comédie de Provence. Baty had intended to add Dumas and Gaillardet's melodrama La Tour de Nesle to the repertoire that summer, but failing health and financial problems prevented him from doing so.

Despite his illness, Baty planned the first production of the new season, 1952-53: it was to be Arden of Faversham, the English Elizabethan drama by an anonymous author. Tragically, Baty died the day before its première; although it was well received, it was poorly attended: no doubt the public's ignorance of the play detracted from their interest in it. There followed two revivals of Les Caprices de Marianne which toured in eight towns not visited by the Comédie the previous season, and of Le Médecin malgré lui. The fourth and last production of this second season was in memory of Gaston Baty: it was Musset's Le Chandelier which had been Baty's contribution to a programme by the

Cartel at the Comédie-Française, and which was intended to revive the theatre's flagging fortunes in 1936.

Cocteau's La Voix humaine was presented as a curtain-raiser in the same programme which was greeted with enthusiasm by both the Aixois and the audiences in the eleven towns in which it toured.

To intimate that under its next two directors, Georges Douking and René Lafforgue, the Comédie de Provence would radically change its repertoire, is not to diminish the initial efforts of Gaston Baty who, like Hubert Gignoux, fully understood the dangers of introducing provincial audiences too soon to an unaccustomed dramatic diet.

(g) Characteristics of the repertoires

Despite the encouragement given to new companies through the Concours des Jeunes Compagnies and to new authors through L'Aide à la première pièce, and despite Jeanne Laurent's own belief in the value of cosmopolitanism, the first Centres Dramatiques Nationaux followed a distinctly conservative pattern in their repertoires. However, given the state of cultural life in the French provinces after the war and the uncertainty governing the new institutions of the Fourth Republic, this is entirely understandable, for several reasons.

First, the predominance of Molière in the repertoires is attributable not only to the public's universal fondness for him, but, what was more essential, was due to the primary need of all the Centres to attract audiences to their productions. This was especially important in the smaller towns and villages on their tours, where there was unlikely to be any predilection for experimental theatre or unknown plays. Gontard has rightly dismissed<sup>23</sup> the adverse criticisms of this overwhelming reliance on the classics - and, in particular, on Molière -

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23. op.cit., p.335.

levelled at the Centres by Jacques Hébertot and Marcel Achard. It must also be stressed that the new provincial directors, conscious that they were rejecting Paris and creating something positively regional, brought to their productions fresh ideas and, frequently, new production techniques, which ensured a diversity of presentation of some of the otherwise familiar texts. Thus, Baty's open-air production of Le Médecin malgré lui or Dasté's Le Bourgeois Gentilhomme at Firminy stand out as unique examples of these plays in the circumstances of their performance.

Second, it would be naïve to conclude from this that a diet composed exclusively of Molière would permanently attract audiences to the new theatres. Gontard does not point out, for instance, that a large majority of the new repertoires consisted of comedies, resulting possibly from a general desire on the part of those who had suffered many years of the Occupation to escape from their recent memories. Light drama provided such an antidote to the personal tragedies of the war years and Molière, Courteline, Musset, and Labiche gave people the opportunity to rediscover laughter and enjoy the comedy of their native heritage.

Third, Gontard's conclusion that a repertoire based on the classical authors was "le plus apte à atteindre rapidement le public de la province"<sup>24</sup> ignores the enthusiastic reception afforded to Giraudoux's Siegfried performed by the Centre Dramatique de l'Est in twenty-five towns in 1951, and the interest shown in R.C. Sherriff's Journey's End by the same company in its second season in Colmar. The success of these two plays reveals the public's identification with the human sufferings caused by war; the interdependent themes of nationality and personal identity displayed dramatically in the Giraudoux play could hardly be more appropriate than in Alsace, a province riven by the history of France and Germany. This regional identification of audiences was to become a feature of future decentralisation theatres which actively encouraged both existing and new local authors to write for them.

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24. op.cit. p.335

Fourth, the form of the new productions appears to have had some relevance in terms of their popularity: the public's appetite for gay and lively shows was satisfied by Dasté's Sept Couleurs and the 'total' production of Noé in the 1945-46 season, or by Gignoux's Les Gueux au Paradis in 1950. Baty's concern to exploit the Provençal public's taste for lyrical drama and melodrama manifests an early appreciation of the inherent potential of the new subsidised theatres in the provinces. Molière's 'comédies-ballets' were attractive as much for their form as for their content. Again, this was one aspect of the Centres Dramatiques which was to be developed considerably in later years.

Fifth, the presence of the major works of Molière and Shakespeare in provincial repertoires would guarantee a proportion of school and university students in the audience, for whom the live productions admirably complemented their textual studies. If The Taming of the Shrew and Les Fourberies de Scapin were chosen for their lyrical and comic values, Hamlet, Macbeth, Tartuffe, and Le Médecin malgré lui would have owed their selection, in part at least, to their academic appeal. Even at this early stage in the development of provincial theatre, it was clear that Shakespeare was among the most popular dramatists. Hamlet was the most frequently performed play in the C.D.E.'s third season, Macbeth the most performed play at Saint-Etienne in 1951-52, and The Taming of the Shrew at the Grenier in 1950-51 and 1951-52 and at Rennes in 1950-51 totalled 159 performances, more than any other single play after Plautus' Le Carthaginois by Le Grenier de Toulouse (230 performances). State intervention in the choice of repertoire is not a desirable phenomenon, but one of Jeanne Laurent's rare pronouncements in this field concerned both Shakespeare and Molière:

S'il est évident qu'il peut et doit veiller à la diffusion du répertoire, l'Etat peut-il avoir une action, même indirecte, dans le domaine de la création? Pour oser se prononcer,

il faudrait percer le mystère de l'inspiration. Sans y prétendre, on peut cependant croire que si un auteur, pour s'exprimer, adopte une forme dramatique...c'est parce qu'il recherche ce que le théâtre seul procure: une émotion enrichie de celle qu'éprouvent d'autres êtres.. rassemblés pour communier dans la même ferveur. Molière et Shakespeare se sont adressés personnellement à leurs spectateurs.<sup>25</sup>

Finally, even early evidence would suggest that, far from requiring a repertoire composed primarily of classical plays presented in standard or traditional format, provincial theatres could survive adequately on an eclectic mixture of classical and modern, French and foreign productions. The analysis of Dasté's repertoire at the Comédie de Saint-Etienne from his productions during these early years of the decentralisation movement demonstrates this. The essential elements of popular drama are: variety of genre, topicality of theme, close contact with audiences, and adaptability of acting technique and scenery to accommodate to the varying facilities of the theatres encountered on tour. Nor do these factors rule out the possibility of experimentation: the Japanese Nô play Ce que murmure la Sumida justified its inclusion in the early repertoire of the Comédie de Saint-Etienne simply by surviving the risk Dasté had taken with it; similarly, Baty's speculative Arden of Faversham, although perhaps premature for Provençal audiences, was a step in the right direction, an attempt to create, to innovate, to educate its spectators.

Dasté has been seen as the natural and forthright successor to Jacques Copeau; conversely, Copeau himself may be regarded as the precursor of the whole spirit of the decentralisation movement. The movement's intellectual precursors were the members of the Cartel themselves, of whom Gaston Baty became particularly influential as the prime mover of the Comédie de Provence.

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25. Jeanne Laurent, La République et les Beaux-Arts, Julliard 1955, p.170.

Dasté's and Baty's respective rôles as the antecedents of popular touring theatre and street theatre confirm Copeau's philosophy that:

Il y a plus de vérité et, par conséquent,  
d'art dans le rassemblement d'un village  
autour d'un cirque ambulante.<sup>26</sup>

It is this formula which binds the two generations of prewar and postwar directors and which affirms the continuity of French popular dramatic philosophy in this century. The decentralisation movement stands as a confirmation and justification of that spirit of expansionist, populist theatre envisaged by Firmin Gémier in his Le Théâtre du Peuple of 1903. Maurice Pottecher's opinions on popular theatre, expressed in Bussang in 1895, had been that it should convey simple, general, and eternal feelings which had the power to move the greatest possible number of men anywhere and at any time. The combined philosophies of Pottecher and Gémier demonstrate their conviction that successful popular theatre is based on broad canvases or frescoes and that it should offer adaptable and malleable spectacles, appealing to simple but widely-felt emotions. Dasté and Baty, although reluctant to jeopardise their Centres' existence by the premature inclusion of foreign, unknown, or difficult works in their repertoires, nevertheless showed the way towards a more regionally-orientated, creative, and innovatory theatre which other directors would eventually follow. André Clavé's Il est minuit, Docteur Schweitzer!, Maurice Sarrazin's L'Age canonique, and Hubert Gignoux's Playboy of the Western World were in this mould; the following years of the nineteen-fifties were to free the directors from their initial anxieties about finance and attendances and allow them to augment their repertoires, thus simultaneously fulfilling the enlightened predictions of the Cartel.

The statistical tables below offer a summary of the

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26. Jacques Copeau, Le Théâtre Populaire, 1941 (reproduced in Théâtre Populaire, no 36, 1959, p.105.



repertoires of the five Centres Dramatiques Nationaux in the years 1946-1952. Certain characteristics about each centre emerge which reflect both their similarities and their differences. The Centre Dramatique de l'Est, for example, stands out eminently for its large output of plays per season. It also can be seen to have produced a far greater number of French plays than foreign ones (48 to 13), proportionally more than the other four Centres. There is also a preponderance of modern plays in its repertoire (38 from the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, compared with 23 from previous centuries). The Comédie de Saint-Etienne, by contrast, produced relatively few plays per season; its output consisted of a large number of French classical works, while Molière's plays accounted for over a quarter of these productions. The Grenier de Toulouse shows a balance between classical and modern plays in its repertoire, although modern French works accounted for half of its total output, a much higher percentage than in the other Centres. The Grenier also experimented least with modern works by foreign authors. The statistics relevant to the one season of the Comédie de Provence which was completed before 1952 do not lend themselves to adequate analysis.

| CENTRE  | SEASON  | Class.<br>French<br>plays | Class.<br>Foreign<br>plays | Mod.<br>French<br>plays | Mod.<br>Foreign<br>plays | TOTALS |
|---------|---------|---------------------------|----------------------------|-------------------------|--------------------------|--------|
| C.D.E.  | 1946-47 | 5                         | 0                          | 4                       | 1                        | 10     |
|         | 1947-48 | 2                         | 1                          | 4                       | 1                        | 8      |
|         | 1948-49 | 3                         | 1                          | 3                       | 4                        | 11     |
|         | 1949-50 | 3                         | 0                          | 6                       | 1                        | 10     |
|         | 1950-51 | 4                         | 1                          | 5                       | 1                        | 11     |
|         | 1951-52 | 3                         | 0                          | 6                       | 2                        | 11     |
|         | TOTALS  | 20                        | 3                          | 28                      | 10                       | 61     |
| C.S-E.  | 1947-48 | 3                         | 0                          | 3                       | 1                        | 7      |
|         | 1948-49 | 3                         | 1                          | 2                       | 1                        | 7      |
|         | 1949-50 | 2                         | 1                          | 2                       | 0                        | 5      |
|         | 1950-51 | 2                         | 1                          | 1                       | 1                        | 5      |
|         | 1951-52 | 2                         | 2                          | 1                       | 1                        | 6      |
|         | TOTALS  | 12                        | 5                          | 9                       | 4                        | 30     |
| Grenier | 1949-50 | 2                         | 2                          | 6                       | 0                        | 10     |
|         | 1950-51 | 4                         | 3                          | 5                       | 1                        | 13     |
|         | 1951-52 | 2                         | 3                          | 5                       | 0                        | 10     |
|         | TOTALS  | 8                         | 8                          | 16                      | 1                        | 33     |
| C.D.O.  | 1949-50 | 2                         | 0                          | 2                       | 1                        | 5      |
|         | 1950-51 | 2                         | 2                          | 3                       | 0                        | 7      |
|         | 1951-52 | 1                         | 1                          | 2                       | 0                        | 4      |
|         | TOTALS  | 5                         | 3                          | 7                       | 1                        | 16     |
| C.P.    | 1951-52 | 2                         | 0                          | 1                       | 0                        | 3      |

Note: These statistics have been drawn up from a total list of productions in each season. No adjustment has been made for revivals, because to omit these would falsify the picture of the repertoires offered by each Centre to audiences each season. Where there have been revivals of a certain play in any one season, the play in question has only been counted once.

CHAPTER II PHASE 2 : 1952 - 1958

(a) The Centre Dramatique de l'Est

The second phase in the development of the Centre Dramatique de l'Est corresponds to its period of direction under Michel Saint-Denis, from January 1953 until June 1957. Saint-Denis, a nephew of Jacques Copeau, had reconstituted his uncle's Copiaus under the title of La Compagnie des Quinze in 1929; in 1933, Saint-Denis moved to London and in 1946 founded the Old Vic School. His experience of this enterprise, together with that of Pierre Sonrel, the architect responsible for the reconstruction of the Old Vic Theatre after the war, resulted in an important shift of direction for the C.D.E. The economy of funds achieved by reducing the number of productions at the end of the 1951-2 season allowed for the financing of a drama school: l'Ecole d'Art dramatique, considered to be the finest drama training centre in France. Pierre Sonrel was appointed architect of the new C.D.E. to be built in Strasbourg, where the company transferred to in 1954.

With the new, reduced production schedule of four plays per season, the question of choice of repertoire became all-important. Until the end of the 1952-3 season, therefore, Michel Saint-Denis, with only six months of repertoire to fill, played safe with productions of Shakespeare's A Midsummer Night's Dream, Musset's On ne badine pas avec l'amour, and Molière's La Jalousie du Barbouillé. Saint-Denis, drawing from his London experience, was the first to present Shakespeare's Dream in a French Centre Dramatique.

The repertoire of the following season was a little more adventurous. It began with Giraudoux's Tessa, the only production of this play in the decentralised theatres during their first twenty-five years' existence. Molière's Le Misanthrope was produced by Daniel Leveugle,

whose association with the company lasted until 1967. Another première for the Centres was that of Crommelynck's Une Femme qui a le coeur trop petit: the mixture of sensuality and intellectuality in the work of this Flemish writer took the audience by surprise. The fourth production that season was a new translation of Chekhov's The Seagull, which had a mixed reception. In the choice of this play, Saint-Denis showed himself to be an innovator: this was to be the only production of The Seagull in the decentralised theatres in the nineteen-fifties and one of only seven productions of Chekhov's plays in that period, whereas twenty-two more productions were to follow during the subsequent twelve years. Statistics of the first twenty-five years' productions in the decentralised theatres show Chekhov to be the eighth most performed playwright.

The 1954-55 season marked the transition of the C.D.E. from Colmar to Strasbourg, a move which had repercussions not only in terms of the company's production programme, but which also brought problems of overwork, ill-health, and financial instability. Nevertheless, Saint-Denis managed to introduce some new plays into his repertoire. Anouilh's La Sauvage and Shakespeare's Romeo and Juliet drew large and enthusiastic audiences; the first of these plays was a provincial première, the second later played for an open-air season. Together with these two productions, Saint-Denis introduced two Marivaux plays: L'Epreuve and La Première Surprise de l'Amour, the only productions of these comedies ever seen in the provinces. Again, Saint-Denis proved to be an innovatory director, for Marivaux's plays were to become a staple diet of the decentralised theatres in the nineteen-sixties, while in total, his plays lie fifth in the order of the most-produced authors. The company was now able to expand its activities through regional tours and it took plays by Cocteau, Mérimée, and Calderon's L'Alcade de Zalamea to supplement its other repertoire. All three of these new plays were premières for provincial audiences.

The following season was one of consolidation:

L'Alcade de Zalamea, which had been well-received at the Festival de Strasbourg at the end of the previous season, was retained in the repertoire, together with a highly successful Molière, Les Fourberies de Scapin. Saint-Denis continued his policy of introducing new works and new authors by producing Supervielle's Le Voleur d'Enfants and Camus's Les Justes, neither of which had been seen by provincial audiences before. Perhaps the most interesting new dramatist premièred by Saint-Denis was Jean-Claude Marrey, five of whose works were to be produced by the company during the course of the following four seasons. His Miroir aux Mensonges had considerable success on tour with Molière's Mariage Forcé, both plays being acted by the new young troupe, Les Cadets, the products of the Ecole d'Art Dramatique recently established alongside the Centre, whose senior troupe was now referred to by the name of the Comédie de l'Est.

The number of new productions, premières, and new authors introduced by Saint-Denis during his five seasons at the head of the C.D.E. did not in any way diminish the public's appetite for theatre. On the contrary, box-office receipts and subscriptions were increasing, while the two troupes were able to extend their activities over an ever-broadening area of Eastern France. The 1956-57 season introduced the C.D.E. audiences to Shaw's The Devil's Disciple, Corneille's Le Menteur, J.C. Brisville's Saint Just, Pirandello's Un Imbécile, Shakespeare's Twelfth Night, Variot's La Belle de Haguenau, and J.Cl.Marrey's Le Pays Noir. Every one of these productions was a première for provincial audiences; the last two plays were performed by Les Cadets. It was unfortunate that Michel Saint-Denis had to leave the C.D.E., for reasons of health, at the peak of its productivity. His successor, Hubert Gignoux, benefited not only from the excellently broad repertorial tradition which Saint-Denis had left, but also from the newly completed playhouse now enjoyed by the existing company, the

Comédie de l'Est, and by its latest recruits, the emerging graduates of the drama school created by Clavé and developed by Saint-Denis on his arrival in Colmar.

Far from serving as an interregnum between the initial period of development under André Clavé and the flowering of the repertoire of the C.D.E. under Hubert Gignoux in the nineteen-sixties, Michel Saint-Denis's period of office in the middle nineteen-fifties can be seen as a pioneering venture: he promoted the first-rate drama school which produced the Cadets - later to become the Tréteaux - ; he supervised the transfer of the company from Colmar to Strasbourg, where the C.D.E. enjoyed the privilege of having the first new theatre built in France since the war; above all, in the field of drama repertoire, Saint-Denis was responsible for an extraordinarily high proportion of premières. Out of a total of twenty-seven productions in the five seasons under his directorship, no fewer than twenty-two were French provincial premières for the new subsidised theatres. Many of these plays were works of hitherto unknown authors, some - Shakespeare's A Midsummer Night's Dream or Musset's On ne badine pas avec l'Amour, for example - were the first productions of these plays to be seen in the provinces, although they were soon followed by many others by other companies under other directors. Thus, Michel Saint-Denis laid the foundations for repertorial diversity in the Centres Dramatiques, a policy which flourished in the productions of the nineteen-sixties.

This real and significant development in terms of repertoire under the leadership of Saint-Denis is all the more remarkable for its having taken place within a period of cultural recession between 1952 and 1960. Jeanne Laurent had been dismissed in 1952, no new Centres Dramatiques were created until 1960, "un temps d'arrêt" persisted and threatened the long-term future of the decentralisation movement. Yet Saint-Denis had the courage and the initiative to pursue a policy of expansion for his theatre, to set in train a varied and ambitious programme of new plays, and to guarantee the

company's future by ensuring the continuance of its own drama school. These activities stand to his great and lasting credit.

(b) The Comédie de Saint-Etienne

In the first phase of its development, the Comédie de Saint-Etienne had performed light-hearted plays and comedies - by Labiche, Molière, and Marivaux - to bring audiences to the theatre, often for the first time in their lives. As the seasons progressed into the nineteen-fifties, Dasté was able to 'carry' one new play each year, thus introducing his new-found public to a greater diversity of theatrical experience. So it was that plays by Lorca, Synge, Gogol, and Betti entered his repertoire; more esoteric tastes were satisfied by the Japanese Nô plays, or by Amal et la Lettre du Roi by the modern Indian poet Rabindranath Tagore, supporting Molière's Les Précieuses Ridicules in 1952.

Dasté's unique achievement in this first decade of his theatre was to have brought a new public - referred to later in the Déclaration de Villeurbanne as the "non-public" - to his performances. The "non-public" consisted of those sections of the population which had had no previous access to the theatre, nor perhaps any desire to set foot in one; in the case of Dasté's audiences, they were for the most part the mining communities of Saint-Etienne, working-class craftsmen and small shopkeepers. For them, Dasté put on open-air shows, performances in great circus-tents in town squares, and concentrated his efforts on reaching as wide an audience as possible. At each performance, he sought to involve the spectators in the stage action as much as possible; the major touring production of 1952, Macbeth, allowed this possibility:

Pendant la représentation de Macbeth, Place du Soleil (à Saint-Etienne), les sorcières allaient faire taire dans les cafés les gens trop bruyants. Entre la troupe, le public, le spectacle, une unité, si importante pour la qualité du plaisir, prenait de plus en plus corps.<sup>1</sup>

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1. Jean Dasté, Voyage d'un Comédien, Stock, 1977, p.36.

The 1952-53 season began with a production of Beaumarchais's Le Mariage de Figaro; it ran for the record number of fifty-three performances. This was followed by Emmanuel Roblès' Montserrat, a violent indictment of Man's oppression of his fellow human beings, first performed in 1948 and since then translated into many languages. It may be said to have been the first of Dasté's modern political plays introduced into his repertoire. Gogol's farce The Marriage (Hyménée) completed the season in a double-bill with Molière's Le Mariage Forcé.

The following season brought plays by Molière and Marivaux, together with Betti's Irène Innocente, Pirandello's A chacun sa vérité, and Sophocles' Antigone. These last two plays, like the previous season's Montserrat were premières for the decentralised theatres, thus demonstrating Dasté's leadership in the varied choice of his repertoire.

Chekhov's The Bear was one of three plays by the Russian author to be introduced into the repertoires of the Centre Dramatiques by the Comédie de Saint-Etienne. This production was supported by being placed in a double-bill with Musset's On ne badine pas avec l'Amour. Claudel and Shakespeare were the other two authors represented in the 1954-55 season, The Tempest breaking the record for the number of performances in one season. In an article written at the end of that season, Morvan Lebesque acclaimed Dasté's production of The Tempest, not merely for its dramatic merit, but for what it represented in the new debate on the philosophy of popular theatre which had begun in earnest that year with the publication of an interview by Bernard Dort in Théâtre Populaire with Jean Vilar and Jean-Paul Sartre. Lebesque used the success of the open-air Shakespeare performance to denounce those who believed that popular theatre could not encompass the classics; with all the sarcasm he could muster, he preferred a strong indictment of the intellectual snobbery of the rich towards the arts, thereby excluding from them the majority of workers:



Jean Dasté est un artiste, c'est-à-dire un homme bon qui ne s'attarde pas aux rancœurs ou aux colères. Nous le quittons et il repart sur les routes, promenant La Tempête sur les places publiques. J'écris cet article pour lui rendre justice. Mais je ne puis m'empêcher, aussi, de me tourner vers les autres, ceux qui ont volé l'art au peuple, et de leur crier: Salauds, vous paierez cela, vous paierez cela, vous paierez cela, comme le reste.<sup>2</sup>

When Vilar had finished his first performance at Suresnes four years earlier, he had been thanked by people who had never ventured into the theatre for giving them such entertainment; Dasté received the same kind of gratitude from many of his audiences, some of whom asked, unrhethorically, why there were no plays about the lives and problems facing ordinary working people.

Such a concept, expressed by the audiences present during his touring productions, undoubtedly contributed to Dasté's subsequent re-orientation of his repertoire around plays which expressed the contemporary problems of the working classes. The fortuitous discovery of Brecht that summer consolidated his views on the form and content of popular drama and, like Roger Planchon, though to a lesser extent than this director of the Théâtre de la Comédie of Lyon, Dasté embraced the principles of Brechtian theatre and produced his own staging of The Caucasian Chalk Circle at Saint-Etienne, one year after seeing the play performed by the visiting Berliner Ensemble in Paris at the Théâtre des Nations. Of this latter production, Dasté has said:

L'univers évoqué par la pièce, son espace, son sens, le jeu des acteurs, l'utilisation du masque, la précision de la mise en scène, l'invention des décors, la qualité poétique et rare de chaque objet, la perfection exprimée d'une manière si légère, si forte et surtout si libre; ce que, sans moyens, nous avons cherché et entrevu à l'Ecole du Vieux-Colombier et aux 'Copiaux' semblait avoir trouvé dans ce spectacle son épanouissement.<sup>3</sup>

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2. Morvan Lebesque, Ceux à qui rien n'a été donné, Le Canard Enchaîné, 13-7-1955.

3. J. Dasté, op.cit., p.44.

Before the transformation of Dasté into a committed Brechtian director - by the end of 1960 he was to produce two further plays by the German dramatist and two revivals of his 1956 production of the Chalk Circle - the plans for the 1955-56 season had to be carried through. They consisted of a long-running Molière success, Le Malade Imaginaire, the first Centre Dramatique performances of Anouilh's Le Bal des Voleurs and Sartre's La Putain Respectueuse, and two new productions, an adaptation of Dostoiewski's The Brothers Karamazov and Jean Schlumberger's Le Miracle de Notre-Dame which was repeated the following season.

But it was Brecht who had captured Dasté's imagination and the subsequent productions of Brecht's plays were undertaken by him, in collaboration with John Blatchley who stayed two years with the troupe. The period 1956-57 was clearly one during which Dasté made a thorough reappraisal of his work, revised his philosophy as a Centre Dramatique director, and took stock of his previous efforts: the Berliner Ensemble production had marked him deeply and his reaction to it not only influenced his future work at Saint-Etienne but set in motion a chain reaction among other directors in the decentralisation movement.

Le Cercle de Craie fut, pour la Comédie de Saint-Etienne, une importante charnière.<sup>4</sup>

Dasté drew inspiration as much from the play itself and its message as from his own part in it - that of the central character of the judge Azdak - and the play's revival brought the troupe the critics' prize, the Prix Molière for 1958. The same year, the company staged the first production in a Centre Dramatique of one of Ionesco's plays, La Cantatrice Chauve, thereby ensuring their position as the most forward-looking and adventurous of all the Centres Dramatiques.

But there were other problems confronting the Comédie de Saint-Etienne at this time:

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4. J. Dasté, op.cit., p.51.

Il devenait évident que, quel que soit le plaisir donné au public populaire qui nous soutenait, nous ne pouvions, sans abîmer les spectacles, continuer à présenter des pièces de cette importance dans les trois quarts des villes de nos tournées habituelles. Or nous avions un peu épuisé le répertoire comprenant peu d'acteurs. Nous avons joué presque toutes les pièces de Molière. A part Jean Lescure, dont la collaboration comme auteur, avec les Noces Noires en particulier, fut courte mais fructueuse, et la création de pièces étrangères comme Irène innocente de Ugo Betti, adaptée par Maurice Clavel, nous n'avions pas fait connaître d'auteurs nouveaux. Nous nous devons d'attirer des poètes dramatiques, sans leur imposer un cadre trop limité.<sup>5</sup>

The two major changes of policy envisaged at this time, therefore, were the necessity for a new, larger theatre for their productions, and the encouragement of new authors to produce works in collaboration with the Comédie. These two aims were pursued throughout the following decade and led to the emergence of the group of committed writers of which Gabriel Cousin was one.

(c) The Grenier de Toulouse

Maurice Sarrazin devoted the period from 1949 until 1955 to pursuing his rôle as organiser of a regional touring company, bringing theatre to as many new areas in the south-west as possible.

La deuxième étape fut de devenir un Centre National et d'organiser, comme tous les Centres de l'époque, des tournées nombreuses, qui nous ont fait le plus grand bien sur le plan de la connaissance humaine et technique de notre métier. Mais ce ne pouvait être qu'une étape transitoire. Un public qui n'a vu que des spectacles de tréteaux pendant dix ans ne sait pas ce que c'est que le théâtre. Le lui laisser croire est un abus de confiance.<sup>6</sup>

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5. *ibid.* p.52.

6. Maurice Sarrazin, Comédien dans une troupe, Grenier de Toulouse, 1970, p.67.

Until the Grenier had a new theatre, in 1964, its task was limited to this activity and its productions therefore had to be adaptable not only to its 'home' stage in Toulouse, but to nearly fifty other theatres of various dimensions. This logistical fact somewhat limited its repertoire, and Sarrazin's choice of plays during the nineteen-fifties cannot be held against him.

The second most popular play of the decade after Shakespeare's The Taming of the Shrew of 1950 was the 1952 production of Molière's L'Avare, which ran for 153 performances. The same season saw the revival of Shakespeare's Romeo and Juliet, which had first been presented by the Grenier in the 1947-48 season. In 1951-52, Maurice Sarrazin completely modified his first production and changed the scenery. It was this revised version which was repeated the following season, and, although it was only given 29 performances, it played to full houses. The season was completed by the L'Histoire du Soldat of Ramuz, with music by Stravinsky. An indication of the unreadiness of the region's audiences to accept such a work may be seen from the fact that it only played for three performances; however, Sarrazin made a second attempt with the work in 1958 and this time it ran for sixty performances.

The major works of the 1953-54 season were from the traditional French repertoire: Giraudoux's La Folle de Chaillot, Labiche's Le Voyage de M. Perrichon, and Molière's Le Misanthrope. Sarrazin's tentative experiment of mounting Arthur Miller's Death of a Salesman was a failure: it ran for eighteen performances but it succeeded in emptying the Grenier's theatre - it was a sad result for this courageous attempt to stage a première in the provinces. The following season, the company reverted to its policy of playing only the known and accepted works of French theatre repertoire and put on Corneille's L'Illusion Comique, Montherlant's Malatesta, and Shakespeare's Much Ado about Nothing. The Montherlant piece was the only performance of this play to be staged in the new subsidised theatres until the nineteen-seventies, but

Montherlant was a sufficiently known author to attract provincial audiences. Over seventy per cent of the performances in the 1955-56 season were of classical plays: a Marivaux, a Beaumarchais, and a Molière. The rest of the season was made up with Feydeau's Le Dindon and Crommelynck's <sup>Une</sup> ~~La~~ Femme qui a le coeur trop petit, a play which the Comédie de l'Est had put on two seasons before.

Sarrazin's predilection for Giraudoux - he had already been responsible for three premières of his works - persisted the following year with the production of Electre. To this were added a very successful production of Beaumarchais's Le Mariage de Figaro, and the première of Musset's L'Ane et le Ruisseau. The interesting new production that season was that of Goldoni's La Locandiera, another première for the Grenier. Although it had only two performances, it was repeated with more success the next year, 1957, thus demonstrating the feasibility of educating the regional audiences to appreciate hitherto unknown works.

Indeed, by 1957, it was becoming apparent that Maurice Sarrazin was again attempting to alter the balance of his repertoire; In addition to the revival of La Locandiera, there was a repeat of the 1953 production of L'Histoire du Soldat. This time the piece was played sixty times. The same season, Sarrazin attempted Le Roi David by René Morax with music by Arthur Honegger, and, although it was only performed three times - it was revived in the 1960-61 season - it achieved some success. Pirandello's Chacun sa vérité completed the season's programme; the first Pirandello play to be put on by the Grenier, it won the first prize at the Barcelona International Theatre Festival of 1958.

Sarrazin continued to innovate in the succeeding years: the next two seasons witnessed the arrival of Brecht, Lorca, and Cervantes into the repertoire; Shakespeare was temporarily omitted from the Grenier's programmes between 1955 and 1961; in the nineteen-sixties Sarrazin was able to introduce an even greater variety of authors and themes into his repertoire.

The period up to 1958 had of necessity been one of great

caution as far as the repertoire was concerned: traditional plays by known dramatists, principally French in origin, had dominated the programmes of the Grenier; experimentation had frequently resulted in failure; Sarrazin wisely pursued a policy of orthodoxy, concentrating his efforts on reaching as wide an audience as possible in the south-west region. Indeed, with no proper facilities for large-scale productions in Toulouse, he had little choice but to tour with this rather stereotyped repertoire. The troupe was conscious of a house-style:

Nous ramenions Molière dans les villes mêmes et devant les publics pour lesquels Molière les avait écrites et présentées. Il y avait moins à chercher des pièces qui conviennent à ce public, que des pièces qui conviennent à la troupe puisqu'on parlait du style de la troupe comme du style d'un peintre. Le public n'allait pas à une pièce, il allait à une troupe.<sup>7</sup>

Yet it must be said in Sarrazin's favour that he succeeded in convincing his public that popular provincial theatre was not necessarily Boulevard theatre. Working in a region which appreciates singing and lyrical drama, it was appropriate that the Grenier should put on such plays as Honegger's Le Roi David, and the original Beaumarchais stories of Le Barbier de Séville and Le Mariage de Figaro. Maurice Sarrazin's origins and those of his troupe - the Pyrenean South of France - made them the ideal purveyors of commedia dell'arte style, whether in Aristophanes, Molière, Goldoni, or Shakespeare. However, it should not be concluded that the Grenier was only able to interpret farces, vaudevilles or comedies: their success with Romeo and Juliet or La Guerre de Troie n'aura pas lieu showed both their individual talents and their collective merit as a troupe, fully worthy of the title Centre Dramatique National.

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7. Maurice Sarrazin, op.cit., p.33.

(d) The Centre Dramatique de l'Ouest

With this company newly installed in their premises at the rue de Redon in Rennes, their working methods saw a corresponding improvement and their technical and rehearsal facilities allowed them to expand their repertoire. The total number of performances given each season increased rapidly, from 141 in the 1951-2 season to 243 in the 1957-8 season. Likewise, the repertoire itself broadened to include a greater variety of foreign and modern authors than had been attempted in previous seasons.

The repertoire of the early nineteen-fifties at the Centre Dramatique de l'Ouest shows Gignoux's desire to create something new each season in order to satisfy the greatest number of people. Many of his productions in this period were French premières and slowly the public came to expect novelty as well as the diversity they had experienced from Gignoux since 1949. This policy led to an interesting state of affairs whereby Gignoux, having to comply with certain financial restrictions, was obliged to rely partly on known authors and partly on revivals of his successful past productions to finance his more experimental repertoire. This in turn produced a precarious existence for the company whose plays often met critical hostility; thus it may be said that the 1950 production of Synge's Playboy of the Western World was too 'early' for this Centre, while the 1957 production of Obey's Noé was conceivably too 'late' as it came after such unknown foreign plays as Strindberg's Dance of Death or Goldsmith's She stoops to Conquer and such experimental adaptations as Henry Grange's The Suitcase of Plautus or Gignoux's own adaptation of Voltaire's Candide. However, the whole programme of the nineteen-fifties reveals Gignoux's continued aim of providing variety for his audiences: this both entertained and educated them and it was a policy which was instrumental in broadening the threshold of acceptance in terms of dramatic production.

The 1952-53 season alone is sufficient to demonstrate the eclecticism of Gignoux's choice of repertoire: apart from the two adaptations already mentioned, those of Plautus and of Voltaire, the season consisted of Beaumarchais' Le Barbier de Séville, Mauriac's Asmodée, and Chekhov's The Three Sisters, the last named being the most frequently performed work that season. Plautus was an author rarely exploited by the decentralised theatre companies - the Grenier's production of Le Carthaginois remains the outstanding example - and Grange's The Suitcase had both a scholastic interest for students of the classics and a popular appeal to audiences appreciating satirical comedy. It was a play which fully conformed to the ideal of the C.D.O. to present new works by unknown authors, thus fulfilling its educational rôle as well as bringing a cultural diet to the people of Brittany. In his adaptation of Voltaire's tale Candide, Gignoux transferred the satirical content of the original to a twentieth century context and played it in the manner of a revue. It was well received when it played to Paris audiences, but provincial spectators reacted unfavourably; this demonstration of the greater sophistication of the metropolis audiences was by no means an unusual occurrence in the history of the decentralised theatre companies at this time. The C.D.O.'s production of Mauriac's Asmodée was the only play by this author to be performed outside Colmar in the first twenty-five years of the decentralisation period. Paradoxically, the company's production of Chekhov's The Three Sisters was the only one of this play in the same period, although, as an author, Chekhov was the eighth most performed playwright in these provincial Centres.

There was a reduction both in the number of plays and in the total number of performances the following season. Four productions were offered to the public: Jules Romains's Knock, Lope de Vega's La Découverte du nouveau Monde (adapted by Morvan Lebesque), Molière's Le Misanthrope, and Armand



Salacrou's L'Archipel Lenoir. In addition, there were productions of Beckett and Dostoievsky by visiting companies, the whole programme for the season thus, once again, satisfying a variety of tastes. The Lope de Vega adaptation, specially commissioned by Gignoux for the C.D.O., was selected for its elements of grandeur of theme, heroic central characters, and colourful décor and costumes. The theme of the play was updated from the Renaissance to the twentieth century. These two facts about this play exemplify the general features of the repertoire of the decentralised theatres, namely: the need for visual appeal and the presentation of a contemporary and recognisable world. Such features were to become almost the sine qua non of later popular repertoires in the provinces.

In an enquiry conducted by the Centre Dramatique de l'Ouest in 1953 into working-class attitudes towards the theatre, the most serious obstacle blocking the entry of this section of society into the world of drama was said to be the lack of contemporary themes in the repertoire. As in other theatres, various attempts had been made to bring all classes of society into the theatre, but Gignoux's conviction was that by pursuing his policy of variety, he would stand the best chance of attracting the most varied audiences. As the nineteen-fifties progressed, there was no doubt that his policy of gradual experimentation was paying off: his repertoire became slowly but noticeably more adventurous and more topical; his successors in the next decade were able to introduce the works of such avant-garde dramatists as Beckett, Ghelderode, and Ionesco. However, one aspect of the work of some of the new subsidised theatres remained outside the policy of the C.D.O. during this period, namely: the favouring of one particular dramatist's work by the director of a Centre Dramatique. Such preference as Dasté showed for Brecht's work, or even Gignoux's own predilection for Dürrenmatt when he later moved to Strasbourg, would not have been politic at this

early stage in the development of the C.D.O. and its audiences. After Gignoux's move in 1957, the time seemed ripe for the new co-directors Goubert and Parigot to introduce a regional author, and a fruitful and lasting relationship was struck up between the C.D.O. and the Breton author Pierre Hélias.

The diversity and experimentation of the nineteen-fifties continued in the 1954-55 season with productions of Shakespeare, Racine, Molière, Strindberg, and Anouilh. There was also a revival of the previously successful Labiche play Un Chapeau de Paille d'Italie. Shakespeare's Merchant of Venice was the first production by the C.D.O. to play for more than fifty performances; Strindberg's Dance of Death was the first play by that author to be introduced to the audience of a decentralised theatre; demonstrating Gignoux's innovatory capacity in terms of repertoire. Gignoux expressed his policy on new creations at the C.D.O. in their journal Le Courrier Dramatique de L'Ouest in July 1954:

Sachez que sans créations il n'y a pas d'art dramatique vivant et que le Centre Dramatique de l'Ouest mourrait vite s'il n'était qu'un petit musée ambulante du théâtre.<sup>8</sup>

The following season the troupe split into two groups in order to accommodate the demands made on it by numerous organisations. The season's repertoire was marked, not unnaturally therefore, by a series of 'safe' productions to win the new audiences back to the theatre. Molière, Beaumarchais, and Courteline accounted for over half the total number of performances given that season. Salacrou's L'Archipel Lenoir was given a revival and the repertoire was completed by productions of Pirandello's Henry IV, Goldsmith's She Stoops to Conquer, and Claudel's L'Otage. For the first time in its history, the C.D.O. gave more than two hundred performances throughout the season. This year was also marked by the first foreign tour of the company:

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8. Hubert Gignoux, Le Courrier Dramatique de l'Ouest, juillet 1954.

this was to Morocco, where it played its revival of Salacrou's L'Archipel Lenoir.

The following season, 1956-57, was the last under the directorship of Hubert Gignoux. The programme consisted of Bréal's Les Hussards, Racine's Bérénice, Shakespeare's Hamlet, Verneuil's Le Train pour Venise, and Obey's Noé. Gignoux, reflecting on the first eight years of the Comédie de l'Ouest - the new name of the company adopted in 1956 - particularly remembered the Plautus play La Valise and his own adaptation of Voltaire's Candide; together with these, Henri Ghéon's Oédipe, and Lope's La Découverte du nouveau Monde remained in the memory as representing repertory innovations - a concept dear to Gignoux. Given the nature of the new Centres Dramatiques and the grants allocated to them, it would have been misguided, according to Gignoux, not to have taken some risks during those eight years. The variety of the C.D.O.'s repertoire testified to this readiness to take risks, not merely to satisfy artistic whims or personal inclinations, but to bring to the Brittany public a broad offering of drama which could appeal to every person somehow and which, hopefully, would enlarge the public's acquaintance with the theatre.

(e) The Comédie de Provence

Gaston Baty's vision of a regional theatre for Provence based on local partiality for pantomime, melodrama, pastoral and nativity plays, farce, and open-air productions had been sadly interrupted by his death at the beginning of the 1953-54 season. His successor, Georges Douking, while wishing to realise Baty's vision, saw that his first task was to secure a regular and faithful audience in the region. In this aim, he was constantly thwarted, despite some good notices for his productions and intense publicity campaigns stretching as far as Italy, Switzerland and Belgium.

Relying on past experience, Douking produced Armoux's Huon de Bordeaux, the epic chanson de geste which he had

first put on in Paris at the Théâtre Pigalle in 1946, then at the new Comédie de l'Est the following year. This production was as successful as his next: Robert Merle's Flaminéo, an adaptation of Webster's The White Devil. Both plays benefited from the vivid staging reminiscent of Baty's productions; Flaminéo's open-air performances captured the imagination of the public, and, to the company's delight, that of the Parisian critics when it toured there the same month. The other production of the season was Paul Delon's adaptation of Cervantes' story Le Rétable des Merveilles. This one-act farce was brought back with success into the repertoire in 1956 and 1957. Racine's Les Plaideurs, used as a curtain-raiser to Flaminéo, was the first play from the French Classical repertoire to be staged by Douking, and at the end of 1953, he decided that he would be obliged to include a major classical work in his future repertoire in order to attract both student audiences in university towns and popular audiences in the smaller villages.

With this policy in mind, he staged Molière's Le Dépit Amoureux in January 1954, and Les Femmes Savantes and Racine's Bajazet two months later. Their predictable success was offset by the failure of the accompanying vaudeville by Sardou called Les Pommes du Voisin.

Douking's open-air production was of Kleist's The Broken Jug and Gide's Saül, perhaps an over-intellectual programme for popular audiences. The following winter, Douking made a more judicious selection, putting on Corneille's Le Cid and Molière's Les Fourberies de Scapin, which were received enthusiastically both in their native Provence and in other regions where the company toured. The Comédie de Provence was beginning to make a name for itself.

Douking's contributions to maintaining the Provençal heritage in 1955 were an allegorical drama, Carré de Sept, by a Provençal poet Charles Galtier, a Roussin farce Le Tombeau d'Achille, and Daudet's L'Arlésienne, all of which

received good notices. The same year, the Comédie de Provence presented an adaptation of Congreve's The Way of the World which met with little success. Douking chose L'Arlésienne for his gala production that year and it was warmly received by large audiences at every performance. However, he clearly felt that his efforts with the Comédie de Provence were insufficient or inappropriate to attract the large audiences necessary to justify the company's appellation Centre Dramatique National. No doubt his successful career with Baty before the war, then as a Parisian director during and after the war, had led him to expect better results from the public and, disillusioned, he left the Comédie de Provence at the end of the 1955 season.

The two final productions that year were handled by Paul Delon, one of the original members of the troupe. His Barbier de Séville and Les Précieuses Ridicules were excellent, safe, productions to ensure audience-appeal before the new director, René Lafforgue, took over the company. Perhaps Douking's real failure was to ignore the basic fact of life for a provincial company in its development stage: that of seeking, finding, and maintaining an audience through a light, popular repertoire of tried classics. His ambitious new creations, his sorties to Paris, and the resulting cost of such activities, were fatal flaws in his philosophy.

René Lafforgue brought the experience of the first ten years of the decentralisation movement with him to Aix-en-Provence. He had been a member of Jean Dasté's original group of La Compagnie des Comédiens de Grenoble from which Gabriel Cousin and other Compagnons de la Saint-Jean had seceded in 1945, and which eventually became, after its move to Saint-Etienne, the first Centre Dramatique in France. Lafforgue remained with Dasté for seven years as an actor and part-time producer, but mainly as musical director and composer: During that period, he had also had contact with Hubert Gignoux's Centre Dramatique de l'Ouest where he had

composed the music for some productions. He had in fact moved to Rennes for one season in 1955-56 before being appointed to the directorship of the Comédie de Provence, a post which he was to hold for six seasons.

Fifteen years younger than Georges Douking, Lafforgue had the advantage of youth on his side: he was still under forty when he took over from Douking. The year before his installation at Aix, he had won the Grand Prix du Concours des Jeunes Compagnies with his production of Les Fiancés de la Seine by Morvan Lebesque, a journalist and critic, humanist and advocate of popular theatre, whose dramatic work had also attracted the attention of Gignoux at Rennes. Indeed, another work by Lebesque, an adaptation of an Otway play entitled Venise Sauvée, was the first production by Lafforgue at his new theatre. He exploited his recent successes to the full, adding to the first year's repertoire not only his prize-winning Les Fiancés de la Seine, but also a Plautus comedy adapted by Henry Grangé under the title of La Valise, for which Lafforgue had composed the music at its première at Rennes in 1952.

Lafforgue's great experience in the new subsidised theatres from their outset thus served him invaluablely at Aix, where he not only took charge of every production himself, but also made himself responsible for most of the musical component of the works performed.

He brought with him to the Comédie de Provence the set designer J.P. Frémont who remained with him during his directorship. The new repertoire and administration of the theatre resulted in some fine successes during 1956. La Valise was a knockabout farce with musical interludes, Venise Sauvée (Venice Preserved) a colourful, intense drama of the English post-Jacobean age, and both these productions stamped the Comédie with a new image.

Lafforgue himself played the eponymous Bourgeois Gentilhomme the following winter and collected further critical praise for the Comédie, but the tone of the repertoire

changed rapidly with the next production, Romain Rolland's Les Loups, a transposition of the Dreyfus affair to the time of the Revolution. It was the only production of a Rolland play to be staged in the decentralised theatres until the nineteen-seventies. During the summer of 1957, the Comédie had a predictable success with Molière's George Dandin, they re-staged their 1953 production of Le Rétable des Merveilles, and, for that year's open-air presentation, performed La Farce de Pathelin and an adapted version of Sophocles' Antigone as a double-bill. The former play was by a seventeenth-century Provençal writer, David de Brueys, who had written it at the behest of Louis XIV. This was the first play in the style of the commedia dell'arte to be attempted by Lafforgue's new group, and a pure experiment on their part. The accompanying major production with this piece, Antigone, had first been performed in the provinces by Dasté at Saint-Etienne in 1954, and Lafforgue had composed the incidental music for it. The enthusiastic welcome the play received at its performance at the subsequent Festival de Lacoste underlined the continuing fortunes of the Comédie de Provence.

A lighter production followed: Labiche's Un Chapeau de Paille d'Italie completed the 1957 season and brought more acclaim for Lafforgue himself who had specially composed additional music and song for this lively vaudeville. By the end of this year, Lafforgue had established himself thoroughly in Provence and shown his expertise in the choice of repertoire. His selection was based on some fundamental principles - which were to adapt the repertoire to suit the regional audience and their preferences and temperament, to include the loved and tested classics as befitted a national drama centre, and to insist on the high quality of all the output of his team. He was now ready to enlarge his repertoire and to introduce his public to more experimental works.

(f) Characteristics of the repertoires

From the statistical tables given below, it can be seen that French plays still dominated the repertoires of all five

of the Centres Dramatiques Nationaux during the period 1952-58; however, plays of foreign origin were being performed more frequently in this period, particularly in the oldest established Centres, the Centre Dramatique de l'Est and the Comédie de Saint-Etienne: in these two theatres, foreign plays accounted for 33% and 38% of the repertoires in this period, compared with 21% and 30% respectively in the first phase of decentralisation. Of all the Centres, the Comédie de Provence put on the greatest proportion of French plays to foreign, namely thirty of the thirty-nine productions. This last figure is perhaps predictable, given the tentative nature of the dramatic decentralisation taking place in Provence at the time.

In this second phase, all five theatres settled down to a regular production of an average half a dozen productions per season, whereas the Centre Dramatique de l'Est and the Grenier had previously tried nearly a dozen productions on average each season.

The Comédie de Provence also proved to be unique in offering more classical than modern plays in its repertoire, a statistic not entirely unexpected in the circumstances. It is equally unsurprising that only two modern foreign plays were performed at this theatre during the first seven years of its existence.

Conversely, Jean Dasté at Saint-Etienne can be seen to be the most experimental of the five directors; his repertoires show a dominance of modern plays - 18 out of 29 productions - of which eight were foreign. He was the only director to produce at least one modern foreign play per season in this period.

No statistics have been given for the 1957-58 season at the Centre Dramatique de l'Est as Hubert Gignoux assumed his directorship that year and his policy vis-à-vis the repertoire can be said to have radically changed from that of his predecessor.



| CENTRE  | SEASON  | Class.<br>French<br>plays | Class.<br>Foreign<br>plays | Mod.<br>French<br>plays | Mod.<br>Foreign<br>plays | TOTALS |
|---------|---------|---------------------------|----------------------------|-------------------------|--------------------------|--------|
| C.D.E.  | 1952-53 | 1                         | 1                          | 2                       | 1                        | 5      |
|         | 1953-54 | 1                         | 0                          | 2                       | 1                        | 4      |
|         | 1954-55 | 2                         | 2                          | 3                       | 0                        | 7      |
|         | 1955-56 | 2                         | 1                          | 4                       | 0                        | 7      |
|         | 1956-57 | 1                         | 1                          | 2                       | 3                        | 7      |
|         | TOTALS  | 7                         | 5                          | 13                      | 5                        | 30     |
| C.S-E.  | 1952-53 | 2                         | 0                          | 1                       | 1                        | 4      |
|         | 1953-54 | 2                         | 1                          | 0                       | 2                        | 5      |
|         | 1954-55 | 0                         | 1                          | 2                       | 1                        | 4      |
|         | 1955-56 | 1                         | 0                          | 3                       | 1                        | 5      |
|         | 1956-57 | 1                         | 0                          | 1                       | 2                        | 4      |
|         | 1957-58 | 2                         | 1                          | 3                       | 1                        | 7      |
| TOTALS  | 8       | 3                         | 10                         | 8                       | 29                       |        |
| Grenier | 1952-53 | 1                         | 1                          | 1                       | 0                        | 3      |
|         | 1953-54 | 1                         | 0                          | 2                       | 1                        | 4      |
|         | 1954-55 | 1                         | 1                          | 2                       | 0                        | 4      |
|         | 1955-56 | 3                         | 0                          | 2                       | 0                        | 5      |
|         | 1956-57 | 1                         | 0                          | 2                       | 1                        | 4      |
|         | 1957-58 | 0                         | 0                          | 2                       | 2                        | 4      |
| TOTALS  | 7       | 2                         | 11                         | 4                       | 24                       |        |
| C.D.O.  | 1952-53 | 2                         | 1                          | 1                       | 1                        | 5      |
|         | 1953-54 | 1                         | 1                          | 2                       | 0                        | 4      |
|         | 1954-55 | 2                         | 1                          | 2                       | 1                        | 6      |
|         | 1955-56 | 2                         | 1                          | 6                       | 1                        | 10     |
|         | 1956-57 | 1                         | 1                          | 3                       | 0                        | 5      |
| TOTALS  | 8       | 5                         | 14                         | 3                       | 30                       |        |
| C.P.    | 1952-53 | 2                         | 1                          | 3                       | 1                        | 7      |
|         | 1953    | 4                         | 1                          | 3                       | 0                        | 8      |
|         | 1954    | 4                         | 0                          | 2                       | 1                        | 7      |
|         | 1955    | 2                         | 1                          | 3                       | 0                        | 6      |
|         | 1956    | 0                         | 2                          | 1                       | 0                        | 3      |
|         | 1957    | 3                         | 2                          | 3                       | 0                        | 8      |
| TOTALS  | 15      | 7                         | 15                         | 2                       | 39                       |        |

Note: Productions at the Comédie de Provence are computed per calendar year during this period.

Molière, with fifty-eight productions of his plays at the five Centres by the end of the nineteen-fifties, stands unequalled at the head of the table of most performed authors in the new subsidised theatres. Tens of thousands of spectators will therefore have seen a performance of a Molière play during this time: many will have had the opportunity to see up to sixteen different productions - this was at the Comédie de Saint-Etienne. At this theatre, in the 1955-56 season, Le Malade Imaginaire attracted forty-four thousand spectators. The Comédie de Provence gave 386 performances of eleven Molière plays in its first ten seasons - including 117 of L'Avare and 95 of Les Précieuses Ridicules, - while the three most popular Molière plays in all five Centres were L'Ecole des Femmes, Le Misanthrope, and Le Bourgeois Gentilhomme.

By comparison, two other French classical authors, Racine and Corneille, were only put on seven and four times respectively. The two eighteenth-century authors Beaumarchais and Marivaux proved to be more popular than their predecessors - stylish comedy clearly attracted more audiences in these early years of the Centres, and, of the remaining French plays in the repertoires, comedies lead the statistics for popularity by production totals and audience figures. Musset is outstanding among the comic authors of the modern period, while Feydeau, Labiche, and Courteline are preferred to Sardou, Daudet, and Mérimée.

Seventeen productions of Shakespeare place that author second behind Molière in the table of frequency of performance. Hamlet was the most successful production at the Centre Dramatique de l'Ouest, attracting an average of 486 spectators per performance, closely followed by The Merchant of Venice with an average of 471.

Among modern French writers, Giraudoux and Anouilh are 'safe' authors whose works generally draw audiences. The former's plays were produced regularly at the Grenier between 1948 and 1955: these were L'Apollon de Bellac, La Guerre de Troie n'aura pas lieu, La Folle de Chaillot, and Electre, while his Intermezzo was put on by both the Centre Dramatique

de l'Est and the Centre Dramatique de l'Ouest. Giraudoux was played a total of ten times by the five centres in this period, Anouilh eight times. Among modern French dramatists, only Claudel, with six productions, comes near to these figures.

The four modern foreign authors whose works were performed most frequently were Pirandello, Shaw, Chekhov, and Brecht. Taking into account the fact that the Brecht era only began in earnest after the Berliner Ensemble's visit to Paris in 1954, it is remarkable that Brecht's plays should already appear in these statistics: it is a measure of the commitment of theatre directors to political theatre that it should be so.

Among the younger generation of French authors, the majority found an outlet for their work at the Centre Dramatique de l'Est: J.F.Noël, Cesbron, Campserveux, B.C.Miel, J.C. Brisville, and J.Cl.Marrey were all premièreed there; ironically, however, none of these writers except Marrey were performed again in the next decade.

The following table, published in Lille,<sup>9</sup> summarises the frequency of productions of the most performed authors of the 1950's:

| Authors      | No. of productions | No. of different plays |
|--------------|--------------------|------------------------|
| Molière      | 39                 | 19                     |
| Shakespeare  | 17                 | 12                     |
| Giraudoux    | 10                 | 8                      |
| Musset       | 10                 | 7                      |
| Marivaux     | 9                  | 7                      |
| Courteline   | 9                  | 6                      |
| Labiche      | 9                  | 5                      |
| Anouilh      | 8                  | 8                      |
| Pirandello   | 6                  | 5                      |
| Racine       | 6                  | 5                      |
| Shaw         | 6                  | 5                      |
| Claudel      | 6                  | 4                      |
| Beaumarchais | 6                  | 3                      |
| Chekhov      | 5                  | 5                      |
| Corneille    | 4                  | 4                      |
| Brecht       | 4                  | 2                      |

9. From: Dossier Confluent, Groupe de Travail, Lille, fév.1960, p.46.

This same publication, the Dossier Confluent, contained the views of the Centres directors on their choice of repertoire and on their problems in finding new authors to fulfil their criteria for that choice. The Grenier replied:

Le choix d'un auteur est avant tout fonction de la mission que nous voulons remplir auprès de notre public:

- lui redonner le sens du beau;
- l'intéresser à tous les problèmes qui concernent l'homme.

D'où un choix qui doit tenir compte de la forme (beau) et du fond (problèmes humains).<sup>10</sup>

There was no problem with the classics: these plays fulfilled both these criteria and would remain favourites with all theatre groups. As far as modern authors were concerned, some were appreciated for their dramatic stylishness (Giraudoux or Montherlant), some for their exposition of human problems (Miller or Brecht). Other criteria in the choice of repertoire, such as financial budgeting, casting, the performing rights dictated by the Société des Auteurs (castigated later by Sarrazin in his book Comédien dans une Troupe) were purely negative criteria.

In his replies, René Lafforgue seemed more concerned with providing his audiences with a varied and proportioned repertoire than with orientating his productions around particular themes or angling his plays politically or socially, technically or aesthetically:

J'essaie de trouver la pièce ou l'auteur qui correspond, à mon sens, le mieux à la réceptivité du public que je touche. J'essaie de varier et de faire alterner spectacle dramatique et spectacle fantaisiste, théâtre d'action et théâtre poétique, théâtre du jeu et théâtre du verbe autant que cela est possible, car l'élaboration d'un programme est toujours malaisée, surtout en ce qui concerne le théâtre moderne.<sup>11</sup>

The Centre Dramatique de l'Est appeared to hold many criteria for its repertoire, all of which were imponderable elements,

10. *ibid.*, p.47.

11. *ibid.*, p.48.

such as quality of play, casting, audience 'appeal' and receptiveness for particular categories of play, balance between French and foreign authors, scenery complications and cost. However, the tendency with this troupe was to choose "ce que nous aimons, ce que nous avons envie de jouer".

The individual replies to the question on their choice of repertoire reveal the unique characteristics of the Centres directors; Sarrazin's sense of mission vis-à-vis culture, later expressed thus:

La principale mission du théâtre n'est pas de penser mais de vivre; pas de faire penser, mais de faire vivre, pensée comprise.<sup>12</sup>

was to be arrived at through a formulated policy of presenting plays with nobility of form and humanity of content; Gignoux's policy of presenting plays which appealed to the company ensured the continuation of the variety of new productions begun under Saint-Denis; Lafforgue's apparent aim to satisfy his public lays him open to the charges of complacency and artistic mediocrity and his statement complements what the statistics have already shown, namely, that he was less willing than the other four directors to experiment with non-French authors, and that modern foreign playwrights had virtually no place in his repertoires.

All the directors agreed on the lack of good, contemporary, French dramatists to equal those standard and reliable fillers of both Parisian and provincial repertoires. The Grenier was seeking an author with mass appeal:

Il est très difficile de trouver un théâtre valable, adapté à notre formule, car nous ne pouvons pas faire de théâtre d'essai, comme à Paris ou dans deux ou trois grandes villes, notre public ne pouvant accéder qu'à un grand théâtre valable pour tous et non pour une minorité d'initiés; et c'est toujours avec une certaine angoisse que nous montons une pièce d'un auteur contemporain. Pour un Molière, un Shakespeare, un Brecht, un Lorca, il y a tant de bonnes intentions mais peu de chefs-d'oeuvre.<sup>13</sup>

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12. Maurice Sarrazin, Comédien dans une Troupe, p.166.

13. Dossier Confluent, p.48.

The C.D.E., while justifiably proud of its record of new plays, expresses the same opinion:

Nous n'avons pas de 'formule', mais nous avons des difficultés à trouver des auteurs qui parlent au plus grand nombre tout en étant des poètes ayant le sens de l'efficacité scénique. D'autant plus que les auteurs 'arrivés' préfèrent confier leurs pièces à des théâtres parisiens plutôt qu'à des théâtres de province. Mais notre public est de plus disposé à écouter des voix nouvelles comme en témoignent les seize créations faites jusqu'à ce jour par le C.D.E.<sup>14</sup>

The Grenier de Toulouse hoped that an expansion of the government's decentralisation policy would bring with it a new wave of popular authors:

Le problème des auteurs contemporains (et principalement des auteurs français), reste un des plus graves du théâtre. Aristophane, Molière, Marivaux, écrivaient du théâtre de leur époque; or la plupart de nos auteurs actuels écrivent le théâtre d'il y a cinquante ans, ou le théâtre d'une classe particulière. Mais nous espérons que les troupes populaires (auxquelles nous voulons nous assimiler) finiront par susciter des auteurs. Il n'y a pas d'exemple d'instruments de valeur qui n'aient suscité des instrumentalistes. Le problème no.1 du Grenier (et le problème no.1 de tout le théâtre en France) est le répertoire. Nous cherchons l'auteur français qui écrirait le théâtre de notre temps.<sup>15</sup>

While it is true that similar expectations and exhortations were expressed a decade later among theatre directors, that decade was to witness a radical change in the repertoires of the new wave of decentralised theatres: the new socially-conscious dramatists of the nineteen-sixties produced committed drama relating to the problems of the age; directors were in a position of being able to select from a variety of talents and themes, aided by the new funds available to them under a Ministry of Cultural Affairs; audiences themselves were confronted with theatre which was as different in style

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14. *ibid.*, p.48.

15. *ibid.*, p.49.

and content from what had preceded as the difference between Classical and Boulevard repertoires.

Together with his contemporaries, Gabriel Cousin formed part of that radical change in the provinces which marked a highly progressive step in the development of French theatre from its prewar literary and class-bound traditions to a more dramatically inventive and populist movement.

(g) External influences on the repertoires of the Centres Dramatiques

While the five directors pursued their separate policies for the five Centres Dramatiques which were in existence in the nineteen-fifties, other theatre groups and their animateurs were influencing the direction which those Centres were to take a decade later during the first few years of the Fifth Republic.

By far the most profound and lasting influence on directors and dramatists alike was the visit, in 1954, of Bertolt Brecht's Berliner Ensemble to the first Festival de Paris with their production of Brecht's Mother Courage. Their return to the Théâtre des Nations the following season with The Caucasian Chalk Circle, in 1957 - the year after Brecht's death - with The Life of Galileo, and again in 1960 with The Resistible Rise of Arturo Ui and The Mother, marked every aspect of French theatre, from writing, acting and directing techniques to a whole philosophy of popular and political theatre. Seen in terms of a stylistic revolution, what the Berliner Ensemble did had the same effect on the theatre as Hugo's Hernani in the nineteenth century or the Ballets russes in 1909. Battles were fought over the rights to perform Brecht's plays:

Le premier Brecht créé en province par Dasté, Le Cercle de Craie Caucasienn, a provoqué un drame quand Dasté a voulu le jouer à Paris. On le lui a interdit. Il fallut l'intervention d'un tas de gens pour lever momentanément cette interdiction. La deuxième, La bonne âme de Se Tchouan, monté par Planchon à Lyon, n'a pu être représentée par lui à Paris. La Mère enfin nous a été accordée dans la mesure où personne

d'autre n'en voulait. 'Le Grenier de Toulouse l'a sortie de son ghetto'. Nous avons l'autorisation de la représenter à Paris. Nous n'avons pas pu parce que nous n'avons pas trouvé de théâtre. Le T.N.P. l'a inscrite ensuite à son répertoire dans la même mise en scène, les mêmes décors et les mêmes costumes.<sup>16</sup>

Sarrazin scathingly refers to the wealth of pièces à thèse (and the corresponding dearth of stage characters) thrown up by such revolutions:

Des sous-Giraudoux (1945-1950), des sous-Anouilh (1950-1955), des sous-Brecht (après 1955), des sous-Gatti (après 1965), des faux-Artaud (actuellement)<sup>17</sup>

yet the fact remains that French society, especially after the return of de Gaulle and the constitution of the Fifth Republic in 1958, was ready for a political theatre movement, and the advent of Brechtian theatre techniques fortuitously granted authors, actors and directors alike the opportunity of exploiting this new, so-called, Epic theatre. Gabriel Cousin and his contemporaries acknowledge this debt to the German dramatist in a practical fashion by their writings in the nineteen-sixties.

The battle over performing rights facing Dasté, Planchon, and Sarrazin in regard to Brecht's plays typified the difficulties facing all the directors of the new subsidised theatres. In the case of Dasté's The Caucasian Chalk Circle, demagoguery ruled: in the year of Brecht's death, 1956, the playwright's wife Helene Weigel had given the French performing rights of her husband's plays to Robert Voisin, the then director of the periodical Théâtre Populaire and of the publishing house of L'Arche. Voisin and his collaborators were punctilious and demanding in their interpretation of the meaning of Brecht's plays and of the style in which they should be performed. When Dasté decided to put on his touring

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16. M; Sarrazin, op.cit., p.71.

17. *ibid.*, p.73.



production of The Caucasian Chalk Circle in the capital - the Comédie des Champs-Élysées had been rented for a fortnight in May 1956 - Voisin stopped the performance at the last minute, and an angry Dasté faced financial disaster. The affair was resolved in the best revolutionary tradition: a preview performance was permitted, provided that the audience did not pay to enter the theatre; the press and interested friends greeted the play with a rapturous ovation, Voisin had to cede his position, and the play continued its run for a whole month, thanks to an extended period of a fortnight at the Apollo theatre. Afterwards, Dasté had to submit to questioning by Voisin and his colleagues who included Roland Barthes, André Gisselbrecht, Guy Dumur, and Bernard Dort:

J'avais à répondre à un interrogatoire souriant, mais sévère. L'événement ayant eu lieu malgré eux, ils écoutèrent mes réponses, réservant leurs jugements. Ils avaient l'air étonnés d'apprendre que nous avions davantage considéré le contenu poétique et humain de la pièce que le contenu politique (celui-ci, d'après nous, devant ressortir naturellement sans qu'il soit besoin de le souligner).<sup>18</sup>

A battle for dramatic freedom and licence had been won for provincial directors. However, this episode highlights one of the major stumbling blocks to artistic freedom facing the new subsidised theatres, namely, the omnipotence of the Société des Auteurs which, according to Sarrazin, abuses its privilege of defending the rights of authors. Companies are obliged to pay a fee to this body to perform plays even by dramatists no longer alive; no plays can be performed in the provinces that have not already been seen in the capital or are likely to be put on by any Paris Director either in the capital or outside; companies are only permitted to perform in theatres contracted to the Société; no drama can be performed in France without going through the Société des Auteurs; if

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18. Jean Dasté, Voyage d'un comédien, Stock, 1977, p.49.

an author does not belong to the Société, performing rights fees for his plays are levied both by him and by the Société. Finally, the fee system in France makes the transfer to Paris of a play premièreed in the provinces a considerable financial risk:

Le problème de la détaxe joue un grand rôle. Une pièce est détaxée pour les trente premières représentations. Si une troupe comme le Grenier de Toulouse crée en province une pièce pour trente représentations, ceux qui voudront monter cette pièce à Paris ne seront plus détaxés. L'opération sera beaucoup plus difficile à réaliser.<sup>19</sup>

This situation militated both for and against the repertoires of the new subsidised theatres. The financial hazards of taking productions to Paris prevented the works of the new dramatists, such as Gabriel Cousin, from becoming more widely known; on the other hand, the resulting cloistering of local talent ensured that the new theatres were fulfilling their function as purveyors of regional drama suited specifically to the needs and sympathies of particular areas of France.

Roger Planchon, while not participating directly in the decentralisation movement until he was appointed the first director of a Troupe Permanente in 1959, had been a pioneer of permanent provincial repertory since his move, at the age of nineteen, to Lyon exactly ten years earlier. There, at the so-called Théâtre de la Comédie, from 1949 until 1957, Planchon's repertoire showed originality and imagination. After a successful start with a burlesque of his own compilation, he produced three Elizabethan plays by Marlowe, Kyd, and Shakespeare, a preference which found an echo a decade later at the T.E.P. under Guy Rétoré. Despite his youth and enthusiasm for the theatre, Planchon always detested touring and, unlike Maurice Sarrazin, whose career has been compared with his,<sup>20</sup> he preferred a non-itinerant form of theatre based in a small, abandoned, basement printing works which held a mere hundred

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19. Maurice Sarrazin, Comédien dans une troupe, Grenier de Toulouse, 1970, p.71.

20. see: Gontard, p.325.

spectators. Once installed there in 1952, Planchon developed a repertoire which included works by the contemporary French dramatists Adamov, Ghelderode, Ionesco, Vinaver, and Vitrac; this placed him in the forefront of provincial directors offering their audiences a regular programme of new plays. The quality of his productions brought the Paris critics to Lyon and articles on his theatre appeared in Théâtre Populaire, nos.5 and 8 in 1954. The next year, Planchon himself wrote his Propos sur Brecht in Théâtre Populaire, no.11, revealing that his espousal of Brechtian theatre was imminent. Since that date, Planchon has generally been recognised as the most enthusiastic exponent in France of Brechtian theatre, his productions of even non-Marxist plays reflecting Leftist political tendencies. Planchon's repertoire during the last two seasons at the Théâtre de la Comédie, before he moved to the vast new premises of the Théâtre de la Cité in Villeurbanne in 1957, defined him as a director primarily to be associated with social-conscience plays. Besides Brecht's The Good Woman of Sezuan, and Fear and Misery of the Third Reich, he produced Calderon's L'Alcade de Zalamea, Synge's The Shadow of the Glen, Vitrac's Victor ou les enfants au pouvoir, Adamov's Paolo Paoli, two plays by Ionesco, and Vinaver's Les Coréens.

The monthly review Théâtre Populaire first appeared in 1953 and devoted its articles to supporting popular theatre; initially, it advocated a pattern of decentralised theatres and dramatic repertoires along the lines of Vilar's T.N.P., then, after the Berliner Ensemble's visits, it switched its attentions to political theatre in the Brechtian vein. In 1955, it devoted its first special number to Brecht, and included the first translation of A Short Organum for the Theatre. The journal also began both to publish Brecht and to elaborate a Marxist criticism of the theatre. Théâtre Populaire continued to publish until 1964, having helped many new dramatists, like Cousin, to gain national recognition by printing previously unpublished texts and articles on their works.

Jean Vilar's programme of activities established for the T.N.P. from 1951, and the company's success in attracting audiences through publishing a regular magazine, forming associations of friends and conducting surveys among its public, set the pattern for the Centres Dramatiques to follow in their early years. Guy Leclerc's study of Vilar's work<sup>21</sup> also illustrates the importance of Vilar's repertoire in the development of socially-conscious theatre in the later phase of the evolution of the Centres Dramatiques in the nineteen-sixties.

Although the Theatre of the Absurd also emerged in the early nineteen-fifties, its sphere of activity was limited principally to the smaller stages of the Parisian Left Bank. None of the works of Ionesco, Beckett, Genet, or the early Adamov - with the single exception of the Comédie de Saint-Etienne's production of La Cantatrice Chauve in 1958 - reached the decentralised theatres proper until the following decade, by which time they held more historical interest than dramatic novelty for provincial audiences.

Theatre directors not however integrated into the decentralisation system naturally pursued independent policies towards repertoire. More or less influenced by the Brechtian iconoclasm of 1954, they used their independence to depart from the orthodox or even tentatively experimental efforts of their State-subsidised colleagues. Jean-Marie Serreau, for example, was the first postwar French director to put on a Brecht play in France. This was due to unusual circumstances: Brecht himself had seen Serreau's German-language production of The Exception and the Rule by his bilingual troupe in Germany and subsequently gave Serreau permission to perform the work in French in Paris, where it took place in January 1950. This was almost a year before Vilar's production of Mother Courage at the T.N.P. in their first season under Vilar's direction, and nearly five years before the fresh impetus given to Brecht productions after the Berliner Ensemble's first visit to France in 1954. In the early nineteen-fifties, Brecht's works were

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21. Guy Leclerc, Le T.N.P. de Jean Vilar, Union Générale d'Éditions, Paris, 1971.

not widely available in French translation and Planchon's The Good Woman of Sezuan in 1954 came via an Italian translation. But Serreau's principal contribution to the decentralisation movement, although he himself did not form part of it, was to bring new authors' works to the attention of Paris audiences. He was responsible for a production of Vinaver's Les Coréens at the Théâtre de l'Alliance Française only three months after Planchon had given the play its première in October 1956. Serreau later brought plays by Aimé Césaire, Kateb Yacine, and Guy Foissy - besides works belonging strictly to the Theatre of the Absurd - to Paris and on tour abroad.

The pioneering work of <sup>the</sup> another independent director, Roger Planchon, who did not become associated with the decentralisation movement until 1959, must be placed beside that of Serreau. In the nineteen-fifties, his conversion to Brechtian techniques led him to be a leading prophet of epic realism in France. Equally important was his experimentation with various forms of stagecraft, in which he borrowed from every possible source, from the Elizabethans to American gangster films and silent comedies. Such mixed-media techniques mark him as a forerunner of many of the productions in the new subsidised theatres of the nineteen-sixties.

André Reybaz founded the Summer Festival d'Arras and directed it from 1951 until 1958, during which time it earned the distinction of being second only in importance to Avignon; it acted as a successful springboard for the establishment of many new young theatre groups. Reybaz also introduced audiences to new authors such as Audiberti, Ghelderode, Büchner, Vauthier, Vian, and the Swiss, Dürrenmatt. He was entrusted with the first new Centre Dramatique - the Centre Dramatique du Nord in Tourcoing - to be established under the Fifth Republic. Other directors similarly elevated included Gabriel Monnet, on whose advice Gabriel Cousin began writing for the theatre in the mid-nineteen-fifties, and Michel Fontayne, whose amicable collaboration with Cousin gave Fontayne's one of his most successful productions at the Théâtre Quotidien de Marseille in 1961. Cyril Robichez was

also active in the theatre in the late nineteen-fifties; after experiments with marionettes and children's theatre, he had produced dramatic forms based on the collective writings of his troupe. In 1956, he produced two Brecht plays and, concentrating his efforts in the North of France, put on, among others, Lorca, Eliot, Brecht, and Molière at the Théâtre Populaire des Flandres - not officially recognised as a Troupe Permanente until 1963. Play-readings were also given, ranging from the works of Kleist, Brecht, Morvan-Lebesque, and Ghelderode; Robichez's unique contribution to the development of popular culture was, however, the integration of his dramatic activities into the traditional festival of the Lille textile workers: Le Broquelet. In 1959, he presented Molière's Les Fourberies de Scapin with particular success, then followed the production with an exhibition and a series of lectures entitled "Au-delà du pain" at which the individual subjects of discussion were: "La musique à l'usine", "Culture populaire en pays minier: expérience du Festival de la Ruhr", and "Esthétique du lieu de travail".

Such activities were by no means as peripheral nor as parochial as they may at first seem; the political activism carried out by theatre enthusiasts in the later nineteen-fifties was the very infrastructure necessary later for the building of a wide-scale theatre of social conscience whose ramifications extended throughout France through the theatre decentralisation movement.

Although the period 1952-1960 has frequently been seen as a barren one, therefore, - Raymonde Temkine refers to it as "un temps d'arrêt" while Gontard says:

Ainsi, pendant huit ans, l'oeuvre de décentralisation officielle, entreprise en 1946 et développée régulièrement jusqu'en 1952, est presque totalement arrêtée dans sa progression,<sup>22</sup>

the indirect influences on the repertoires of the established Centres during that period were considerable. In particular,

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22. Gontard, op.cit., p.357.

the Brechtian influence both on writers and directors, the individual enterprise in the field of repertoire by Roger Planchon, and the collective inspiration by the Théâtre National Populaire must all be mentioned in this context.

Finally, the development of reciprocal visits by the Centres themselves helped to foster interest in alternative repertoires. This overlapping of activities between the Centres also enhanced the variety of plays presented in any one Centre, so educating regional audiences even more effectively in the art of dramatic production and in the techniques and 'message' of individual dramatists.

The French government publication, La Documentation Française Illustrée, also categorically denied the suggestion that things were not going well in the subsidised theatres:

D'aucuns se plaisent à affirmer que la décentralisation théâtrale se trouve actuellement dans l'impasse. Rien n'est plus faux: le montant des recettes, l'intérêt accru dont témoignent les spectateurs isolés et les collectivités, la collaboration, chaque jour plus étroite, entre les Centres et les Associations Culturelles, tout cela, au contraire, témoigne de la vitalité de nos Centres Nationaux.<sup>23</sup>

While admitting that the decentralisation programme still required greater State aid, priority had to be given, the document stated, to providing new theatres for the companies already in existence. At Rennes, Saint-Etienne, and Aix-en-Provence, new buildings should be constructed to house the activities still in the process of expansion. The effect of initiating a new building programme would extend to the repertoire itself:

La construction de théâtres destinés aux Centres Nationaux aurait, n'en doutons pas, les plus heureuses conséquences sur la vie des Centres, sur le moral des comédiens, sur le répertoire même. Quel jeune auteur parisien refuserait aujourd'hui de voir créer sa pièce dans le théâtre neuf de Strasbourg? Car c'est aussi la mission des Centres de susciter des oeuvres

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23. La Documentation Française Illustrée, no.148, juin 1959, La Décentralisation Théâtrale, p.31.

nouvelles. Les classiques, si admirables soient-ils, ne suffisent pas à tenir le public en haleine. Il réclame des oeuvres qui concernent notre temps et les Centres se doivent de répondre à cette exigence.<sup>24</sup>

The next decade's expansion in the decentralisation programme was to prove this prediction correct in every respect.

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24. *ibid.* p.31.



CHAPTER III PHASE 3 : 1958 - 1968

(a) Expansion of the decentralisation movement

Within eighteen months of de Gaulle's return to power in October 1958 and the promulgation of the Constitution of the Fifth Republic, a Ministère des Affaires Culturelles had been created under André Malraux, Planchon's Théâtre de la Cité de Villeurbanne had been designated the first Troupe Permanente within a new decentralisation policy, and another Centre Dramatique had been created - in the Northern region at last - under André Reybaz. The years 1959-1960 have been named "ces années charnières où la promotion redémarre en province"<sup>1</sup> and the following decade under Malraux's direction - he was replaced in 1969 by Edmond Michelet - saw one of the most spectacular advances in government-subsidised cultural policies in the history of France.

In the years 1960-1963, three new Centres Dramatiques and seven Troupes Permanentes had been established in the provinces. To these must be added a Maison de la Culture - in Caen - , and a Théâtre National - Le Théâtre de l'Est Parisien. However, it would be convenient but erroneous to ascribe this surge of activity entirely to enlightened government intervention: several of these new enterprises had been in existence over a period of years and had been providing a Vilar-type 'service public' to local inhabitants through a variety of cultural activities. It was as much to the credit of their directors, in their tenacity and dedication, as to the government in their wisdom, that their futures were put on a financially sound basis.

By the end of Malraux's period of office in 1969, there were fractionally more Troupes Permanentes than Centres Dramatiques in France - the respective totals being nine and eight. The Troupes Permanentes were organisations complementary to the Centres Dramatiques but enjoying a lower level of government subsidy. In status, they represented a middle

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1. Raymonde Temkine, L'Entreprise Théâtre, Editions Cujas, 1967, p.184.

echelon between the nationally-recognised Centres and the regionally distinguished, but still amateur, drama companies. Some of the Troupes Permanentes became fully-fledged Centres later - this was the case with the Comédie de Caen and the Théâtre du Cothurne; others developed their activities to include performances at the later Maisons de la Culture, a third echelon of dramatic centres which were established from 1963 onwards.

The extent of the various subsidies allotted to the two major theatre organisations, the Centres Dramatiques and the Troupes Permanentes, analysed in detail in Raymonde Temkine's book<sup>2</sup>, illustrates the distinction between them. In 1965, the Centres were receiving, on average, four times as much money from the State as the Troupes. However, the Troupes received proportionally far more in local subsidy - from the 'collectivités locales' - than their senior counterparts. Not infrequently, their income from local sources surpassed that from the government - this was the case with the Comédie de Nantes, the Théâtre de Champagne, and the Théâtre Populaire des Flandres - while the subsidies received from the two sources by the Comédie des Alpes were roughly equal. This financial data illustrates the importance of the local community to the Troupes Permanentes - an importance which is reciprocated by the presentations of the companies themselves in terms of their repertoire and localised orientation.

Such rappports, however, lead directly to problems both for the theatre directors and for the community they serve and these problems in their turn have a bearing on the repertoires of the companies. In general, the accusation of cultural paternalism may be levelled at any government intervention in the arts; in France, during the period of decentralisation, this criticism tended to be counteracted by the very real and practical results of the rapid expansion

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2. Temkine, op.cit., pp.197-8.

of dramatic activity within the tripartite system of Centres Dramatiques, Troupes Permanentes, and Maisons de la Culture. In addition, as Bradby and McCormick have pointed out: "the Maisons de la Culture were justified as part of a plan to promote the growth and prestige of French culture, the term 'culture' being understood in a conservative sense."<sup>3</sup> This promotion of French culture also spread abroad with the foreign tours of the companies of individual Centres Dramatiques.

The decentralisation movement in the French theatre of the nineteen-sixties, therefore, consisted not only of a lateral, or geographical, expansion into the provinces, but also a vertical delineation of character, through the triple-level system of Centres Dramatiques, Troupes Permanentes, and Maisons de la Culture. Nor were the provinces the only areas to benefit from this expansion: between 1960 and 1966, six theatres, all more or less experimental in character, opened in the suburbs of Paris. The repertoires of each of these groups of theatres are somewhat different in kind - a separate study of each will illustrate the distinctions in function and in influence which exist between them. Finally, a review of other developments in the theatre in this period will allow an overall picture to be made of the remarkable increase of theatrical activity, and of repertoire development in particular, between the years 1958 and 1968.

(b) The Centres Dramatiques Nationaux

The five original Centres, all established by 1952, were joined by the Centre Dramatique du Nord in 1960, the Comédie de Bourges in 1963, the Théâtre de la Cité de Villeurbanne in 1963, and the Théâtre de l'Est Parisien in 1966. Sarrazin remarked of the new era under Malraux's ministry:

En 1958, avec la décentralisation, le Théâtre National Populaire et les festivals, on recommence à respirer dans le théâtre.<sup>4</sup>

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3. David Bradby and John McCormick, People's Theatre, Croom Helm, 1978, p.25.

4. Maurice Sarrazin, Comédien dans une Troupe, Grenier de Toulouse, 1970, p.63.

The Grenier, preparing for its new home in Toulouse at the Théâtre Daniel Sorano which was inaugurated in 1964, stabilised its production in the city, toured less, and thereby began to develop a Théâtre Populaire Toulousain, catering for a wide variety of tastes. Its repertoire changed accordingly: in 1962, Armand Gatti was given the full use of its workshops to research his own plays and his Chroniques d'une planète provisoire and Le poisson noir were performed there in 1963 and 1964 respectively; in 1966 came a production of Brecht's The Mother, based on Maxim Gorki's novel of the same name, now produced for the Grenier by Jacques Rosner; another Gatti play, V comme Vietnam, was produced in the season 1966-7, and the following season brought productions of works by Kipphardt, Jarry, Adrien and Ionesco.

The Centre Dramatique de l'Est had also been installed in a new theatre: the Théâtre de la Comédie in Strasbourg was inaugurated in 1957, ten years after the founding of the Centre proper. Under its new director, Hubert Gignoux, the Centre Dramatique de l'Est extended its repertoire to include works by dramatists from neighbouring Germany: Brecht, Kleist, Kipphardt, and the Swiss-German, Dürrenmatt, five of whose plays were presented over the next decade together with two repeated productions. In the nineteen-sixties, audiences at the Centre Dramatique de l'Est demanded more modern plays, plays with a contemporary value or message; this request was satisfied by the introduction of the works of such authors as Synge, Wilder, Pirandello, and O'Neill.

The most notable production of René Lafforgue at the Comédie de Provence in the nineteen-sixties - he left the company in 1963 - was his The Countess Cathleen by Yeats. It was an attempt at 'total' theatre, Lafforgue's first attempts to reproduce some of the effects which he had worked on with Jean Dasté at Saint-Etienne, and it achieved considerable success. From 1963 until 1966, the newly-named Centre Dramatique du Sud-Est came under the direction of

Philippe Tiry and Jacques Fabbri, although the latter remained in Paris performing a purely administrative function. Aix became the centre for coordinating all the cultural activities of the South-East region and was therefore not concerned exclusively with the theatre. Plays by the Théâtre Quotidien de Marseille company of Michel Fontayne, including Gabriel Cousin's L'Aboyeuse et l'Automate, were performed there in 1963 and the following year, the Comédie de Saint-Etienne brought Cousin's Le Drame du Fukuryu-Marû to Aix.

At Rennes, Georges Goubert and Guy Parigot took over the Centre Dramatique de l'Ouest in 1957. Despite financial difficulties, the Centre's repertoire remained varied and even included occasional premières such as Ghelderode's Pantagleize in 1959 and Pierre Hélias's Le Roi Cado in 1960. In playing Hélias, a local Breton playwright, the C.D.O. was fulfilling one function of the Centres Dramatiques Nationaux, that of revealing regional talent. Hélias's next work, Le Grand Valet, depicting the life of a Breton peasant struggling to obtain a piece of land for himself, was presented by the C.D.O. in the 1961-2 season. A third play, La Femme de Paille, was on a more general subject and was described as a 'drame psychologique'. It formed part of the repertoire of the 1964-5 season and was well attended. However, audiences were beginning to dwindle at the C.D.O. as the repertoire became more orientated towards the avant-garde and contemporary social and political drama: in 1962, there was Beckett's Fin de Partie, in 1963 Ionesco's Tueur sans gages, in 1964 Osborn's Look back in Anger, and in 1965 Brecht's Man for Man. Although these plays were not new to France as a whole, they were unfamiliar to Rennes audiences. Frisch was an author already known to audiences at Saint-Etienne, and Goubert and Parigot introduced three of his works to their public: Biedermann and Philippe Hotz formed a double bill in the 1963-4 season, while Biography came later in 1969. Such productions as these, together with the plays of Betti, Vian,

Lorca, Dürrenmatt, Dario Fo, Audiberti, Handke, von Horvath, Livings, Havel, Kops, and Jarry, all produced in the period 1965-70, ensured that younger audiences were well-catered for and attracted to the theatre. However, the corresponding drop in audience numbers raised the question of a repertoire policy: should a Centre Dramatique National cater predominantly for audiences seeking a closer acquaintance with the classics, and leave the avant-garde and experimental drama to the newer institutions, the Maisons de la Culture? If the answer was yes, then the Centres ran the risk of becoming stultified institutions, a form which they should, and would, refuse to adopt. Goubert and Parigot's policy was therefore courageous and interesting - especially as it appeared to be competing with the newly-formed Maison de la Culture de Caen nearby, which, since its inception in 1963, had presented works by such authors as Brecht, Foissy, Vitrac, Yendt, Boyer, Frisch, and Liger. Whatever might be said of the policy of the C.D.O., it was one of the few Centres which concentrated on giving its audience an eclectic and theatrically educational repertoire.

Of all the first five Centres Dramatiques, it was the Comédie de Saint-Etienne whose repertoire changed the most radically in the nineteen-sixties. Dasté's last production of a Shakespeare play had been in 1958 and in subsequent seasons he regularly produced Molière, but his repertoire is significant for its introduction of the works of the newer French dramatists: Jamiague in 1959, Vinaver in 1960, Cousin in 1962 and 1963, Gatti in 1966, Atlan in 1967, Audiberti in 1968, and Arrabal in 1969.

Jean Dasté s'adresse tout spécialement à un public ouvrier, préoccupé par les problèmes que pose l'actualité. A ce public, il présente volontiers des oeuvres représentatives du théâtre politique contemporain: Les Coréens, Le Drame du Fukuryu-Marû, Un homme seul. Brecht est fréquemment joué. Grâce aux efforts de Jean Dasté, un certain nombre d'ouvriers a compris que le théâtre pourrait être à la fois une distraction pour la masse et un instrument de libération.<sup>5</sup>

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5. Paul Surer; 50 ans de Théâtre, Société d'edition d'enseignement supérieur, Paris, 1969, p.211.

Other authors whose works featured in the repertoire more than once were Brecht, O'Casey, Gogol, and Frisch. From these statistics, it is evident that Dasté was aiming to present drama with a social or political commitment; Dasté's own account of these years substantiates this view:

Nous sentions la nécessité (en 1958) de jouer des oeuvres d'auteurs vivants. Nous avions été jusque-là trop absorbés par la conquête d'un public (les tournées nous éloignaient de Saint-Etienne plusieurs mois dans la saison) pour avoir la possibilité d'attirer en permanence de jeunes écrivains. Conscients de ce manque, nous décidons de faire tous nos efforts pour présenter, chaque saison, au moins une création au public.<sup>6</sup>

Two points of interest arise from this statement: first, that Dasté found himself too concerned about seeking an audience - suggesting that he would have preferred to create his own repertoire from choice and not out of necessity; second, that he now fully intended to act on a permanent basis as an outlet for new authors. Dasté's zeal as an innovator and experimental director had in no way diminished since his arrival in Saint-Etienne: in addition to their dramatic activities at Saint-Etienne, the Comédie had played during the summer of 1958 in a large circus tent, reminding Dasté of his period spent with the Copiaus in Burgundy; a young troupe presented a play for children in 1960 called Les musiques magiques; Dasté himself continued his pastime of creating masks which represented politicians frequently seen on television - at the same time he acknowledged their importance in drama (especially in the recent production of Brecht's The Caucasian Chalk Circle) and thus continued a tradition of the commedia dell'arte which was to be extended a few years later by Ariane Mnouchkine's company, Le Théâtre du Soleil.

After the disbanding of the second troupe, Les Tréteaux, in 1963, Dasté confessed

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6. Dasté, Voyage d'un comédien, Stock, 1977, p.71.

Je commence à comprendre que j'éprouve plus d'ennui que de joie à diriger la Compagnie. Je suis tiré, entraîné vers quelque chose qui ne correspond pas à ce qui est pour moi la raison d'être d'une troupe: une ouverture vers un théâtre populaire dans un esprit nouveau.<sup>7</sup>

He regretted the impossibility of working over a period of time with a resident dramatist; he felt he understood why some experienced producers such as Planchon turned to writing themselves. Such sentiments clearly foreshadow the development which French theatre was to make in the post-1968 era, namely, the various attempts at the collective creation of plays by an author, actors and a director.

André Reybaz, who directed the new Centre Dramatique du Nord during the decade 1960-1970, generally based his repertoire on the tried classics - Shakespeare, in particular, featured regularly in his seasons - and it was only occasionally that twentieth-century authors' works were produced. One outstanding exception to this pattern was the production of Armand Salacrou's finely written tragedy of working-class life in Le Havre at the turn of the century, Boulevard Durand, which played during the two seasons from 1961 to 1963 for a total of 141 performances, a record for any one play at the Centre Dramatique du Nord.

At the Comédie de Bourges over the same period of time, Gabriel Monnet ventured further into the unknown after his first two relatively staid seasons. Monnet particularly favoured the work of Pierre Halet, presenting his La Provocation in 1963, Le Cheval Caillou in 1964, Le Montreur de Galaxies in 1966, (brought back in 1967), and Votre silence, Cooper in 1968. He also experimented with many montages of works by poets and dramatists, allowing his actors to take the initiative in these creations.

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7. *ibid.*, p.73.



Ainsi ces artistes - les comédiens - si fortement guidés qu'ils en sont souvent tenus en lisière, trouvent-ils, grâce à la compréhension de leurs aînés, une possibilité de découvrir en eux les talents où la création a sa part.<sup>8</sup>

In this respect, Monnet's encouragement to the younger generation of actors, like that of Dasté to the emerging new generation of dramatists, indicated a change of attitude on the part of theatre directors towards the creative function itself. Monnet, steeped in the creed of cultural decentralisation since his meeting with Jean Dasté in 1945 in Grenoble, was particularly successful as both administrator and director of the Centre Dramatique de Bourges and, at the same time, of the local Maison de la Culture. His philosophy therefore complied with the aims of the new institutions and aimed to spread culture - in its broadest sense - to the greatest number of people possible.

Roger Planchon's individualistic approach to popular theatre through a repertoire characterised by socially-conscious plays continued through the nineteen-sixties at the Théâtre de la Cité de Villeurbanne. The first half of the decade was marked by new, democratised productions of the classics - in particular, of Molière, Marivaux, and Shakespeare - , while the second half revealed Planchon's interest in developing his own plays in order to fulfil his aims.

Il se trouve que, seul théâtre de créations existant à ce jour en province, [le Théâtre de la Cité de Villeurbanne] est aussi le seul à se vouloir populaire; à croire que décentralisation et démocratisation vont de pair.<sup>9</sup>

This article by André Gisselbrecht explains that Shakespeare and Molière were chosen for the early seasons - from 1957, after the installation of Planchon's theatre in Villeurbanne -

8. Temkine, op.cit., p.224.

9. André Gisselbrecht, quoted in Itinéraire de Roger Planchon, L'Arche, 1970, p.43.

as a result of an opinion poll distributed in local factories, asking what plays should be performed. Planchon's treatment of Henry IV as "une grande leçon politique sur un rythme de western" showed Shakespeare's potential as a popular dramatist.

Henri IV est un spectacle complet: le burlesque et l'obscénité y voisinent avec la violence, l'attendrissement et le tragique; le mouvement y est tel que même l'habitué des cinémas de quartier n'est pas trop dépaysé.<sup>10</sup>

Bernard Dort's appreciation of Planchon's work illustrates the latter's individuality:

Ses efforts pour la création d'un théâtre totalement populaire ne doivent pas avorter, comme tant d'autres. Nul metteur en scène de sa génération n'est, plus que Planchon, capable de mener pareille tâche à bien... Il est déjà en train de révolutionner le plateau et la compréhension que nous pouvions avoir d'oeuvres archi-connues.<sup>11</sup>

Planchon's individual search for a popular style of theatre made him perhaps the most important director of the decentralisation movement in terms of theatre repertoire; his eventual decision to write his own plays was the culmination of previous attempts to democratise known texts for modern audiences. His final appointment as director of the new T.N.P., the label transferred to his own Théâtre de la Cité de Villeurbanne, represented the apotheosis of his career as the director of a theatre which could justly be called 'popular'. The full appreciation of Planchon's work in the decentralisation movement is outside the scope of this study, but Planchon's development towards a fusion between his rôle as author and director in the later nineteen-sixties prefigures those similar developments in dramatic creativity in the post-1968 period.

The last of the four new Centres Dramatiques to be set up in this phase of development in the decentralisation movement was the Théâtre de l'Est Parisien, appointed to its

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10. *ibid.*, p.46.

11. *ibid.*, p.64.

new rôle in 1966. The history of the first twenty-two years of this theatre, from 1950 when Guy Rétoré created his company called La Guilde, to 1972 when its successor the Théâtre de l'Est Parisien (T.E.P.) was designated a Théâtre National, is, in a most remarkably accurate way, a microcosm of the whole development of popular decentralised theatre in France during the two decades of the nineteen-fifties and nineteen-sixties. Both its achievements and its setbacks reflect the vicissitudes of national policy towards the theatre in this period; the energy and dedication of its director during the whole of its existence reflect those same virtues in numerous other animateurs in the other new subsidised theatres; the development in the variety of the activities offered by the T.E.P. to its members, and the latter's increasing support, both numerically and artistically, of these activities, illustrate in an exemplary way the achievements of popular theatre and typify the philosophy of the decentralisation movement itself. For all these reasons, a closer study of the work of the T.E.P. is valuable for the representative picture it gives of the development of the new subsidised theatres in France in the postwar decades.

(c) The Théâtre de l'Est Parisien

The early history of Rétoré's company has been adequately, if sketchily, drawn elsewhere,<sup>12</sup> but the salient features of the work of La Guilde are worth repeating, as they demonstrate the struggle of many of the young, emerging companies of the time for State recognition and financial subsidy which would put their activities on a guaranteed, stable, and permanent basis. During this period of the nineteen-fifties, the larger Centres Dramatiques had already been established by the Direction Générale des Arts et des Lettres, and Jean Vilar was achieving international renown for his work with the T.N.P. and at the Avignon Festival. Indeed, Vilar's work stood as the model for many of the new theatre directors whether in the field of administration, production methods, or choice of repertoire.

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12. Philippe Madral, Le Théâtre hors les Murs, Seuil, 1969.

The problem of finding a theatre to play in, a problem common to most of the early companies, bedevilled the efforts of the T.E.P. during the fifties: la rue Pelleport from 1951 to 1958, and la rue du Retrait from 1958 to 1960, both in the twentieth arrondissement of Paris, provided church halls which served inadequately for rehearsals and performances by La Guilde. Finally, the Ministère d'État chargé des Affaires Culturelles acquired a disused cinema, Le Zénith, for Rétoré who, in 1962, was appointed director of the newly-named Théâtre de l'Est Parisien, a fully-fledged Maison de la Culture which first opened its doors to the public in October, 1963. Since 1967, the T.E.P. has been expecting to move again into new premises but still today, sixteen years after its establishment in the former cinema in the rue Malte-Brun, financial cutbacks have prevented its re-siting in the Square Séverine which had been designated for it by the local council in the late nineteen-sixties.

In common with other incipient theatre companies of the period, La Guilde won the Grand Prix at the Concours des Jeunes Compagnies. Its production of Jean Cosmos' Les Grenadiers de la Reine in 1957 not only represented the first major success of Rétoré's troupe, but it brought them the confidence to expand their activities beyond drama production. The same year, an experimental cinema group - Art et Essai - was instituted; in 1958, inspired by the peripheral activities of the T.N.P., whose production of Molière's l'Etourdi was put on by invitation at the rue du Retrait theatre - named by the group with pride but without pomposity Théâtre de Ménilmontant - , there began the first of a series of 'soirées poétiques'; a year later, the first of the future T.E.P.'s musical activities took place with a performance by the Quatuor Pro Arte.

When the Théâtre de Ménilmontant closed its doors to La Guilde - their lease was not extended - , the company toured the eastern suburbs of Paris, playing in cinemas and municipal halls. Jean Cosmos' own recollections of this period in the

history of the T.E.P. reveal an inevitable nostalgia for a time of struggle, but his praise for the dedication and vision of Guy Rétoré is unstinting:

Le nuage de notre jeunesse continue de flotter entre Pelleport et le Retrait. L'expérience eût pu se réduire à cela, une certaine nostalgie d'ancien combattant. En réalité, elle a débouché sur un fait social dû à la conviction obstinée de son créateur: le Théâtre de l'Est Parisien existe en parfaite harmonie avec son environnement.<sup>13</sup>

The history of La Guilde, preceding that of the Théâtre de l'Est Parisien which it became, is characterised by the problems of finding a permanent home, of being forced to play in temporary halls unsuitable for dramatic performance, and by a general and disquieting uncertainty about the future. However, Rétoré was not one to give up easily; success at the Concours des Jeunes Compagnies and the introduction of artistic activities outside drama mark a tendency which was to be continued in the later T.E.P. of the nineteen-sixties.

In terms of repertoire, too, Rétoré began as he intended to continue. Like Vilar, he soon discovered the public's enthusiasm for Shakespeare and Molière. Of the ten plays performed between 1951 and 1962, that is, the complete repertoire of La Guilde before its State recognition as the T.E.P.;, two were by Shakespeare - The Life and Death of King John and Macbeth - , and two by Molière - Le Médecin malgré lui and L'Avare - , while the T.N.P. presented L'Etourdi on tour in 1958 at the Théâtre de Ménilmontant. Jean Cosmos, who joined La Guilde in 1953, wrote La Fille du Roi which was performed in the 1954 season, and adapted Farquhar's play The Recruiting Officer (Les Grenadiers de la Reine) which won for La Guilde the Concours des Jeunes Compagnies. He also adapted Macbeth for the 1959 season, thereby establishing himself as an important and creative collaborator

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13. Jean Cosmos: De la Guilde au T.E.P., in T.E.P. 25 ans de Théâtre, Paris, 1976.

for the company. The remaining plays of the repertoire demonstrate the same eclecticism and courage which were to be the hallmarks of the later T.E.P. repertoire: a classical foreign dramatist: Ruiz de Alarcón - whose work prefigures Molière in content and style - , a modern foreign dramatist: Luigi Pirandello, a classical French dramatist: Musset, and a modern French (unknown) dramatist: Jean Chatenet.

Philippe Madral pays tribute to the efforts of Rétoré's La Guilde whose successes were achieved in the face of considerable State indifference in the early years:

L'histoire de La Guilde montre que le phénomène d'une Maison de la Culture dans ce secteur déshérité de Paris, s'il est la conséquence d'une décision ministérielle, a été aussi et surtout le résultat d'un long travail en profondeur mené par un homme et son équipe au sein d'une population avec laquelle ils parvinrent à établir des liens spirituels et affectifs. L'Etat ne suscita pas l'expérience: ce n'est qu'après coup qu'il intervint pour entériner une situation de fait caractérisée par une prise de conscience de la population de l'Est parisien devant le problème de la Culture.<sup>14</sup>

A detailed study of the repertoire of the decade 1963-1973, during which time the T.E.P. operated first as a Maison de la Culture, then as a Centre Dramatique National, will reveal Rétoré as a director with a social aim, presenting plays with contemporary relevance and directing a theatre which challenges opinions and stimulates social and political discussion.

Aujourd'hui, il devient démodé de dire qu'on a 'des préoccupations sociales'. Tout à coup, tout le monde veut faire du 'théâtre politique'... Bien sûr, le théâtre a une fonction sociale qui va au-delà de la représentation proprement dite. Bien sûr, un spectacle n'est pas qu'une oeuvre d'art. Mais ce qui me paraît plus important encore, c'est de faire un théâtre de contestation, de rechercher un théâtre qui divise, qui inquiète. Parler de 'théâtre politique' m'ennuie, parce que le terme recouvre des choses bien différentes: Céline ou Brasillach auraient pu aussi faire du 'théâtre politique'!<sup>15</sup>

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14. Philippe Madral, op.cit., p.19;

15. ibid., p.20.

The first season of the T.E.P., Maison de la Culture, in 1963-4, included two of the previous production successes: Shakespeare's King John, and Musset's Les Caprices de Marianne. Jean Cosmos' adaptation of Gogol's The Coat (Le Manteau) and Marivaux's L'Ile des Esclaves ran for 51 and 41 performances respectively, equalling the number of performances of the previously tried pieces. The remainder of the repertoire consisted of Goldoni's La Locandiera (23 performances), and Eugene O'Neill's The Hairy Ape (Le Singe velu) by the visiting Comédie de l'Est. The range of activities undertaken by the T.E.P. in this first season was remarkable: it included a recital by Georges Brassens, the appearance of a visiting ballet company, a continuation of the experimental cinema presentations Art et Essai begun by La Guilde, and the launching of TEP-Magazine by Luc Decaunes, a regular single-evening event which brought to the T.E.P. audiences personalities from all branches of the performing arts, literature, politics, economics, sociology, medicine, and sport. These evenings often took the form of a dialogue between guests and audience, so providing an invaluable link between the creator and his public, which in turn promoted a closer rapprochement with the work of art itself. Six months after opening its doors, in October 1963, the T.E.P. was obliged to stop enrolling new members: its membership already stood at sixteen thousand.

The T.E.P.'s second season, 1964-5, brought back the former productions of Macbeth and La Locandiera and added to the repertoire Arden of Faversham (adapted by Jean Cosmos), and Cosmos' Monsieur Alexandre, a comedy based on Ben Jonson's Volpone. The Teatro Stabile of Turin paid a visit to the T.E.P. with productions of L'Anconitaine and Bilora by Ruzante. In an article published in the T.E.P. monthly magazine<sup>16</sup>, Jean Jacquot pointed out that a total of thirteen Elizabethan plays had been performed in France since 1892. This was probably

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16. T.E.P., mensuel du T.E.P., no.11, décembre 1964.

too few, but the plays were representative of the age and were drawn from a large number of dramatists. Besides Shakespeare, Marlowe, Ford, Haywood, Jonson, Dekker, Webster, and Marston had been performed, while adaptations had frequently been made by French writers for the French stage. Rétoré's introduction of Arden of Faversham therefore stood in the tradition of Paul Fort at the Théâtre d'Art, of Lugné-Poe at the Oeuvre, of Copeau, Dullin and Vilar. Jacquot found Elizabethan drama useful for two reasons: first, the work of Shakespeare not only derived from the pen of a genius, but is explained by the social background to the era; second, this type of drama allows both a producer and an audience to discover something new in the theatre. It would be unflattering to assume from this statement that novelty is its own reward for M. Jacquot; we may prefer to interpret the suggestion of drama as a means of discovery in terms of character-interpretation and acting style. If this is so, then Elizabethan drama provided postwar French theatre with the means to put into effect the new dramatic style which had been learnt from Brecht's Berliner Ensemble in the mid-nineteen-fifties, that is to say, a mixture of acting styles in a single performance, technical innovation to assist the action, the use of music and dance to enhance the dialogue and argument, and the combination of humour, tragedy, satire, and didacticism to whet the audience's appetite continuously. Guy Rétoré explains his choice of Arden of Faversham in particular, and the Elizabethan drama in general, in these terms:

Si nous revenons volontiers au théâtre du XVI<sup>e</sup> siècle anglais, c'est qu'il nous paraît exprimer avec un bonheur exceptionnel les aspects les plus secrets de la nature humaine confrontée à des situations qui ne sont pas sans parenté avec celles que nous propose notre époque. Des caractères communs rapprochent ces deux moments de la conscience humaine. Au XVI<sup>e</sup> siècle, les imaginations s'ouvrent aux innombrables perspectives qu'offre la découverte du Nouveau Monde, avec tous les bouleversements économiques et sociaux qu'elle va provoquer. Les hommes de cette époque sont à la ligne de partage de deux univers, l'un qui s'effondre sous la pression



des découvertes, des curiosités nouvelles de l'esprit, l'autre, encore à créer et dans lequel la vision que l'homme a de lui-même sera modifiée, agrandie. Epoque incertaine, donc, comme la nôtre qui connaît aussi ses bouleversements, ses révolutions, ses remises en question, conséquences des découvertes scientifiques qui transforment l'idée que nous avons du monde et de nous-mêmes. 17

The renewal of interest in Elizabethan drama at this time, and of Shakespeare's plays in particular, was due in part to the occurrence of the quatercentenary of Shakespeare's birth in 1964.

It is clear from Rétoré's contributions to the monthly magazine T.E.P. that he had not only formulated a programme of socially relevant plays for his audiences, but that, more important still, he was prepared to analyse the reasons for his choice of repertoire and so involve the public in the issues presented in those plays. T.E.P. broadened and developed the discussions by publishing articles which linked the dramatic material to the public's everyday experience. Elsewhere, Rétoré spoke of the apparent social consciousness of his audiences vis-à-vis the productions at the T.E.P.:

Nous avons noté nous-mêmes une 'participation', une 'sensibilisation' plus intense du public aux représentations du Manteau, par exemple, qu'à celles des Caprices de Marianne. 18

The theme of Monsieur Alexandre, money, served as an example of that kind of theatre which appealed to the contemporary preoccupations of the spectators. Boulevard theatre did not satisfy such audiences; the idle and futile life of the young Octave in Les Caprices de Marianne found little sympathy with the people of Ménilmontant, and Rétoré was certain that for the theatre to have significance for his suburban audience, he had to 'penser moderne'.

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17. T.E.P., no.10, novembre 1964.

18. Guy Rétoré, in Informations Sociales (Mensuel de l'Action Sociale), Paris, février 1965, p.39.

Il faut que le théâtre soit le reflet des soucis (de notre public), de ses aspirations, de son ambiance d'existence ou de celle de son temps.<sup>19</sup>

Part of the programme of the TEP-Magazine evening on January 7th 1965 was devoted to the performance, by Françoise Ponty and Bernard Frémaux, of one scene from Gabriel Cousin's Le Drame du Fukuryu-Maru, a play dealing with the dangers of nuclear fallout.

The following season brought a production of Measure for Measure, directed by Guy Rétoré, Lesage's Turcaret, and Labiche's Le Voyage de Monsieur Perrichon: this emphasis on comedy was a tacit admission that he could not sustain high audience numbers with a programme entirely devoted to modern authors. He conceded that the public was to a certain extent conservative in its approach to anything new or unknown in the field of drama so the subscription system proved a considerable help in carrying along the contemporary and innovative works he wanted so desperately to introduce into his repertoire: Turcaret and Macbeth, for example, compensated for the unknown Arden of Faversham and M. Alexandre. Yet there must be pioneers in theatre production and selection of texts; Rétoré acknowledges his own debt, and that of many French theatre directors, to Copeau and Dullin in the first place, but mainly to Jean Vilar and the Centres Dramatiques, for introducing Shakespeare to French audiences.

Another step forward for the T.E.P. was made in 1966: it was designated a Centre Dramatique National. In talking of the rôle of the Centres, Rétoré remarked that their function was to "mettre à la disposition de tous les chefs d'oeuvre hérités du passé, pour les faire connaître et surtout les faire aimer comme nous les aimons nous-mêmes...mais, témoigner pour ce même temps qui est le nôtre, qui est celui de nos contemporains, demeure également notre rôle."<sup>20</sup>

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19. *ibid.*, p.39.

20. Guy Rétoré, Classiques de demain, théâtre d'aujourd'hui? T.E.P. no.22, janvier 1966.

Thanks partly to the increased budget allowed to Rétoré, the 1966-67 season produced the first and the most hotly criticised social drama in a series of such plays put on in the following seasons by the T.E.P. The play was John Arden's Live like Pigs (Vous vivrez comme des porcs), which deals with the social problems arising from the incursion of a family of gypsies into a relatively settled housing estate community. It aroused the approval of Bernard Dort, but the indignation of many critics who thought the piece inappropriate for the repertoire of a State-subsidised Centre Dramatique. It provoked more hostile reaction from the critics than any other play performed by La Guilde. At the time of the production, T.E.P. published an article on living conditions in France's H.L.M. blocks, while Rétoré himself defended his choice of the play by stating:

Il faut donner la priorité à la création d'oeuvres contemporaines. Car comment inquiéter mieux qu'avec des oeuvres contemporaines, comme Vous vivrez comme des porcs?<sup>21</sup>

In commenting that it was plainly wrong to portray the working class man as necessarily good and faithful in his personal morality, his marriage, and his politics, Rétoré was tilting at the frequently misrepresented tendentiousness of Brechtian theatre which provincial audiences had been subjected to during the previous decade. Plagiarists of Brecht's style and subject-matter were equally blameworthy:

[Vous vivrez comme des porcs] est une pièce qui montre le conflit entre le Lumpenproletariat et les travailleurs. Il est certain que ce n'est pas le Lumpenproletariat qui fera la Révolution, mais il est non moins certain que les travailleurs, que nous approuvons dans leurs luttes sociales, ont aussi des attitudes très mesquines dans leurs comportements quotidiens, des attitudes démobilisatrices, et qu'ils sont souvent écrasés par la société de consommation. Il me semble donc plus profitable de contester leurs comportements dans ces situations que de faire comme tous les sousbrechtiens usant de démagogie en direction du public populaire.<sup>22</sup>

Bernard Dort saw the play's strength not so much in the intensity of its hero, nor in its contemporary relevance, but in Arden's rich and complex dramatic structure. For Dort, Arden's play

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21. Philippe Madral, op.cit., p.22.

22. ibid. p.21.

stood as a perfect example of what social drama should comprise and what effect it should create. This play can be seen as a key work of the period, despite the fact that it was not performed by any other company in the Centres Dramatiques, nor revived by Rétoré in later seasons at the T.E.P. Its significance is as a model social drama, containing contemporary relevance to audiences and provoking an awareness of social-cum-political problems in a vigorously dramatic form. Dort says of the extraordinary vitality of the play:

Elle naît précisément de ces décalages entre l'époque figurée et l'époque évoquée, entre l'individu et le groupe, entre les motivations et les actes etc. Par là, le spectateur lui-même se trouve provoqué, ébranlé, menacé et amené à réfléchir sur sa propre situation dans la société - car c'est lui qui est, en définitive, l'objet du grand jeu théâtral de John Arden.<sup>23</sup>

Rétoré continued his policy of seeking new plays and new playwrights with a production of O'Casey's 1928 play The Silver Tassie (La Coupe d'Argent) which, like Gogol's The Coat and Arden's Live like Pigs, was another French première of a foreign work by the T.E.P. O'Casey stands fourteenth in the list of authors most staged in the theatres of the decentralisation period; no fewer than twelve of his plays were presented in France, the majority of them (nine) for the first time in the nineteen-sixties. The Silver Tassie ran for thirty-eight performances at the T.E.P., two more than Corneille's Le Menteur and Marivaux's Les Sincères, which completed the repertoire for that season. A revival of the Gogol play ran for twenty-seven performances during the same season.

O'Casey's The Silver Tassie, although set at the time of the 1914-18 war, posed the problem of Man destroyed by battle. In its condemnation of War in general, the play evoked memories of the conflicts in Indo-China and Algeria, recently terminated for the French, but revived by the continuing struggle in Vietnam. Number 36 of the magazine T.E.P. reminded its readers of this seemingly permanent state of affairs in the world and mentioned a production of Armand Gatti's V comme Vietnam currently

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23. Bernard Dort, Un théâtre de décalage, in T.E.P., no 29, octobre 1966.

playing at the Grenier de Toulouse and subsequently invited to the T.E.P. in June 1967. V comme Vietnam had an even greater significance for the Grenier than its mere topicality: it was the first time that French trade unions had asked a writer to produce a play on a contemporary theme and, in addition, sponsored its tour of France. By its action, the Collectif Intersyndical Universitaire d'Action pour la Paix au Vietnam showed its intention of using theatre to raise the level of public awareness in the war.

The T.E.P.'s own contribution to such public debate and awareness took the form of a production of Aimé Césaire's Une Saison au Congo at the beginning of the next season, 1967-8, while TEP-Magazine organised an evening on 17th October 1967 at which specialists on China, the U.S.A., Greece, and the U.S.S.R. discussed current world problems with members of the audience. Luc Decaunes expressed the philosophy of the T.E.P. towards art and society and their common goals in an article in the house magazine:

N'y a-t-il pas quelque paradoxe, en effet, à parler d'art et de beauté, de pensée et d'harmonie, ou tout simplement de bonheur, puisque la culture est un art de vivre, dans le vacarme meurtrier que font à tous nos horizons la violence, la haine, la bêtise? ... En conséquence, considérant que la vocation de notre TEP-Magazine est une prise de conscience aussi large que possible de l'actualité qui nous concerne tous, j'ai choisi de l'ouvrir tout entier à quelques-uns des problèmes majeurs qui se posent aux hommes d'aujourd'hui, et d'inviter ainsi nos adhérents à faire le point avec nous. 24

Another debate - or, in this case, a series of debates - led directly to the composition of a play in 1977 which had its première at the T.E.P. in March 1968. Armand Gatti's Les Treize Soleils de la Rue Saint-Blaise was the product of a series of discussions with T.E.P. theatregoers, brought together at Rétoré's initiative to reply to the question: "Quels sont les problèmes actuels qui selon vous devraient être représentés sur scène?" The different points of view expressed by thirteen people about a newspaper report announcing the imminent destruction

of the Charonne district in the twentieth arrondissement in Paris - the area in which the T.E.P. stands - , form the basis of this play. The psychological interaction of the personalities is as fascinating as the social drama of the reported elimination of the rue Saint-Blaise, representative of the district as a whole. Optimism prevails at the end, however, when, despite memories of the failed revolutionary aspirations of their Communard predecessors, these local inhabitants see glimmers of hope for improving the lives of ordinary working people.

Gatti's play ran for thirty-one performances; the season was completed with Pirandello's On ne sait jamais tout, which had forty performances, and Gogol's The Government Inspector (Le Revizor) performed by the visiting Comédie de Saint-Etienne. In an article published in T.E.P., this play's producer, Edmond Tamiz, wrote:

Pourquoi jouer Le Revizor? Parce que les fonctionnaires (et les hauts...), parce que la bureaucratie, parce que, comme dit Maxime Gorki, "Parmi nous se trouvent des morts qui n'ont pas été enterrés. Ils n'ont pas fini de boire, de manger, de se promener dans la rue et de respirer, mais ils empoisonnent tout autour d'eux par une odeur fétide de décomposition!" Parce que tout cela aujourd'hui encore, vit et légifère; parce que, enfin, Gogol nous a légué un chef d'oeuvre... Fonctionnaires, bureaucratie, respect du pouvoir établi, voilà ce qu'il faut balayer...25

The events which swept France six months after this article was published appear now as the predictable breaking of the bureaucratic chains which had bound and straitjacketed so many aspects of French life under Gaullism. Guy Rétoré's policy of broadening his repertoire to include plays of contemporary validity seemed to be totally justified; after three months of silence as the theatre was caught up in the general wave of strikes which crossed France that summer, T.E.P. published this editorial:

Les soubresauts de la vie qui se fait et les tempêtes du temps y pénètrent à pleines portes et la secouent rudement, au risque peut-être du naufrage. Du moins

n'y a-t-on point loisir de s'endormir sur le mol oreiller des béatitudes esthétiques. Dans les dures mains de la nécessité, il n'est pas de place pour la 'culture à la papa'.<sup>26</sup>

Rétoré's expansionist policy continued. Turcaret was taken to the United States; the T.E.P. invited the Piccolo Teatro from Milan to play Goldoni's Harlequin, the Servant of two Masters (Arlequin, serviteur de deux maîtres); the most performed play of the following season was the première of a piece by an East German political dramatist, Peter Hacks, entitled The Battle of Lobositz (La bataille de Lobositz); TEP-Magazine was established on a permanent basis, and, in 1969, Rétoré produced his first Brecht play, The Threepenny Opera (L'Opéra de Quat'Sous) which ran for a record-breaking fifty-nine performances.

The diversity and wealth of Rétoré's repertoire, evident already in the nineteen-sixties - and Live like Pigs marked a turning-point in his adherence to a philosophy which sought to emphasise the problems of contemporary society - , continued into the nineteen-seventies. The predominant features of his repertoires have been the presence of a large number of works of contemporary foreign dramatists and the absence of the French Classical Theatre. Up to 1973, the T.E.P. never put on a Greek drama, nor the Parisian avant-garde of the nineteen-fifties nor, in contrast to other decentralised theatres, did it ever perform the works of Montherlant, Giraudoux, or Sartre. Claudel was also a notable absentee, yet it is perhaps not remarkable that Rétoré has not favoured either strictly religious or poetic works, but preferred those more directly, that is, dramatically and intellectually, assimilable by his audiences.

Rétoré has therefore been faithful to his earlier stated creed of wishing to portray socially relevant theatre; he constantly sought the playwright who would be "le porte-parole de notre époque"; the most important freedom in the theatre is that which leaves poets free to write "une dramaturgie qui traite des problèmes de notre société, qui porte témoignage sur notre civilisation"; his function as a director is to select

plays which would "choquer notre public, l'inquiéter même afin qu'il conserve sa vigilance"<sup>27</sup> For Rétoré, all theatre is doubly political: first, because, in an insidious way, it tends to make an audience believe in the normality of the moral behaviour portrayed on stage by a class which, in fact, is merely demonstrating its own hypocrisy; second, because, when it reveals the trappings of theatrical illusion, it is at the same time unmasking the half-truths of society itself. The latter aspect of theatre was especially evident in the T.E.P. production of Brecht's Threepenny Opera in the 1969-70 season, which, with the subsequent production, in 1972, of his Saint Joan of the Stockyards (Sainte Jeanne des Abattoirs), came at a time when Brechtian theatre was undergoing a crisis of identity in France.

If, as Rétoré thought, it is the rôle of theatre to provoke thought, to shock its audiences, to ask questions about the state of society, then theatre must necessarily deal with political and social problems - just as Greek theatre had done. Theatre thus appeals to the dignity of its audience to find the most humane solution to those problems.

Toute pièce est donc bien quête, interrogation, mais non par rapport au théâtre: par rapport à la vie!<sup>28</sup>

It follows too that the producer - and Rétoré produced all but four of the plays presented by the T.E.P. in the nineteen-sixties - has a particular responsibility towards his public. To please and to entertain his audiences is not sufficient - it was never Molière's intention either - it is his duty to make a play speak in the most direct way to its spectators and, in addition, to make those spectators want to listen to what the author has to say.

Les exigences du public doivent rejoindre celles du metteur en scène, dont la tâche consiste à éclairer l'aventure humaine de façon à ce que chacun y reconnaisse les données de sa propre existence.<sup>29</sup>

Réroré's achievements in the pursuit of these ideals and in the practice of the repertoire at his Théâtre de l'Est

27. Madral, op.cit., pp.21-24.

28. Guy Rétoré, in T.E.P. 25 ans de Théâtre, p.4.

29. *ibid.*, p.2.



Parisien places him in the forefront of the directors of social drama in the new subsidised theatres of France. Recognition by the State of the activities and achievements of Rétoré's company came in 1972 with the promotion of the T.E.P. to the status of Théâtre National.

(d) The Troupes Permanentes

Although differing in status from the Centres Dramatiques, the Troupes Permanentes, of which there were ten throughout France at the end of the nineteen-sixties, operated similar programmes to, and possessed the same philosophy as, their senior counterparts to whose rank they all aspired. Their more itinerant nature, however, allowed them access to different audiences - such as local schools and small communities - and their resulting adaptability led to simpler sets and more modest presentations.

The Théâtre de Bourgogne at Beaune, one of the five Troupes Permanentes appointed in 1960, provided imaginative repertoires which included not only the classics, but also modern French works by Sartre, Camus, Obaldia, and Pinget. When Guy Foissy became an administrator of the theatre in the mid-nineteen-sixties, his own plays, L'Entreprise and En regardant tomber les murs, were produced. One of the most successful productions was Brecht's Die Kleinbürgerhochzeit (The petty-bourgeois wedding) which played for three seasons with a total number of 137 performances. Given that this was only the second Brecht play to be presented by the Théâtre de Bourgogne in the period 1955 to 1973, and in view of the fact that this was the only production of Die Kleinbürgerhochzeit in any decentralised theatre in that period, this play proves the experimental and innovative nature of the new theatres.

Other Troupes Permanentes helped to foster the new writing talents of the nineteen-sixties: the Comédie de Nantes performed Georges Michel's La Promenade du Dimanche in 1967 and 1968, the Théâtre Populaire des Flandres played Michel de Ghelderode, Foissy, and Arrabal, the Comédie de Caen played Foissy and Bouchaud, and the Théâtre du Cothurne's programme included works by Arrabal, de Ghelderode, Audiberti, Obaldia, Vauthier and Guilloux.

The statutes of the Centres Dramatiques and the Troupes Permanentes stipulated that they should produce four new plays each per season. After November 1965, this provision was changed to three new plays, of which one was to be classical, another a première. The minimum number of performances was to be 110 per season for each type of theatre: the overall pattern of their repertoires was therefore similar, the only major difference being in the smaller subsidies allowed to the Troupes Permanentes to fulfil those conditions.

It was to the credit of the government that it should envisage such a large number of cultural centres under the Fourth Plan; that it should also reward directors and companies which had established a local reputation was an additional demonstration of its foresight and liberal thinking.

En effet, à partir de 1961, la politique de décentralisation culturelle prend une nouvelle orientation. Le IV<sup>e</sup> Plan envisage la création d'une vingtaine de Maisons de la Culture qu'animeront les troupes théâtrales partout où l'implantation des unes et des autres coïncide, les activités nouvelles profitant de l'élan déjà donné.<sup>30</sup>

Through these measures, many directors were given the means to finance the works of contemporary authors and to experiment with new production techniques. However, the inherent dangers of receiving a subsidy from certain sources, such as local authorities, had to be taken into account in such ventures. Municipalities believed they held a proprietary interest in their local theatre, whose directors frequently clashed with local politicians, and the result was often a soured relationship between the community and its cultural providers. This was the case with one Troupe Permanente, the Théâtre Quotidien de Marseille, whose history is worth a closer study for this very reason. The demise of the T.Q.M. was a great blow not only to its inspired director, Michel Fontayne, but also to those dramatists - including Gabriel Cousin - who had been encouraged by his efforts.

(e) The Théâtre Quotidien de Marseille

The Théâtre Quotidien de Marseille no longer exists. It  
 30. Temkine, op.cit., p.186.

survived for eight years, from 1956 until 1963 when it succumbed to massive debts and the indifference, even hostility, of the local council of Marseille. Yet it is still ranked as one of the finest examples of enlightened, pioneering and ambitious theatres of the decentralisation period, one which regularly drew critics of all persuasions from Paris, attracted the talents of numerous writers, directors and actors, and aroused so much interest that, after only six years' existence, Théâtre Populaire (no.45) devoted twenty pages to its work. L'Association Technique pour l'Action Culturelle recognised in Michel Fontayne, the T.Q.M.'s director, one of its principal founders, and said: "ne pas mentionner dans cet ouvrage<sup>31</sup> les spectacles créés par le Théâtre Quotidien de Marseille serait passer sous silence une étape importante de la décentralisation".

Michel Fontayne, who had studied under Charles Dullin during the latter's final year at the Conservatoire Maubel, was conscious not only of the necessity of directorial energy, but had learnt too the equal importance of design and technical research in theatre production. Imbued with the spirit of Dullin's teaching, Fontayne set up a collective of actors, and in 1954 toured his native Languedoc and Provence with medieval plays. This experience, not dissimilar to that of Dullin himself, or of Copeau in the nineteen-twenties, served ideally as his apprenticeship to his new life in Marseille where he arrived in November 1955. He left his post as professeur-adjoint at the Institut Cinématographique du Midi after some months, and, joining his former friend Roland Monod and some actors from Paris, set up the first permanent, professional theatre company in the city.

From the beginning, Fontayne aimed at creating popular theatre, avoiding the extremes of intellectual pretentiousness and Boulevard inanities, and basing his own repertoire on the presentation of moral or social issues. At the same time, he intended to stage the work of new authors, particularly from the Midi. The first season, from 1956 to 1957, consisted of Racine's Phèdre; Ben Jonson's Volpone, and Tistet-la-Rose by

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31. A.T.A.C. Informations: 25 ans de décentralisation: les spectacles, Paris, septembre 1973, spécial numéro 2, p.129.

a local Provençal poet Max-Philippe Delavouët. Phèdre received considerable critical acclaim, thanks principally to the excellent playing of the title rôle by Madeleine Marion, a Parisian actress whose presence in the future T.Q.M. company was to enhance its reputation considerably. Volpone suffered from a lack of preparation by both actors and technicians, yet still played for nearly forty performances, reaching several thousand spectators. The Provençal play, translated into French for the company, achieved a remarkable success with over forty performances. It was a lyrical piece, narrating in troubadour style the socially impossible love of a princess for a gardener. Fontayne, who played the title rôle himself, was experimenting with the notion of presenting simple, direct passions to the avowedly anti-intellectual public of Marseille. A musical ensemble accompanied the action to complete the pastoral charm of the piece.

Obliged to quit the theatre they had leased for a year, Fontayne's actors prepared Molière's Les Fourberies de Scapin for open-air production, and in June 1957 gave a total of twenty-one performances of the play; these productions were generally followed by a dance in the square in which the troupe had played. The need for the actors themselves to help in the construction of the movable stage before each performance lent to the popular attraction of the company, who reached a truly new, culturally-deprived audience in the working-class quarters of Marseille.

Despite a multitude of problems in finding adequate accommodation for the new season's productions in 1957-8, the T.Q.M. continued to broaden its repertoire by experiment and diversity. Its production of the melodramatic La Tour de Nesle by Alexandre Dumas was a resounding failure and this genre was never repeated by the company. Brecht's Señora Carrar's Rifles (Les Fusils de la Mère Carrar), on the other hand, was performed a total of eighty times, and proved to be one of the greatest successes of the company. The play, an indictment of neutrality in a wartime situation, although set in Spain at the time of the Civil War, held memories for the French audiences not only

of the Occupation, but also, more immediately, of the Algerian war which affected the lives of the Marseillais particularly closely at that time. The decision to put on Marcel Achard's Boulevard comedy of 1923 Voulez-vous jouer avec moi? was another error on the part of Fontayne: it played before very small audiences and was compensated for, in the new season in 1959, by a successful return of the Brecht play of the previous year.

The third season also saw Beaumarchais's Le Barbier de Séville enter the repertoire, together with Roland Monod's own adaptation of Dostoievski's Eternal Husband (L'Eternel Mari), and the world première of Samuel Beckett's La Dernière Bande, produced and played by Monod. The first of these, a popular play in the sense that it is well-known in France and loved both as a drama and as an opera, ran for a total of sixty performances; the second and the third plays, each requiring a very small financial outlay because of the small number of actors involved, received critical praise as much for their rarity value as for their successful productions, and helped to put the T.Q.M. onto a firmer financial footing. The company's income was increased too by a subsidy from the Ministère de l'Education Nationale for its contract to perform to school audiences; among other shorter items, it gave Molière's Le Médecin malgré lui.

In 1957 and 1958, the T.Q.M. had been invited to the newly created Festival de Cassis, sponsored by an American millionaire, Jerome Hill; there, it had played Racine, Shakespeare, Musset, and Claudel.

The following season, 1959-60, the T.Q.M. benefited from some new premises in the Théâtre Montgrand and a State subsidy from the Ministère des Affaires Culturelles, which accorded it the status of a Troupe Permanente in 1960. The company expanded and was consequently in a better position to experiment with its repertoire. In the three seasons from 1959 until 1962, seven of its thirteen productions were premières. As a theatre of research, its production of Xavier Pommeret's Pour des raisons de coeur, directly inspired by the Algerian war, united the two concepts of popular and topical theatre. In terms of theatre

technique, the development of collective creation by the group already experienced in the production of Brecht's Señor Carrar's Rifles, was to become more widely used and it reached its peak with the 1961 production of Gabriel Cousin's L'Aboyeuse et l'Automate.

The opening production in the new premises, Cocteau's Les Chevaliers de la Table Ronde, was carefully chosen not to shock the audience which included the mayor of Marseille, M. Gaston Defferre. This play continued in the repertoire for thirty-five performances, an artistic success, but, unfortunately, a financial loss. The other plays of the season formed a double bill: Ionesco's La Leçon and Marguerite Duras' Les Viaducs de Seine-et-Oise. Despite the originality of these plays, the Duras première was considered too abstract to hold the attention of the audience, whereas the tragic farce of Ionesco was found more digestible by the Marseillais.

Michel Fontayne's fifth season beginning in 1960 included an adaptation of Diderot's La Religieuse, a play dealing with an individual's freedom to choose his or her own faith within a religiously dogmatic community. It had some considerable success with the Marseille audiences. There followed Xavier Pommeret's Pour des Raisons de coeur which, like Vinaver's Les Coréens, shows the futile fratricide of an internal conflict within a country. After many of the performances, Fontayne organised discussions between the audience and the production team and actors. The eclecticism of the season became even more noticeable with the next production, Audiberti's philosophical farce Le mal court. This was followed a month later by O'Casey's Shadow of a Gunman (L'Ombre d'un franc tireur) a play which had never been performed by any company visiting Marseille in the past. Set in Ireland during the struggle for independence in 1920, this play sees the fighting from the point of view of a common man, just as Pommeret's and Brecht's plays on the theme of war had done in preceding seasons. As with the other plays in the repertoire that season, nearly fifty performances had been staged by the company; the artistic success of the O'Casey play led to the authorisation

for another production by the Irish playwright the next season. Two productions for schools completed the 1960-61 season: Jules Renard's Poil de Carotte and Molière's Les Précieuses Ridicules.

Through the wide diversity of the T.Q.M.'s productions, Fontayne was bringing a new, live, and varied theatre to what had been a culturally barren region. His stated aim of producing a theatre of research had led to many new plays by both known and unknown dramatists entering the repertoire. His audiences were coming regularly to the productions, the average attendance figures for 1961 showed a hundred per cent increase over the previous two years, and actors and actresses were being attracted by the T.Q.M.'s reputation to come and play in Marseille. After many years of unstable membership, the company had now settled down and was working harmoniously; the result of such homogeneity was an improvement in the troupe's general esprit de corps and, more important still, in the quality of its productions. Works of known authors previously unplayed in Provence were now available to the inhabitants of France's second largest city.

Three new plays were announced for the season 1961-62: Gabriel Cousin's L'Aboyeuse et L'Automate, the promised O'Casey play The Drums of Father Ned (Les Tambours du Père Ned), and an adaptation by Antoine Vitez of Aristophanes' Peace (La Paix). The Cousin play proved to be the biggest success of the T.Q.M.'s history: it not only ran for eighty performances, often to full houses, but its multi-media techniques attracted just those spectators for whom Cousin had intended it. The preparation by the company for the production was carried out on a basis frequently referred to as 'le système unicellulaire' - that is, a collective creation by the author, producer, designers, and actors themselves. This method of working appealed to Fontayne particularly, as it corresponded to his earlier experiences in Languedoc when he, too, was a participant in collective theatrical enterprises.

The other two plays in the repertoire during the 1961-62 season were each performed forty times: O'Casey's play, a burlesque treatment on the theme of the new progressive Irish

versus the old reactionary generations, was well received by the T.Q.M.'s audiences; the Aristophanes' piece, on the theme of individual responsibility towards the universal search for peace, was particularly topical in 1961 in view of the current discussions taking place between the Russians and the West on the subject of the H-Bomb tests. Vitez' adaptation of the original text updated and even changed some of the arguments of the Greek playwright - and some critics reacted unfavourably to this new treatment - , but the public were attracted to the play, not least because of the technical resources exploited in its presentation. The Cousin play had made use of mime and masks to enhance the effect of the text; in La Paix, marionettes were used to scale down a battle scene and to symbolise a flight into space.

The season 1962-63 was to be Fontayne's last. The T.Q.M. had run into enormous debt. The suggestion that the company may have become a new Maison de la Culture for the Marseille metropolis was not fulfilled. The lack of a bigger theatre suitable for the kind of popular productions on a large scale which Fontayne had always envisaged made the development of a suitable repertoire impossible. Finally, the opposition by the mayor of Marseille, Gaston Defferre, put paid to any future plans for an enlargement of the T.Q.M.'s activities. Despite the ominous signs of an imminent collapse of the company, Fontayne advertised his programme for the season: Armand Gatti's Le Voyage du Grand Tchou, Shakespeare's The Tempest, Mayakovsky's The Bath House (Les Bains), and a schools' production of Les Empires de la Lune, written by a local journalist and poet Henri Deluy, about the life of Cyrano de Bergerac.

It was probably unwise to attempt the Gatti play whose technical demands were enormous and whose meaning obscure to the majority. This satire of municipal administrations seen through the eyes of a cat, the preponderance of symbols in the play, and the transposition from the real world to the imaginary created a multitude of problems for all concerned with the production. The play ran for twenty-five performances. The



parlous financial state of the company forced Fontayne to cancel the remaining programme for the season, and despite a revival of Cousin's l'Aboyeuse et l'Automate, he failed to redeem his losses.

To all intents and purposes, the T.Q.M. ceased its existence in 1963; after a not altogether successful tour with Cousin's play and others in Paris and in the provinces, the non-dramatic activities were the only sign of life of the Théâtre Quotidien de Marseille after that date: exhibitions, marionette shows, lectures, poetry readings, and invited drama companies were the final offerings to the local population. The company was dissolved by Fontayne, who was still optimistic that Malraux's IVth. Plan would benefit him and Marseille by the granting of Maison de la Culture status to his activities.

Among these activities, there was featured a marionette show by Agnès Vanier, the wife of Antoine Vitez, who had directed the marionettes for the production of Aristophanes' La Paix. Her present production of The Three Bears, freely based on the Russian folk tale, was clearly aimed at a young audience. It was hoped to stage marionette shows for adults later in the season. It is to the T.Q.M.'s, and Fontayne's, credit that these shows, the first of their kind in France for many generations, should have been attempted in Marseille and by the then semi-defunct troupe of the Théâtre Quotidien. It was tragic for theatre in France that such an experiment should coincide with this moment in the T.Q.M.'s history. Among others, Gabriel Cousin has bitter regrets that such new features of dramatic activity in France were never allowed to continue. Unfortunately, like similar experiments in the field of repertoire, Michel Fontayne's innovations had been courageous but impractical, artistically exciting but financially disastrous.

By 1966, the whole policy of theatre decentralisation in France had altered as a result of the excessive costs which had been incurred for certain productions. Ironically, the government which, in its initial enthusiasm, had sought to create theatre which would appeal to large portions of the population, now found itself obliged to restrict the number of new productions. Some Centres Dramatiques drastically reduced their

theatre activities in the season 1966-67. A system of limiting the repertoire of each Centre to a small number of plays, then of taking those plays on tour to other Centres, was instituted to save costs. This succeeded financially, but naturally curtailed the grandiose schemes of each Centre and, what was even more humiliating to the directors themselves, it put an end to the specialised interests which they had fostered over previous seasons.

Michel Fontayne, angered by this new direction in national policy and realising that the T.Q.M. had already had its continuity interrupted and its homogeneity destroyed, abandoned the decentralisation movement completely. He left Marseille in 1967 and returned to farm in his native Cévennes.

(f) The Maisons de la Culture

In purely numerical terms, the Maisons de la Culture matched the Centres and the Troupes in importance: nine establishments were created in the nineteen-sixties. However, in terms of their function as purveyors of culture for all - as an adjunct to the notion of 'éducation permanente' perhaps, serving the whole community with a dazzling variety of cultural activities - they may be judged to have had a greater influence on the nation than their administratively senior counterparts.

Although the first Maisons at Le Havre, Caen, and Bourges suffered from the constraints of being housed respectively in a museum, a municipal theatre and an outdated building, later Maisons at Amiens, Thonon, Rennes, Saint-Etienne, Firminy, and Grenoble were designed individually to suit the needs of their communities. Despite some early political difficulties - including the unnecessarily premature change of administrators in Paris - the multi-media 'polyvalence' of the Maisons remained the fundamental principle on which they were all based. Facilities for drama formed the hub of their activities.

The granting of the status of a Maison to an area where an 'animateur' had already acquired a following in an otherwise culturally barren region, indicated that drama in general, and popular theatre in particular, was dictating the pace of development. De facto dramatic achievement preceded de jure recognition, and not vice versa, thus demonstrating the strength

of the popular theatre movement as a whole. However, new or experimental drama could not provide the exclusive diet of the Maisons - nor would the public expect or want it to - but, conversely, the Maisons did offer an outlet for much of the new writing produced in the nineteen-sixties. Malraux's conception of the Maisons as purveyors of France's cultural heritage was another facet of their raison d'être; his other aim, to further the creation of works of art to enrich that heritage, more than adequately supplied the motive for them to practise new forms and fresh material. Not many of the Maisons were endowed with the finance or the talent to produce entirely home-based programmes, and their statutes, requiring a fifty-fifty financial share in their enterprise by State and municipality, inevitably ensured some outside influence. Many were receiving centres for itinerant groups such as the Franc-Théâtre or the Tréteaux de France; most attracted foreign companies or smaller groups of musicians, dancers, poets, or players; all consciously and actively decentralised culture to the extent that local talent featured on programmes of activities side by side with nationally-recognised artists.

As was the case with the Centres, individual directors of the Maisons left their stamp on their activities. At Bourges, Gabriel Monnet presented works by the local winegrower-turned-playwright Pierre Halet. He also put on 'montages' of the works of Chekhov, Hugo, Lautréamont, Courteline, Beckett, Rimbaud, Ramuz, and some surrealists, and plays by Arrabal, Audiberti, Vitrac and Adrien. The lack of proper theatre facilities at Le Havre did not deter the directors Marc Netter (1964 to 1968) and Bernard Mounier (from 1968) from producing a good number of plays for children in a local auditorium and, in the summer months, in a large tent. At Amiens, under Philippe Tiry, one season (1969-70) consisted solely of a collection of new plays by Arrabal, Foissy, Grumberg, Haïm, and Halet. Firminy put on a double-bill of Mrozek and Obaldia which ran for forty performances. Créteil's first season (1968-69) consisted of a triple-bill of Lorca plays. At Chalon-sur-Saone, established in 1969, collective productions were the order of the day and were aimed mostly at children's audiences.

The Comédie de Caen was founded in 1963, but, due to lack of adequate finance, its director Jo Tréhard was unable to plan any new plays for three seasons. He relied entirely on visiting productions from other centres and the repertoire consisted of a highly successful Beaumarchais play and other works of Molière, Ramuz, Ben Jonson, Corneille, Labiche, Gay, and Sophocles. However, after 1966, Tréhard expanded his repertoire considerably and introduced his audiences to an unknown Brecht play, The One who said Yes, The One who said No, Maïakovsky's The Bathhouse, Bouchaud's Les Caisses, qu'est-ce?, La Grande Fuite, and Les Affreux, and Foissy's L'Événement. From 1965, Tréhard was assisted in his production work by the young Pierre Barrat, who had been an actor in Gignoux's Comédie de l'Ouest before becoming a producer in his own right. His first production for the Théâtre de la Maison de la Culture de Caen (T.M.C.) was Corneille's Nicomède. Barrat's keen desire to attempt new works brought a new repertoire to the people of Caen and admiration from the critic André de Baecque:

Les deux aspects fondamentaux et complémentaires de l'art dramatique: consécration d'oeuvres importantes et recherche de nouvelles formes d'expression sont tour à tour mis en valeur au T.M.C. qui est sans conteste un des foyers importants du théâtre vivant en France.<sup>32</sup>

The predominant characteristic of all the repertoires in the Maisons de la Culture was, and still is, variety. This eclecticism was sustained in the later sixties by the work of the newly-created Association Technique pour l'Action Culturelle (A.T.A.C.) which was founded on March 1st. 1966 and which coordinated the activities of all the new centres. It offered advice to directors, technical assistance, and organisation of the itineraries of the touring companies and in this way fulfilled the rôle of disseminator of new drama throughout France. Its initiative thereby served to introduce new works to regions hitherto lacking in the finance or the facilities constantly to create their own products. It directly benefited the new playwrights who themselves were prepared to accept the sparse

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32. A.de Baecque, Les Maisons de la Culture, Seghers, 1967, p.35.

financial rewards for the privilege of being produced:

Mais de jeunes auteurs: Gatti, Obaldia, Cousin, Halet, Foissy (et il faut compter parmi eux Armand Salacrou) acceptent ces conditions, et souhaitent même que les Centres les jouent. Mais il ne sont pas assez nombreux ni assez au fait de ce qui convient aux moyens et au public des C.D. et T.P., pour empêcher le théâtre, en province, de souffrir d'un cruel manque de pièces à monter.<sup>33</sup>

More money was demanded and, in October 1966, increased State aid was announced for the existing 24 decentralised theatres (8 Centres, 9 Troupes, and 7 Maisons). The capital investment programme was increased threefold: the high-point of cultural provision in France had been reached with this budget, and it was to remain so until 1968. In 1967, plans for a further fifteen Maisons de la Culture were revealed under the government's Fifth Plan. The twentieth anniversary of the decentralisation movement had been reached and, despite some adverse criticisms of the rôle of the new subsidised theatres - from René Kaës and Emile Copfermann, in particular, who attacked them as purveyors of essentially middle-class culture, as stultifying rather than innovative establishments - the new generation of dramatists had been able to find outlets for their works. Their names, although not so familiar to Paris audiences, became known in the provinces.

Certains critiques semblent des nostalgiques de ce qu'ils appellent le nouveau théâtre et qui se limite pour eux à Ionesco, Beckett, Adamov, Genet. Ces auteurs sont heureusement bien vivants et nous attendons encore beaucoup d'eux, mais la génération des poètes de quarante ans nous paraît également riche d'espoirs et de promesse déjà tenus. Au fameux quatuor, je voudrais opposer trois noms, non par esprit de système, mais pour suggérer la diversité de la relève: Gatti, Halet, Cousin. Ces trois auteurs ont été révélés au public par les troupes de province. 34

Gatti had had his plays performed in Toulouse, Villeurbanne, Saint-Etienne, and at the T.E.P., Cousin at the T.Q.M. and in Saint-Etienne and Aubervilliers, Halet in Bourges and Amiens.

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33. R.Temkine, L'Entreprise Théâtre, Cujas, 1967, p.229.

34. André de Baecque, Les Maisons de la Culture, Seghers, 1967, p.98.

Guy Foissy, another social dramatist contemporary with Gabriel Cousin, saw most of his plays premièred in Paris, but they transferred later to Caen, Amiens, Lille, Beaune, and Limoges.

An analysis of the repertoires of the Maisons de la Culture reveals that they are far less conservative and far more experimental than the Troupes Permanentes or the Centres Dramatiques: Molière, for example, appears only three times in the A.T.A.C. list of programmes for the nine Maisons from 1967 until 1973; Shakespeare's plays were performed only at Thonon; only one Musset play and no Marivaux plays at all were put on by the Maisons in this period. In view of the fact that Molière, Shakespeare, Musset, and Marivaux were four of the five most frequently performed authors in the new subsidised theatres - the other being Brecht - the Maisons can be said to have brought a new spirit of experimentation to the decentralisation movement.

It was now possible to separate the functions of the well-endowed regional Centres and the more localised Maisons de la Culture, with the result that repertoires became more flexible, more suited to specific needs, and more experimental in character. This brought benefits both for potential audiences and for the new dramatists emerging during this period; more important still, it allowed theatre to remain permanently up-to-date by providing social commentaries on certain issues, thus reacting against the hallowed notion of the theatre as a cultural museum-piece or as an archaic medium of communication and entertainment. In ten short years, the theatre had descended from its elevated position as a bourgeois institution and had demystified its rituals to become the mouthpiece of the man-in-the-street with his everyday problems and his desire to communicate his experiences. The new Maisons were social meeting-places and initiators of a great variety of cultural experiences.

(g) Other developments in French theatre up to 1968

The proliferation of new cultural centres throughout France, providing new drama by new authors to new audiences, necessarily implied a re-examination of the nature and content of drama and a re-assessment of theatrical techniques. But the emphasis given to such novel drama still depended upon the predilections of

particular directors, as was the case with Michel Fontayne and the T.Q.M. The nineteen-sixties saw the growth of a score of experimental theatre centres which attracted the talents of many new directors to the Paris periphery, some of whom were preoccupied with the difficulties of introducing the theatre to a basically working-class population; this problem in itself was sufficient to produce a new repertoire. The work of Guy Rétoré has already been discussed; that of Gabriel Garran, Pierre Debauche, Raymond Gerbal, José Valverde, and Patrice Chéreau is studied in some detail in Philippe Madral's book, Le Théâtre hors les murs.

Madral concludes that repertoire is not a problem at all: opposition from the public is only expressed when the whole repertoire of a theatre seems alienated from the concerns of ordinary people. The answer, therefore, implicit in this statement, is to make theatre the concern of everybody, to make its repertoire have meaning for the public at large. Madral also rejects the class-conscious notion of certain theatre directors that the 'classics' represent a cultural heritage appropriate for general consumption by an overtly consumer-based society; further, that such culture is "héréditaire, particularist c'est-à-dire tout simplement bourgeoise".<sup>35</sup> He concludes that such a statement - as outlined in the later Déclaration de Villeurbanne - is a pure admission of failure to recognise that culture needs above all to be recognisable - and comprehensible - to present-day audiences. This does not necessarily exclude the classics. It is patronising to treat the public merely as consumers.

Madral's own definition of the goal of culture is eminently suitable to the purpose of the repertoires of the new subsidised theatres:

La culture est la recherche toujours renouvelée de l'Autre, l'ouverture sur des réalités apparemment insaisissables ou inconnues, qu'elles soient sociales, historiques ou mentales. Elle est le processus qui élargit sans cesse la sensibilité et l'intelligence de l'homme à des mondes qu'il ne connaît pas, la démarche par laquelle il s'efforce d'atteindre à sa plus grande dimension en se rendant maître de réalités qui lui sont étrangères.<sup>36</sup>

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35. Philippe Madral, Le Théâtre hors les murs, Seuil, 1969, p.203.

36. *ibid.*, p.203.

Gabriel Garran, director of the Théâtre de la Commune d'Aubervilliers, more interested in the means by which one can achieve this end than in the philosophy of the end itself, stated categorically that his theatre aimed at providing a creative centre for unpublished works which related directly to contemporary society; by his insistence on this aspect of theatre, he dismisses much of what may be termed classical, bourgeois, or uncritical:

Ni passéistes, ni unanimistes, nous avons écarté l'idée d'être une courroie de transmission du 'patrimoine' culturel, refusé la fonction digestive du théâtre bourgeois et celle, plus mystique et plus mystifiante, de communions ou d'engouements autour de réalisations qui ne remettent rien en question. Nous avons opté pour un théâtre qui soit témoin de son temps et ait valeur de commentaire sur notre monde. Que ce témoignage soit critique, document, polémique ou miroir déformant du réel, c'est cette idée de l'art dramatique qui détermine le choix de mes spectacles.<sup>37</sup>

From 1960 until 1964, Garran was preparing the ground for the future Théâtre de la Commune d'Aubervilliers. He put on Chekhov, Brecht, Kleist, Vichnevski, O'Casey, Strindberg, and Shakespeare. Acknowledging his debt to the T.N.P. revolution under Vilar, Garran clearly drew on Vilar's experiences with these authors in the composition of his own repertoire. After the last Festival d'Aubervilliers in 1964, Garran felt confident enough to present almost exclusively twentieth-century works, by a variety of new authors: Max Frisch, Arthur Miller, Tone Brulin, Peter Weiss, Jean-François Regnard, Eugene O'Neill, Bertolt Brecht, Jean-Pierre Chabrol, and Gabriel Cousin.

Garran's own interpretation of the unity to be found in his choice of pieces is equated with Eluard's phrase: "ce petit monde meurtrier est orienté vers l'innocent". Garran extends this notion into his choice of repertoire:

Cette mise à mort de l'innocence piégée, cette interférence du destin individuel et de la destinée collective, cette mutilation à laquelle sont soumis individus et groupements humains dans le système marchand qui nous régit, voilà ce qui définit la première phase de notre répertoire qui pourrait avoir pour sous-titre "L'Homme, victime de l'homme."<sup>38</sup>

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37. *ibid.*, p.45.

38. *ibid.*, p.48.



This interpretation covers the plays Andorra (Frisch), Death of a Salesman (Miller), Les Chiens (Brulin) - a dramatised journalistic report on apartheid in South Africa -, and Brecht's Visions of Simone Machard. Feeling the need to investigate certain problems more thoroughly, Garran proceeded from Andorra to Peter Weiss's The Investigation, an 'oratorio' on Auschwitz which reflects, without a trace of romanticism, on the problem of genocide, and dissects in an almost surgical fashion the apocalyptic revelation of Nazism through the atrocities of that camp. This play was first produced by Piscator in 1965, three years after his unequivocal praise for the epic-documentary 'total' play of another contemporary German dramatist: Hochhuth's The Representative. Weiss's own Notes towards a definition of Documentary Theatre were published in March 1968 and influenced Gabriel Cousin in his subsequent playwriting.

For Garran, it was a short step from his other plays on racism to Cousin's L'Opéra Noir, which he put on in 1967. Aware of the need to introduce modern French authors into his repertoire, and conscious that history would judge unfavourably any theatre director who limited his choice of plays to the recognised dramatists and foreign 'best-sellers', Garran took the risk of experimenting with Cousin and Chabrol. The selection was based on a desire to research the form of drama more radically, even if this meant running the risk of denying his audiences some understanding of the plays presented.

Pour l'Opéra Noir, le travail scénique réalisé en collaboration avec Patrick Belda a été passionnant. Cet essai de mélange de genres (geste, texte, danse, jazz, chant) où la phrase musicale retombait en phrase dramatique, où la parole explosait, se faisait expression corporelle, et où le mot converti en modulation aboutissait au solo de saxo ou de flûte, a été littéralement porté par le public le plus jeune et le plus nombreux que nous ayons jamais eu, compris par la critique - pourtant sévère - des magazines de jazz, et complètement désapprouvé par la critique dramatique.<sup>39</sup>

Gabriel Garran's repertoire also illustrates the principle of the alienating effect of society on its members; speaking of Death of a Salesman, and of The Iceman cometh, he says:

Ce qui m'intéressait dans la pièce d'Arthur Miller, c'était l'aliénation qu'une société pouvait opérer sur l'homme (à partir du moment où elle considère que celui-ci ne vaut que ce qu'il gagne) et son issue: le mythe et la mort. Egalement, la fuite dans l'irréel et le jeu d'aller et retour onirique entre passé et présent. La pièce d'O'Neill a été son approfondissement, en poussant ce raisonnement à la limite, aboutissant à une représentation théâtrale 'en creux', vision totalement négativisée du système de valeurs occidentales, et à la vertigineuse absence de tout héros positif.<sup>40</sup>

It is this reasoning and this philosophy of the theatre which separates Garran and other directors of the nineteen-sixties from their predecessors. Moreover, the new subsidised peripheral theatres around Paris, such as that of Garran, had many characteristics in common which distinguished them from theatres in the centre of Paris. Of these differences, Garran says:

Nos prédécesseurs de la décentralisation théâtrale en province ont été amenés à jouer des classiques parce qu'ils s'adressaient à un public coupé de leurs sources: la Comédie Française, le T.N.P., le Théâtre de France... A cela s'ajoutait la nécessité pour eux de faire un travail complémentaire à l'enseignement, et d'apporter à la population de province des oeuvres que le Cartel avait fait connaître avant la guerre à un cercle étroit de Parisiens (Pirandello, Tchekhov...). Notre propos, à Aubervilliers, proche de la capitale, ne pouvait être le même.<sup>41</sup>

Both geographically and philosophically therefore, Garran felt himself predisposed towards providing a new sort of theatre, the nature of which, subtly subversive, "est d'être une critique en même temps qu'une remise en question des idées reçues et des formes sclérosées."<sup>42</sup>

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40. *ibid.*, p.48.

41. *ibid.*, p.50.

42. *ibid.*, p.51.

An enquiry conducted by Le Figaro in 1965 into the current state of the theatre, revealed that theatre audiences were increasing in number - particularly among the younger generation - and that there was a consequent change of pattern in the repertoires of the newly established State-subsidised companies.

Un nouveau public se forme, impossible d'en douter. Les organisations qui proposent des places moins chères favorisent un mouvement vers le théâtre. "Les bas prix permettent de doubler ou tripler l'assistance" note le Centre Dramatique du Nord. "Nous tenons pour acquis, assure Marcelle Tassencourt, qu'un très vaste élargissement de la clientèle est possible." Mais aussi un nouveau répertoire se forme. Les goûts sont profondément modifiés dès à présent, affirme Félicien Marceau. Les tournées elles-mêmes évoluent 'vers le culturel' dit-on au Centre du Nord. L'évolution actuelle pourrait bien apporter un nouveau public au Théâtre de Boulevard. 43

In the enquiry by Le Figaro, Jean Vilar enthusiastically called for three or four new theatres, each holding three thousand spectators, to be provided in Paris and the suburbs. He foresaw the eventual concurrence of public and repertoire, which he had hoped the T.N.P. could provide, spreading to the provinces:

N'oublions jamais que les goûts de ce public admirable, qui vont aujourd'hui des très grandes oeuvres du passé (souvent oubliées ou méconnues par l'élite) aux oeuvres fortes et agressives du présent - disons d'Eschyle à Brecht - peuvent demain être autres. Je ne serais pas surpris qu'il s'attache alors et uniquement à un répertoire d'oeuvres inédites et contemporaines. 44

Some indication of the future explosion of activity within and on the periphery of theatre which was to erupt in the nineteen-seventies was already discernible in the visionary practices of Jean Vilar at the Avignon Festivals after 1965. Vilar concentrated on broadening the cultural basis of the Festival by increasing the number of official theatres to four, extending

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43. Louis Chauvet, Le théâtre influencé par un nouveau public? Le Figaro, 23 février 1965.

44. Jean Vilar, *ibid.*

the period to beyond a month, adding concerts, films, and exhibitions to the programme, and organising public debates, youth festivals, children's theatre, experimental drama, and public readings and discussions of new plays. Between 1947 and 1967, the number of spectators rose from 8,000 to 150,000, and the growing side-interest provided by the 'fringe' (Le Festival "Off"), which attracted experimental companies to Avignon during Festival time, culminated in 1968 in the invitation to the Living Theatre to provide one of the official events, a progressive step which almost put a stop to the Festival itself.

In 1959, Jean Danet founded the Tréteaux de France, a mobile group playing under canvas in outer Paris and in regional locations beyond the reach of normal theatre. Their repertory consisted of works by Claudel, Labiche, Pirandello, Camus, Sartre, and Tennessee Williams. The group became a Troupe Permanente in 1963, and was then considered as an itinerant Maison de la Culture from 1967. This recognition of a company's desire to remain officially a touring company showed that governmental policy was flexible enough to accommodate such anomalies within the system of subsidised, decentralised theatre.

Jacques Kraemer's Théâtre Populaire de Lorraine was founded in 1963 and based first on Metz, then on Villerupt.

It practises a Brechtian form of drama, sensitive to the economic and social needs of a largely industrial and first or second generation immigrant population. Plays have been on the whole classical texts (Molière, Marivaux, Chekhov, Strindberg, Musset, Corneille, Ruzante) together with Brecht and Adamov, and some work by Kraemer himself. The group's strongly local character, its sense of solidarity with a working-class audience in search of cultural identity, makes it a model for similar groups in central and southern France.<sup>45</sup>

Kraemer's approach to the composition of what he calls Theatre of Intervention, and his outline of its aims and its drawbacks encapsulate many of the ideas and feelings of social dramatists in this period:

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45. Theatre Quarterly, Vol VI no.23, 1976, p.57.

Our own path has led us progressively towards producing plays intended to meet the demands of the workers of Lorraine, and express their problems... Some of our plays are the result of collaboration between the dramatic team, the author, and the public. A subject is chosen which is felt to serve a need... The players are all set to research the subject...meetings are organised with trade unions or workers' associations with a view to constituting working parties....at the same time, an 'intervention show' is organised... Our method is not the only possible one, and we ourselves produce plays from the classical or modern repertoire. But it is the one that fully justifies the idea of decentralising theatre, since it presupposes specific roots in the realities of one province, and an artistic product that could not have been produced elsewhere. For a professional company, however, theatre of intervention presents some difficulties. From the artistic point of view, it does not allow complex aesthetic and complex meanings. From the technical point of view, it does not allow up-to-date methods and gives the public an archaic image of theatre. Street theatre, one of the forms of intervention, presents difficulties of its own. People will be inclined to see street intervention as a spontaneous rather than a planned activity...Theatre of intervention is thus an indispensable accessory genre, but it has its limitations, and should be used with discretion. 46

Experimentation was the order of the day; even the T.N.P. was not immune from attempting new authors and new themes: in January 1967, Georges Wilson opened the Salle Gémier in the Palais de Chaillot with a production of Kateb Yacine's Les Ancêtres redoublent de férocité, a flamboyant and ritualistic treatment of the Algerian war. The Salle Gémier was to be an experimental theatre aimed at revitalising the T.N.P. repertory. New York's Living Theater appeared for the first time in France in 1961 at the Théâtre des Nations festival in Paris. It introduced the French public to environmental theatre. A return tour in 1966 revealed a shift to radical, didactic theatre with a production of The Brig, Mysteries and Smaller Pieces.

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46. *ibid.*, p.57.

Le Living Theater propose d'en finir non seulement avec les théâtres conventionnels et leurs structures à l'italienne, mais avec la forme traditionnelle du spectacle. Il faut faire violence au spectateur, provoquer une catharsis, communier avec la salle. Le public sera sollicité des manières les plus directes. Gesticulations, appels, provocations, exhibitionnisme essaieront d'établir sa participation profonde au jeu. Ici encore on tente de dépasser Artaud sur son propre terrain. La France a accueilli le Living avec intérêt et curiosité, bien qu'une partie de l'opinion ait jugé outrés et puérils ses moyens de 'mise en condition' des spectateurs. Le Living Theater a intéressé bon nombre d'animateurs qui croient à la communication gestuelle, à la participation du public au jeu dramatique.

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In 1968, the appearance of the Bread and Puppet Theater at the Sixth World Theatre Festival in Nancy caused a sensation, with its productions of Fire - a Vietnam protest piece - and two street-theatre shows, Chairs and A Man says Goodbye to his Mother. Radical American theatre thus paved the way for new French groups also seeking to give back to the theatre its social function. Agit-prop theatre showed that it was not only necessary to break with traditional ways of acting, but also with production methods. Françoise Kourilsky, in her book on the Bread and Puppet Theater<sup>48</sup>, explained the philosophy behind the art-life relationship: the technique of radical theatre lies in the commitment and understanding of the political nature of reality. It is not a question of making a 'cultural revolution' (a counter culture to that of the Establishment, or local activities in which the spectators and actors are awakened to the reality surrounding them), but of making theatre one of the weapons of social revolution.

There was no doubt that, by 1968, a powerful momentum in the theatre was under way which drew dramatists and animateurs alike towards ever more experimentation and diversification of their activities: the enormously expanded programme of the Avignon

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47. Jean-Luc Dejean, Le théâtre français d'aujourd'hui, Nathan, 1971, p.126.

48. Françoise Kourilsky, Le Bread and Puppet Theater, La Cité, 1971

Festival reflected these changes in French theatre. Indeed, France in the year 1968 might itself be regarded as the climactic point of a dramatic intrigue which had lasted for twenty years; tragically, the decentralisation movement carried the seeds of its own destruction, namely, its propensity to become constantly more political - generally with Left-wing tendencies - and this factor brought an inevitable clash with the authorities, both local and national. While Barrault was evicted from the Odéon - for sympathising with the feelings of the students who had occupied his theatre - , Planchon cynically burlesqued the pretensions of the théâtre populaire movement itself with his extravaganza La Mise en pièces du Cid.

Most of all, the lesson of 1968 was that the 'benevolent gradualism' which had inspired the people's theatre movement since Vilar was now revealed to have been based on a number of comforting illusions - the chief one being that a humanist 'public service' theatre could unify the strata of society in an uplifting communion - and that, as the waves of dismissals of Left-ish theatre directors that summer showed, when the chips were down, much of the popularisation movement was little more than a cultural alibi, icing on a centralised neo-capitalist cake. At the very least, after 1968 it would no longer be possible to run a popular theatre with the same belief in the rhetoric of cultural evangelism.<sup>49</sup>

However, the impact of life on art was by no means a one-way movement, as Jean-Luc Dejean's assessment of the Marat-Sade shows:

Le Marat-Sade, de l'Allemand Peter Weiss, connu à Paris en 1968 un immense succès mêlé de scandale. Ce qui se fait jour à travers le spectacle, le conflit entre la morale révolutionnaire et l'individualisme, révèle un penchant anarchiste qui enthousiasma les étudiants français contestataires de mai 1968.<sup>50</sup>

The rappports between art and life had reached their closest point: their form dictated their content, or, in McLuhan's terminology, the medium had become the message; 1968 stood at the mid-point between two cultures.

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49. Michael Kustow, The French People's Theatre, Plays and Players, Winter, 1976, p.18.

50. Jean-Luc Dejean, op.cit., p.126.

CHAPTER IV    SOCIAL DRAMA IN THE NEW  
SUBSIDISED THEATRES: AN EVALUATION

No consensus of critical opinion exists to define the trends in French theatre which emerged in the new subsidised theatres up to 1968. Broad agreement has been reached on the unique importance of the metaphysical theatre of Ionesco, Beckett, Genet, and the early Adamov, frequently though not universally identifiable under the heading of Absurd Theatre. However, this was a movement which centred exclusively on the smaller private theatres of Paris, whereas the new socially-conscious themes of the younger dramatists of the fifties and sixties were largely expressed in the provinces of France.

Geography, therefore, is one of the principal factors dividing the new theatre from the old; however, it would not be accurate to identify all the group of new social dramatists as simply provincial authors exercising their local talent in their home regions. Some had their plays premièred in Paris, others saw their provincial productions taken to the capital on tour, even though this was often only for a very limited period of time. It would be unnecessarily dogmatic to exclude from this evaluation those plays - and dramatists - which belong to these categories, therefore, and so the assessment is made purely on the basis of thematic material. If a play belonging loosely to the category of 'social drama' has only been produced in Paris, then it is an exception.

The sixty-five contemporary authors whose works were premièred in the new subsidised theatres and who are listed by André de Baecque in his book Les Maisons de la Culture, have never been satisfactorily categorised by theme or style. Yet trends are detectable among this large number of dramatists who, perhaps fortunately for their own independence and artistic development, have remained, if not beyond definition, outside a recognised school of thought. The diversification and extent of the decentralisation movement itself has, ironically, ensured their continuing disparity as writers, yet it might be the case that, had they all been from one city, one common background, or of



one political persuasion, they would have fitted more easily into a school beloved by critics and audiences alike. As things stand, their work is still in the process of development and time alone will fashion a mould for them until, predictably, 'the authors of the decentralisation period' assume a recognisable shape and reveal a common purpose. Until then, this study can attempt to pursue the task of reviewing their work objectively with a view to assessing their contribution to French theatre history in the contemporary era.

Out of the total number of sixty-five modern dramatists listed by de Baecque, twenty are foreign authors whose reputation and influence cannot easily be passed over in this assessment, for their works complement, and often provide stimulus for, the writings of their French counterparts. First among these foreign authors is undoubtedly Brecht. Next in importance come the German and Swiss documentary dramatists, Friedrich Dürrenmatt, Max Frisch, Heinar Kipphardt, and Peter Weiss, whose techniques and theories bore as much influence on Gabriel Cousin and his contemporaries as did the ideas of the earlier German theoreticians Piscator and Brecht. In particular it was Peter Weiss' Manifesto of documentary theatre in fourteen points which inspired the work of the Théâtre de l'Atelier and of Cousin himself.

Social dramatists of other nationalities also feature in this list: Arbuzov and Maïakovsky from Russia, Arden and Wesker from England, and O'Casey from Ireland. Ernst Toller's classic of popular theatre, Hop-là, wir leben (Hey there! we're alive!) played at the Théâtre Gérard Philipe in the 1966-67 season. A majority of the works by foreign authors produced in the new subsidised theatres can therefore be seen to have been selected for their socio-political content and, perhaps equally importantly, for their interesting and innovative dramatic styles.

The French dramatists listed by de Baecque may be divided into three groups: the Absurd school (including Ionesco, the early Adamov, Vauthier, Vian, Schéhadé, Gombrowicz and Audibert), the social dramatists, and the remainder who do not fit into any

cohesive category but who include the novelists Duras and Guilloux, the adapters Cosmos, Arnaud, and Sonnier, and the critics and producers-turned-playwrights Planchon, Itkine, and Morvan-Lebesque. But it is the social dramatists who form by far the largest group among their contemporaries; they are: Adamov (later works), Atlan, Cousin, Foissy, Gatti, Halet, Michel, Salacrou, and Vinaver. Planchon and Sartre could also be added to this list, the latter being an exclusively Paris-based writer.

Since the repertoires of individual theatres within the decentralisation movement diversified so rapidly in the nineteen-sixties, it is impossible to attribute to them any specific policy of political, social, or aesthetic orientation in their choice of plays. The same could not be said, however, of those theatres outside the official circuits and operational spheres, such as the Nouvelle Compagnie d'Avignon under André Benedetto or the Théâtre Populaire de Lorraine of Jacques Kraemer, whose directors maintained a single policy towards repertoire. A global picture of the influences at work in the theatre at this time is therefore considerably harder to detect than in previous decades or with previous troupes. Nevertheless, from the study of the works of the dozen or so new authors who began their careers in the new provincial theatres of the decentralisation period, a pattern emerges of their overall sympathies and philosophies which, although spread thinly throughout the system, did play its part in changing the nature of drama in France in the two postwar decades.

In chronological order of publication, five books by André de Baecque, Genviève Serreau, Raymonde Temkine, and Michel Corvin in the nineteen-sixties reveal attempts to categorise the new 'jeunes auteurs' and to find common ground between them. De Baecque, in his Le Théâtre d'aujourd'hui (1964) saw the value of the new works:

Déplorer la sclérose du répertoire des centres dramatiques de province, c'est ignorer que Jean Dasté et la Compagnie de Saint-Etienne montent chaque saison un manuscrit inédit en France, c'est contester le talent d'auteurs comme Dürrenmatt, Armand Gatti, Gabriel Cousin, Michel Vinaver,

Pierre Halet, Jean Cosmos...<sup>1</sup>

De Baecque, himself a dramatist, spoke even more forcefully in his later publication Les Maisons de la Culture (1967) of the need to recognise the new generation:

Depuis 25 ans, le théâtre français a découvert et assimilé les principales pièces de Paul Claudel, de Bertolt Brecht, d'Eugène Ionesco, de Samuel Beckett, de Jean Genet, pour n'évoquer que les écrivains les plus importants... A la suite de ces écrivains considérés à leurs débuts comme inférieurs et dérisoires et devenus désormais des classiques, de nouveaux auteurs naissent, bons à être joués. Et puisque des voix parfaitement autorisées vont jusqu'à nier leur existence, je ne résisterai pas au plaisir de citer certains noms: Arrabal, Gatti, Cousin, Halet, Michel, Foissy, de Obaldia, Billetdoux, Vauthier, Atlan, Clavel et Planchon.<sup>2</sup>

Geneviève Serreau selected only Gatti among the modern generation of French dramatists (outside the Absurdists) to feature in her list of writers following in the path of Brecht.<sup>3</sup>

Raymonde Temkine, in a study predominantly of the administrative and business side of the decentralisation movement, mentions Gatti, Obaldia, Cousin, Halet, Foissy and Salacrou as authors prepared to accept the precarious financial situation of dramatists, yet does not conceal the fact that a state of crisis existed in the production of works for the newly-created Centres Dramatiques and Troupes Permanentes.<sup>4</sup>

Michel Corvin's study is the first comprehensive account of the new dramaturgy; it not only acknowledges the existence of the new generation, but it applauds their intentions and supports the notion that future, democratised theatre will benefit both the artists and the recipients of their works:

Le théâtre d'aujourd'hui est-il un carrefour d'impasses? ... En fait, le théâtre nouveau ne cesse d'explorer ses pouvoirs et d'étendre sa juridiction. A une époque de demi-stagnation,

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1. A.de Baecque, Le Théâtre d'aujourd'hui, Seghers, 1964, p.9.
  2. A.de Baecque, Les Maisons de la Culture, Seghers, 1967, p.71.
  3. G.Serreau, Histoire du 'Nouveau Théâtre', Gallimard, 1966.
  4. R.Temkine, L'Entreprise Théâtre, Editions Cujas, 1967, p.228.

vers 1965, quand les classiques de la dérision comme Ionesco, Beckett et Genet semblaient s'être figés dans leur perfection, succède une période de bouillonnement créateur..Copi, Arrabal et Weingarten ont inventé la poésie de situations. Lavelli et Garcia redonnent aux sens et à la matière tout leur pouvoir d'émotion. Loin de rebuter les jeunes écrivains, le théâtre ne cesse de susciter de nouvelles vocations dont les cafés-théâtres prouvent la vitalité. Surtout il est tout un groupe de dramaturges, Gatti, Cousin, Foissy en particulier, qui ne cessent d'allier la conscience la plus aiguë des problèmes du monde contemporain aux recherches théâtrales les plus riches et les plus variées. C'est à eux que le théâtre nouveau devra de se dégager des recettes un peu mécaniques de l'avant-garde pour devenir le théâtre tout court et prendre rang, pourquoi non, à côté des chefs-d'oeuvre d'Eschyle ou de Racine. Sans solliciter quelque adhésion immédiate ou égarer les esprits dans les labyrinthes de l'étrange, le théâtre vivra alors d'un échange permanent entre le dramaturge et le public.<sup>5</sup>

Corvin's assessment of the new authors and, hence, the new repertoire, as viable successors to popular dramatists of previous ages and previous cultures is not without foundation, for it combines the appreciation of the themes used in the new drama with the logistical feasibility of the dissemination of those themes through the new centres of popular culture. It is this concurrence of the artistic and administrative developments of the nineteen-sixties which makes the whole decentralisation movement into a real force in contemporary French theatre and makes the directors of the new, subsidised theatres the equals of their predecessors, the directors of the Cartel.

As was the case with their exemplars, Artaud, Copeau, and Brecht, the new social dramatists introduced changes both in the form and the content of their works; all of their work may be seen to lie in the tradition of popular theatre, all produced theatre for immediate consumption relating to topical issues, all were attempting to activate a prise de conscience in their audiences. Some of the new dramatists rely on historical material to illustrate a Marxist viewpoint: Planchon's Bleus, Blancs

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5. M. Corvin, Le Théâtre Nouveau en France, P.U.F., 1969, p.125.

Rouges ou les Libertins uses the French Revolution to state, as Ariane Mnouchkine was to repeat later in her 1789, that the Revolution only brought about a change in power from the nobility to the bourgeoisie, leaving the common people as excluded as ever. Following in the wake of Brecht's Days of the Commune, Adamov wrote Printemps 71, Halet La Butte de Satory, and Gatti Les 13 soleils de la rue Sainte Blaise. All three plays deal with the Commune and use parody and farce to demonstrate inequities: Adamov replaces certain of his characters by marionettes, Halet integrates fact and fiction in his characters, their costumes, and in time itself, Gatti's experiment with the T.E.P. audience explored Man as a social being seen through the eyes of various suns, themselves personified by a group of evening-class students, and each seeking to achieve "une image de nous plus grande que nous". As an example of a popular political stance, the Commune naturally attracted the committed Left-wing writers of a century later: its lack of colourful royalty, violent polemic, and cloak-and-dagger intrigue which characterise accounts of the 1789 Revolution, as a play "in which the only bourgeois were a few stereotyped rich nonentities and a villainous priest", it eminently suited the sober intentions of the new social dramatists.

More recent social history is depicted in plays such as Jean-Claude Grumberg's Dreyfus, Armand Salacrou's Boulevard Durand, relating to an incident which took place in 1910, Gatti's Chant public devant deux chaises électriques on the Sacco and Vanzetti affair of 1920, or the same author's La Passion du Général Franco about the dictator's effect on his countrymen. Trade Union history and activities are, not unnaturally, frequent subjects of social drama. Not only do they occur in Salacrou's play, but also in Gatti's La Vie imaginaire de l'éboueur Auguste Geai, and in André Benedetto's Emballage which, coincidentally, is set in Le Havre, the background to Boulevard Durand. The treatment of themes from Trade Union history is not exclusively a preoccupation of French theatre writers and directors. Predictably, working-class

history is the staple diet of popular theatre companies elsewhere, not least in Britain where John McGrath's touring company 7:84, the Half Moon Company, or Bill Gaskill's Joint Stock Company are currently providing audiences with productions similar in style and content to those of the new French authors of the decentralisation period. Indeed, the Franco-British connection in social drama was critical in the later nineteen-sixties, as Garry O'Connor has explained:

Arnold Wesker's The Kitchen, performed by Ariane Mnouchkine's group theatre, Le Théâtre du Soleil, has had a considerable influence both on collective work and social themes. When The Kitchen opened at the Cirque de Montmartre in 1967 it not only made Wesker the most popular foreign dramatist in France, but it opened the way for the local treatment of innumerable work themes. Curiously enough, the experience which led Wesker to write The Kitchen was a French one - he worked as a pâtissier in a French restaurant for nine months - so when it was adapted by Philippe Léotard into French, the Parisian equivalents were authentic.<sup>6</sup>

However, in contrast to the realistic production of this last play, several French dramatists of the sixties preferred a mixture of genres to make their plays more outwardly attractive. Vera Lee has pointed this out:

Popular theatre seems most successful when it molds reality into more frivolous forms - comedy, light satire and farce. In such cases, the subject is almost always social rather than political.<sup>7</sup>

Foissy's L'Événement, Cousin's L'Aboyeuse et l'Automate, Morvan Lebesque's L'Amour parmi nous, and Halet's Cheval Caillou, all postdating Sartre's Nekrassov, are examples of plays in this vein. The same may be said of the satires of big business, another theme favoured by the social dramatists of the sixties: Adamov's Ping-Pong and Paolo Paoli, Vinaver's Par-dessus bord, and, later, Rezvani's Capitaine Schelle, Capitaine Ecco. The object of these satires of the business world is a denunciation of the social oppression which that world represents. In this context, these examples are manifestly distant cousins

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6. G.O'Connor, French Theatre Today, Pitman, 1975, p.72.

7. Vera Lee, Quest for a Public, Schenkman, 1970, p.134.

of, and not purely younger siblings to, Salacrou's play Boulevard Durand, first performed in Tourcoing in 1961. Social drama has incorporated elements of the Absurd theatre of the previous decade and the clowning antics of the circus, with the result that it finds itself poised at mid-point between the naturalistic stage of turn-of-the-century drama with a socialistic ethic, and the vaudeville and burlesque features of the products of Ariane Mnouchkine's and Jérôme Savary's companies, Le Théâtre du Soleil and Le Grand Magic Circus.

War, both in its general and its particular aspect, is a recurring theme among the dramatists of the sixties. Vinaver's Les Coréens of 1957 pointed the way for the modern generation: Vietnam produced its own war ethic and was portrayed through such plays as Charbonnier and Felhandler's La Guerre entre parenthèses of 1966, and Victor Haïm's L'Arme Blanche, Gatti's V comme Vietnam, and Benedetto's Napalm, all dating from 1967. Haïm's play, the story of the wartime experiences of a certain Stephen Humphrey and the after-effects upon him and on the community he returns to, is not unlike the presentation of war in the recent American film on Vietnam, Robert de Niro's The Deer Hunter. Both stories have the elements of grotesque horror, of animal symbolism, of acute dilemmas of human conscience; neither has any propagandist motive nor philosophical import. Gatti's play shows the process of mechanisation at work in the corridors of power behind a war, a facet of human behaviour which is not unnoticed in other Gatti plays, nor in works on other themes by other writers: Adamov's Ping-Pong and Grumberg's later Amorphe d'Ottenburg carry similar ideas.

Hiroshima and Nagasaki also stimulated their own dramaturgy: Michel Parent's Gilda appelle Maë West of 1962 prefigured Vilar's Le Dossier Oppenheimer (1964), Gatti's La Cigogne (1968) and Halet's Little Boy (1970). Halet's play, like that of Michel Parent, sees the episode from many points of view simultaneously. It ends with a trial scene in which Major Bob Eatherley, the pilot of the plane carrying the ~~A~~ Bomb, returns

to Japan and confesses that his utopian peace plan was presented to "faire état de mes idées sur l'amour, la confiance, la fraternité qui devraient régner entre les nations et les hommes". Such a humanistic outlook might well have come from the pen of Gabriel Cousin, whose Le Drame du Fukuryu-Maru dwells on the sufferings of some Japanese fishermen caught in the radioactive fallout from the H-bomb tested in the Pacific in 1954. This concentration on the effects of a major political event, be it in war, in business, or in social policy-making, is the stuff of popular theatre: the audience can identify more readily with such a treatment of the event than with a broader intellectual inquiry into its circumstances. Liliane Atlan's outwardly simple play Monsieur Fugue on the journey of a group of Jewish children to the gas chambers of the concentration camps has an impact lacking in some of Gatti's or Adamov's plays, for example.

It is the human element which distinguishes Gabriel Cousin's work from that of his contemporaries: he does not indulge in the technical virtuosity of Gatti, nor the often strident Marxist didacticism of Benedetto; he is neither purely Absurdist in his techniques, nor over-literary in his style; the predominant characteristics of his work are a natural sensitivity to the pathos of the human condition - especially visible in Le Voyage de derrière la montagne - and an awareness of the underlying menace in social situations: l'Opéra Noir illustrates this particularly tangibly. Cousin, in taking from contemporary dramatic conventions and adding to them his own brand of socio-political humanism, has produced a theatre which is highly individualistic and which, at the same time, mirrors the problems and preoccupations of his age.

Ironically, the finest example of popular theatre in France in recent times, the events of May 1968, which brought historical immediacy and ideological fervour to the very streets of Paris themselves, contained the seeds of its own destruction. The momentum of dramatic revolution created by the visit of the Bread and Puppet Theater to Nancy in April seemed unstoppable. Planchon called together all the directors of the new subsidised



theatres to Villeurbanne, a meeting which culminated in the issue of a Déclaration on May 25th. The forty-two directors condemned the cultural cleavage between a privileged bourgeois minority and a socially and artistically deprived majority, and affirmed the rôle of the theatre as a 'politicising enterprise', with the right to share with the State in the formation of cultural policy:

Tout effort d'ordre culturel ne pourra plus que nous apparaître vain aussi longtemps qu'il ne se proposera pas expressément d'être une entreprise de politisation... Parler de culture active, c'est parler de création permanente... et le théâtre..est une oeuvre humaine collective proposée à la collectivité des hommes. C'est pourquoi nous tenons à affirmer...la nécessité d'une étroite corrélation entre la création théâtrale et l'action culturelle.<sup>8</sup>

By demanding this right to participate in policy-making, the theatre directors themselves were recognising the force of recent developments among creative artists in the field of collective creation. It was an attempt to transpose an achievement in the artistic field into the political sphere. The Déclaration de Villeurbanne was certainly to be heeded: in July, the twenty-second Festival d'Avignon was disrupted by municipal bans and police intervention; in September, the municipal councils of Caen, Bourges, and Toulouse withdrew subsidies to their theatres and Maisons de la Culture and terminated the contracts of their directors; in November Malraux produced a new policy which would weaken the structure of the subsidised theatres and limit their freedom to innovate; in December, pressure from the Ministère des Affaires Etrangères caused the T.N.P. to abandon its rehearsals of Gatti's La Passion du Général Franco. The following year, the budget of the Ministère des Affaires Culturelles was reduced to 0.42 percent of the national budget, and in 1970 it decreased even further to 0.37 percent. Suspicious of the intentions of the subsidised theatre directors whom they had, paradoxically, themselves appointed and fearful that liberalisation in the theatre spelt ruin for the

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8. P.Madral, Le Théâtre hors les murs, Seuil, p.246.

political status quo, the government had decided that enough was enough. Pressure was already being brought to bear on authors whose works were strictly politically-orientated; Victor Haim's experience with his play L'Arme Blanche in 1967 was not unique:

Pendant les deux mois de répétitions, il aura fallu subir les attaques répétées de quelques-uns des responsables du montage de la pièce, me 'suggérant' de gommer toutes les allusions à l'agression américaine, me reprochant mon manque d'objectivité et mon aigreur contre les Américains.<sup>9</sup>

Bernard Dort wrote at the time:

The policy of a decade collapsed like a pack of cards... It is as if an era in French theatre - the era of Jean Vilar's T.N.P., of theatre decentralisation and the appearance of Paris suburban theatre - has come to an end, before even reaching maturity. Something is dying, and it is hard to see what could take its place.<sup>10</sup>

Gabriel Cousin expresses the same sentiments about the virtually aborted child of social drama:

1968 a marqué une rupture et la décentralisation a commencé à baisser et à regresser alors qu'elle n'était pas aboutie encore - on la rêvait encore plus large, en fait, c'est une sorte d'avortement. Ça s'est stoppé maintenant, c'est en régression et la décentralisation n'existe pratiquement plus.<sup>11</sup>

Cousin sees the events of May 1968 not as a politically-based revolution but as an example of collective psychosis - the psychological effects of which are still being felt. These effects are apparent, too, in the current theatre trends, with new tendencies towards the exploitation of psychological drama and the motivation of the protagonists within plays.

While fears persisted of the imminent introduction of clandestine political censorship in the theatre, Malraux himself

9. Auteurs Dramatiques d'aujourd'hui, 1969-1972, Association Professionnelle du Spectacle, Paris, 1972, p.61.

10. Translated and quoted by Theatre Quarterly, Vol.VI, No.23, 1976,

11. Interview avec D.W.Jeffery, 11 août 1978.

was replaced by Edmond Michelet, and other major figures of the decentralisation era disappeared from the scene: in 1970, Jean Dasté gave up his position as director of the Comédie de Saint-Etienne to become a simple actor; in 1971 and 1972 respectively, the deaths occurred of Jean Vilar and Jo Tréhard.

While the Déclaration de Villeurbanne expressed a consensus of views held by theatre directors, the Manifeste d'Amiens of December 1969 declared the interests of the dramatists. Rebuffing the suggestion from certain sources, including some of the decentralised theatre directors themselves, that there was at that time a lack of good dramatists providing suitable material for the Centres and Maisons, the eleven signatories of the manifesto published their reply on behalf of nearly fifty modern French playwrights, gathered at the Maison de la Culture in Amiens, whose works had been produced in the decade since 1960. They denounced the trepidation, mental lethargy, inertia, and hypocrisy of the cultural authorities responsible for preventing new works reaching the stage while foreign theatres readily welcomed such new talent, including their own in translation. The eleven authors whose signatures were appended to the manifesto were: Guy Foissy, Jean-Claude Grumberg, Victor Haim, Georges Michel, Jeannine Worms, Pierre Halet, Marguerite Duras, Jean-Pierre Faye, René Ehni, Romain Weingarten, and Gabriel Cousin. L'Association Professionnelle du Spectacle (A.P.D.S.) attempted to summarise the output of those authors represented at the Amiens fortnight by printing details of their work in a publication entitled Auteurs Dramatiques d'Aujourd'hui 1969-1972. Their classification did not take account of "tout un courant de théâtre [qui] se développe aujourd'hui avec l'ambition d'une création collective dans laquelle la part du texte écrit est très variable",<sup>12</sup> nor did it consider those authors generally termed the avant-garde (Ionesco, Beckett, the early Adamov, Vauthier, Genet) whose work belongs to the decade of the nineteen-fifties. Four marginally more recent authors, Duras, Billetdoux, Gatti, and Obaldia, were omitted for similar

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12. Auteurs Dramatiques d'aujourd'hui 1969-1972, Association Professionnelle du Spectacle, Paris, 1972, p.2.

reasons, their work having nevertheless been deemed to form the transition between the avant-garde and the generation of the nineteen-sixties.

All attempts at classification of the creative spirit being invidious, it would be unwise to follow slavishly the categorisation of this publication of the A.P.D.S.; however, the broad tendencies in contemporary French theatre outlined in the A.P.D.S. document provide an adequate basis for the study of social dramatists whose work falls within three of the seven tendances listed in the A.P.D.S. publication, viz: engagement politique (Gatti - included as a major precursor of the movement, Cousin, Atlan, Benedetto), satire contemporaine (Foissy, Ehni, Aron, Pommeret, Michel, Grumberg, Marc'O, Adrien), and chronique socio-historique (Vinaver, Planchon, Liger, Cosmos, Reybaz, Kergoulay, Halet, Cousin, Atlan).<sup>13</sup>

If there is a unity of form visible in the presentation of contemporary drama, then, there is also a unity of purpose behind most of the works of the authors mentioned: it is to place Man both in his immediate social setting and in a larger political context. Jean-Pierre Miquel distinguishes six themes which cover the works of these playwrights: "la société de consommation et son asservissement; l'absurde, tant quotidien que métaphysique; l'individu et son destin, face au groupe; la politique et ses mécanismes; le racisme et ses conséquences sociales et psychologiques; l'insolite et la poésie dans le quotidien".<sup>14</sup>

Finally, it is relevant to mention two events which, although occurring after the end of the decade of the nineteen-sixties, justify the previous assertion that the decade itself had contained its own ethos, and had spawned a generation of authors whose themes were novel in the history of the French theatre. Quasi-official recognition of the importance of the new generation of dramatists came with the production and the subsequent publication of nine one-act plays at the Comédie Française in the winter of 1970-71. Pierre Dux, the then General Administrator of the Comédie Française, caused a near-

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13. *ibid.*, p.6.

14. *ibid.*, p.7.

revolution by introducing the contemporary dramatists' works to the Salle Richelieu. Asked if he considered his action to be risqué, he replied:

Ma foi, non! C'est un privilège accordé à la fois aux spectateurs et aux auteurs. Une occasion de rencontre par le truchement des Comédiens-Français. Jean-Pierre Miquel l'a fort bien dit: "les neuf auteurs que nous avons choisis sont représentatifs d'une nouvelle génération d'écrivains dramatiques: le ton, la forme de leurs oeuvres, les thèmes qu'ils travaillent sont nouveaux, disons mieux: contemporains".<sup>15</sup>

The nine authors were: Romain Weingarten, Roland Dubillard, François Billetdoux, Andrée Chedid, Guy Foissy, Robert Pinget, Gabriel Cousin, Jean-Clause Grumberg, and René de Obaldia. The second event which set the seal on the work of the generation of the sixties was the publication of a synopsis of productions in the new subsidised theatres, documented by the organisation L'Association Technique pour l'Action Culturelle (L'A.T.A.C.).

By its own admission, this association does not represent the totality of French cultural life, nor does it lay claim to be the sole representative body of the postwar decentralisation movement on the theatre in France. However, its special issue of September 1972, entitled 25 Ans de Décentralisation: Les Auteurs,<sup>16</sup> provided the first comprehensive documentation on the period in question, listing 412 authors whose 1619 plays had been produced in 47 different centres between 1947 and 1972. This publication was sufficient in itself to demonstrate both the enormous variety of dramatic talent that had been stimulated in France, and the eclecticism of repertoires chosen by theatre managements during the initial developmental period of decentralisation.

What was perhaps more important, the A.T.A.C. publication served to dispel any suspicions that the decentralisation movement itself was a spent force in France's cultural life;

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15. Avant-Scène, no.469-470, avril 1971, p.10.

16. ATAC Informations, Paris, numéro spécial, septembre 1972.

a second publication, 25 Ans de Décentralisation: les Spectacles, which appeared a year later, reinforced this demonstration of the vitality of dramatic activity by cataloguing the activities of individual theatres within the decentralisation movement.

The decentralisation era, therefore, or, in more precise terms, the period of widest expansion in French theatre history, from the beginning of the Fourth Republic to the events of May 1968, marks a period of distinct and definable evolution. In particular, the first decade of the Fifth Republic, from 1958 to 1968, was an age in which the repertoires of the new subsidised theatres in France changed markedly. The social and political dramatists of this age were no iconoclasts as their predecessors, the avant-garde writers of Absurd Theatre, had been; they stood for rejection and change - rejection of prewar literary styles and forms, rejection of the arid and self-annihilating Absurdist theatre, and a change to popular, even populist, drama, attempting to create a prise de conscience among its spectators. Yet these changes were no more rapidly to be brought about in the theatre than in society itself: it was a time when theatre and society evolved simultaneously. Indeed, for the first time perhaps, theatre accurately reflected the mood and changes in society instead of standing superciliously apart from it; the theatre revolution was the people's revolution.

A closer study of the work of Gabriel Cousin will demonstrate his personal affinity with this revolution and manifestly show his representative rôle within the generation of social dramatists who helped to produce it.

PART TWO : GABRIEL COUSIN

CHAPTER V : FORMATIVE INFLUENCES ON COUSIN AS A DRAMATIST

(a) Childhood

Gabriel Cousin was born on 7th. July 1918, the only son of Jules Marie Léon Cousin and Lucie (née Brière) Cousin at Droué (Loir et Cher), a village of some 1,200 inhabitants in the Perche, a hilly, wooded area about 150 kms. to the south-west of Paris.

Cousin's parents both became octogenarians - his father died in 1969 at the age of 81 and his mother, now 92, lives near Grenoble, close to other members of the Cousin family. Gabriel and Hélène Cousin recently retired to Castelnaudary in the department of Aude. Cousin's father, who had returned from the Great War with a slight head wound, discovered that the family joinery business had lost its workshop during the war, and that there was now little work for him in that region. Gabriel was two years old when his father decided to move to Paris to look for work. This early childhood period was a sad one for him: his parents, and in particular his mother, were bigoted, narrow-minded people, timorous and naïve, proud but limited. They had few friends and rarely left their home.

Two other members of Cousin's family appear to have had some considerable influence on his development while he was still at school. His maternal grandfather, Jules Brière, was illiterate, but his wide experience of work - he had done many jobs, from agricultural work to bakery - had brought him into contact with many kinds of people and given him a far wider outlook on life than Cousin's parents possessed. Jules Brière's son Lucien, Gabriel's uncle, was a barber by trade and it was he who initiated the young boy into the world of sport. These two men helped to counterbalance the restrictive influence of Cousin's parents.

Cousin was directly affected by this attitude of his parents: he was unable to invite friends to the house or to leave its high-walled garden to play elsewhere. His mother dressed him in girl's clothes until he was about six years of age and also forbade him leave the house, even later when he was approaching

his teens. This restriction of physical movement, however, led to a fine development of the young Gabriel's powers of imagination.

The small family lived in near-poverty, and the need for economy in their lives has left its mark to this day. The house, constructed at a price really beyond their means, became a financial burden to them and the repayment of its cost forced enormous sacrifices on the family.

For a year during the economic crisis of 1929-1930, Cousin's father was out of work. He even spoke of committing suicide at this time and Cousin felt the ignominy of his father's situation personally, as he was obliged to wear the corduroy suit which was part of the standard distribution to children of the unemployed.

(b) Work and Sport

By 1931, the economic crisis had passed and Cousin's father had found work again. Cousin left school the same year, at the age of thirteen, and took up an apprenticeship with the Compagnie Electro-Mécanique of Le Bourget. He had disliked school for several reasons: firstly, he was particularly weak at arithmetic; secondly, his ability to daydream had earned him the constant disapproval of his teachers; thirdly, he felt that the classroom was too restricting for him and he wanted only to feel more actively engaged in learning. As the son of a working-class father his only hope for advancement lay in becoming an apprentice - this at least allowed him to earn some dignity in the form of wages, even if these were only derisory in amount. At the Compagnie Electro-Mécanique, Cousin obtained his Certificat d'Aptitude Professionnel as a fitter in 1934, but remained with the same firm on the production side until the outbreak of war. This initiation into factory work was to coincide with another major aspect of his development: sport. At about the age of ten, Cousin was taking part regularly in football games organised by the local 'patronage catholique'. But one day his father, insensed by the threat to the apprenticeship that this activity represented, burnt his son's football boots: this act, together with the influence of his uncle Lucien who encouraged him to



pursue sport, was destined eventually to channel the boy into athletics, a sport which had such an enormous influence on him for many years afterwards and in which he experienced much success. What was even more invaluable, Gabriel's talent at athletics brought him a new self-confidence.

When Cousin began work at the Compagnie Electro-Mécanique, he found that he was able to pursue this interest in athletics without his parents' knowledge. The following year, 1932, was the year of 'l'affaire Ladoumègue'. The French middle-distance runner, favourite for a gold medal at the Los Angeles Olympic Games, was disqualified from competing only months before they began after an accusation of professionalism. The example of Jules Ladoumègue, a mere gardener and near illiterate who won the hearts of millions of French people, showed Cousin that sport could enable the humblest person to achieve some success in life and in society. Cousin was also attracted by the pure physical beauty of Ladoumègue's style of running.

The same year, 1932, Cousin's parents allowed him to join the Club Sportif Corporatif of the Compagnie Electro-Mécanique. It was through his association with this club that Cousin later met his wife, Hélène Weltz, who was a member of the basketball section of the club.

Between the ages of sixteen and twenty-two, that is, during the six years before France became involved in the war, Gabriel Cousin underwent some radical changes in his development. During the outburst of strikes which followed the elections of 1936 when the more militant French industrial workers organised sit-ins until, as they hoped, the factories would be handed over to their control, Cousin played his part in 'guarding' and 'protecting' the machines he was responsible for. This experience gave him a new awareness of his social class, and he became militant in his turn - in the Jeunesse Ouvrière Chrétienne and in the Jeunesses Syndicales. He became aware, too, of his deep unhappiness at his position as a factory worker, and realised that his one chance of climbing out of it was through his ability at athletics.

In 1934 he joined a new club, the Club Olympique d'Aubervilliers.

one with a good many high-quality athletes as members, including many international runners. One of these, Auguste Lepigocher, a veteran member of the club, and in his fifties when Cousin first met him, was to have a considerable influence on his development. He worked as a lathe operator at the Compagnie Electro-Mécanique and had been a top French athlete at the turn of the century. In Cousin's eyes, he revealed a more enlightened and educated view of life than that which he had learnt from his narrow-minded parents and Cousin saw through him that there was no lack of culture among many working-class people of that time. Cousin says of him:

Il fut une sorte de père psychologique,  
m'apportant, m'ouvrant son immense richesse  
intérieure et son art de vivre.<sup>1</sup>

Cousin wrote his epitaph in a poem entitled Mon compagnon est mort. It takes the form of a series of teachings - the legacy of Lepigocher to Cousin - expressed in gratitude to a master from whom one disciple has learnt many things about life and human contact:

Il m'avait appris que l'effort est la morale de l'homme.<sup>2</sup>

Auguste Lepigocher was the first of many men to impress Cousin by their hard work and by their humanity, but also by their sensitivity to the beauties of life - currently one of hardship for the working classes.

In 1936, at the age of seventeen, Cousin was a finalist in the 800 metres at the French Junior Athletics Championships and, three years later he reached the peak of his athletics career when he finished third in the 400 metres at the Senior level in the French National Championships. The man who had trained him for these events, Lucien Desmurs, was another mentor for Cousin at this period in his life: he was a cultured and intelligent man, whose effect on Cousin was felt both within and without the limits of the running track.

1. Notes from Gabriel Cousin, in my possession.

2. G. Cousin, Au Milieu du Fleuve, Saint-Germain-des-Prés, 1973, p.94.

(c) War, Marriage, and a change of direction

It was Cousin's aim to be accepted by the Ecole Militaire des Sports de Joinville and he began military training to this end in 1938. The following year he passed the examination to become a 'sous-officier' with the rank of 'sergent' and qualified for entry into the Ecole de Joinville. He competed in the military sports championships at cross-country running, basketball and table tennis. However, the declaration of war in September 1939 prevented him from actually joining the Ecole de Joinville. Instead, he asked to join the Corps-Francs and when the Germans attacked in May 1940, he was in charge of a group of machine gunners in the hills of Aisne.

This sudden break with the past routine of factory work and suburban living, and this opportunity to travel for the first time outside his home region, awoke Gabriel Cousin to the beauties of the countryside. Perhaps the most valuable and permanent gain by the working classes from the Matignon agreement after the strikes in 1936, had been the achievement of 'congés payés'. Since that date, Cousin had spent one period of a fortnight at his grandfather's house, but now the war was to open up further opportunities for travel and for making new acquaintances, thereby enlarging his experience of life and developing his ideas on society and the world.

But the war was soon over for Cousin, for when his group was attacked in Aisne there were great losses and Cousin himself was taken prisoner and sent off to Germany. He was later in captivity in Austria, where he helped to construct the Salzburg-Vienna motorway. It was a severe winter and the prisoners were inadequately clothed for working in the snow. He had the good fortune to be repatriated in the Spring of 1941 because his specialist knowledge was required in his old company, the Compagnie Electro-Mécanique in Le Bourget, now employed in construction work for the German Navy. Through this stroke of luck he found himself close to Hélène again and the next year, 1942, they decided to marry, against the wishes of Cousin's parents. The marriage took place in September.

Cousin had already become aware of the activities of the

Resistance and was soon involved in sabotage attempts at the factory; he also organised cover-up operations for escaped prisoners or Resistance fighters.

In the Summer of 1942 Cousin had started attending a course of instruction at the Ecole de Bagatelle, - which had replaced the Ecole de Joinville in the North Zone of occupied France, while the latter had removed to Antibes - in order to train as a sports instructor. In October 1943 he left the Compagnie Electro-Mécanique for the second and last time and began a job as a sports instructor, organising physical education for factory workers. He was to continue this work until early 1945 when Jean-Marie Conty, the founder and head of the Ecole de Bagatelle, had him appointed 'Assistant pour la Jeunesse Ouvrière' at the Ministry of Youth and Sport. He was to take charge of the organisation of one sector of the département of Seine. Later in 1945 Cousin was appointed to Grenoble as a regional assistant for the same work and the Service Académique Jeunesse Ouvrière was created to provide a continuous training programme for sports instructors in factories.

(d) Literary awakening

It was while Cousin was attending the sports instructors' course that he made the acquaintance of Jean-Marie Conty and Jacques Lecoq. The friendship with Lecoq and the two men's artistic collaboration have continued to this day. It was at the Ecole de Bagatelle and under the influence of these two teachers that Cousin's new 'prise de conscience' was awakened. Through the numerous artistic and sporting activities that he participated in, there germinated and grew an awareness of his artistic sensibilities and a realisation of his cultural capacity.

At the Ecole de Bagatelle, Cousin learnt from Conty some of the dramatic principles of Antonin Artaud, with whom Conty had worked. With hindsight, it is not difficult for us to speculate on the exact sections of Artaud's work of 1938, Le Théâtre et son Double, which must have attracted Cousin and which were to influence his own writing later.

L'acteur est un athlète du coeur... Là où l'athlète s'appuie pour courir, c'est là que l'acteur s'appuie pour lancer une imprécation spasmodique, mais dont la course est rejetée vers l'intérieur.<sup>3</sup>

This must surely have caught the attention and the sympathy of Cousin, experienced in the art and the joy of running, and now turning his sights towards the artistic expression of that art and joy through an understanding of the significance of body movement in general as an expression of inner emotions or intellectual ideas. In Artaud's Le Théâtre de la Cruauté, (Premier Manifeste), Cousin will have read of Artaud's ideas on the possible themes likely to be appreciated most in this new type of theatre. He will have read of the form as well as the content of productions at such a theatre, and of the importance, according to Artaud, of the use of language, music, lighting effects, costumes, masks and other props. In the Second Manifeste, Artaud stated that:

Le Théâtre de la Cruauté choisira des sujets et des thèmes qui répondent à l'agitation et à l'inquiétude caractéristiques de notre époque.<sup>4</sup>

It would not be an exaggeration to say that we can see in Artaud's work, and Cousin's discovery of it, the turning point in Cousin's career. Artaud's elaboration of his principles in the same book centre around his play La Conquête du Mexique whose content and form are not too dissimilar from Cousin's later Le Cycle du Crabe.

Conty also introduced Cousin to the work of Jacques Copeau, whose group, Les Copiaus, had aimed their work at popular audiences in Bourgogne from 1925 to 1929. But what must have impressed Cousin most about the nature of Copeau's productions was their scale: in the nineteen-twenties and thirties, Copeau had experimented with open-air productions in streets and market squares, both in France and Italy. He had also produced his own manifesto for popular theatre in 1941.

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3. Antonin Artaud, Un athlétisme affectif, in Le Théâtre et son double, Gallimard, Collection Idées, 1964, p.195.

4. *ibid.* p.185.

Jean Dasté, who had been with the Copiaus and who later became Copeau's son-in-law, formed his own itinerant company in the French provinces during the Occupation. He remained faithful to the principles of Copeau and played in the open air as well as indoors during his period at the Comédie de Saint-Etienne from 1947 until 1971. Cousin had already met Dasté in 1945 when the latter came to Grenoble to start the first official experiment in decentralisation - an abortive one - and Dasté had asked Cousin to join his company. Cousin, aware by this time that he was not suited to be an actor and knowing that his real inclination was to be a teacher and writer, declined the invitation. However, Dasté later paid Cousin the compliment of staging his Le Drame du Fukuryu-Maru in Saint Etienne in 1963.

Apart from Cousin's encounter with the theory and practice of the theatre during this wartime period, he also began to read and write extensively. By chance, in July 1943, he happened upon a copy of Rilke's Briefe an einen jungen Dichter (Letters to a young poet); this book was a revelation to him and one which he claims to have influenced him right until the present day. It served as a major encouragement to him to begin writing, showing him the importance for every individual to express what he feels inside him, and demonstrating that everyone has an artistic potential which simply requires to be roused into activity:

Niemand kann Ihnen raten und helfen, niemand.  
Es gibt nur ein einziges Mittel. Gehen Sie in  
sich. Fragen Sie sich in der stillsten Stunde  
Ihrer Nacht: muss ich schreiben? Graben Sie in  
sich nach einer tiefen Antwort. Und wenn diese  
zustimmend lauten sollte, wenn Sie mit einem  
starken und einfachen 'Ich muss' dieser ernstesten  
Frage begegnen dürfen, dann bauen Sie Ihr Leben  
nach dieser Notwendigkeit. 5

If this letter persuaded Cousin of the necessity to write, then a second letter may have provided the stimulus for what was to be the major preoccupation of his poetry, namely, the

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5. Rainer Maria Rilke, Briefe an einen jungen Dichter (dated 1903-8), Insel Verlag, 1967, p.8.

theme of love - the simple, unsophisticated treatment of the expression of love by one human being for another:

Auch zu lieben ist gut: denn Liebe ist schwer.  
Liebhaben von Mensch zu Mensch: das ist vielleicht  
das Schwerste, was uns aufgegeben ist, das Äusserste,  
die letzte Probe und Prüfung, die Arbeit, für die  
alle andere Arbeit nur Vorbereitung ist.<sup>6</sup>

Cousin uses this quotation to preface the last section of his volume of poetry Au Milieu du Fleuve, published in 1973.

The literature of sport naturally played its part in Cousin's transition from training as a sports instructor to his education in the theory and practice of the theatre. His first contacts with literature during the period at the Ecole de Bagatelle were with Montherlant's Les Olympiques, Giono's Le Chant du Monde, Prévost's Plaisirs des Sports and Giraudoux's Notes et Maximes. Cousin's first visit to the theatre was to see Obey's Huit cents mètres, produced by Jean-Louis Barrault at the Roland-Garros stadium.

La résonance de ces textes en moi fut immédiate  
et profonde. Je les connaissais sans le savoir,  
j'avais été élevé avec eux. Non par l'école,  
mais par le stade. Je les avais pratiqués  
physiquement, avec le souffle et les muscles.<sup>7</sup>

Sport can thus be seen to have fulfilled a double rôle in Cousin's life: first, it enabled him to escape the monotony and physical hardship of factory working conditions and to discover the joys of individual freedom through communication with nature and the sheer pleasure of physical fitness; second, it acted as the catalyst in the transference of his interest to drama while retaining its place in the training of the dramatic artist. The close integration of sport and drama has never been abandoned by Cousin in his theatre: through sporting movement and expression of the inner self, drama takes on a rhythm akin to that of athletic activity:

6. *ibid.*, p.35.

7. G. Cousin, Sport et Dramaturgie, Cahiers Pédagogiques no.13, (avril 1959) p.13.

Ecrire une pièce, pour moi, c'est d'abord la voir en mouvement. Je n'entends le texte qu'après. Tant que sa construction n'est pas faite, que ses personnages ne sont pas vivants, que je n'ai pas visionné leur jeu, je ne puis écrire. Nul doute que cette méthode, que ce chemin que j'emprunte, ne me vienne du stade.<sup>8</sup>

It is to Jean-Marie Conty that Cousin attributes his successful transition from sport to drama. Conty had been a member of the French basketball team and was an athletics and rugby champion. A writer and poet too, he had known Antonin Artaud well and now spent his time directing the Ecole de Bagatelle. During the war he also helped to found another organisation, as Barrault has mentioned:

Avec Jean-Marie Conty, Roger Blin et quelques autres amis, nous avons créé l'E.P.J.D. (Education par le jeu dramatique). Cela consistait à aller dans les écoles, à entrer en contact avec les élèves, à leur faire faire des improvisations bien orientées grâce auxquelles, à l'occasion, nous pouvions avoir une action antigouvernementale. Une sorte d'esprit de résistance auprès des jeunes.

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Today, Conty is an industrial psychologist and a specialist in management retraining.

The effectiveness of body movement on stage to enhance the emotional and dramatic appeal of a play was not apparent only to an athlete such as Cousin: it had also occurred to the theoreticians and practitioners of the theatre who were seeking new ways of expressing mood and ideas in the prewar period. French theatre as a whole benefited from the simultaneous and historically fortuitous meeting of Copeau with Jean-Louis Barrault and André Obey. As Dorothy Knowles points out in her book, French Drama of the Inter-War Years:

8. *ibid.*, p.13.

9. Jean-Louis Barrault, Souvenirs pour Demain, Le Seuil, 1972, p.155.



Copeau ... considered that Obey was the only French dramatist who had been prepared to adopt the methods of the Vieux-Colombier and its School, and to profit by their experience. Obey declared that as the result of long discussions with Copeau he had sought to develop his own particular dramatic style.<sup>10</sup>

[La Compagnie des Quinze] drilled themselves in a type of theatrical gymnastics quite independent of any text, and the plays which [Obey] wrote specially for them utilized to the full the plastic virtuosity of the actors... Working almost exclusively on texts by Obey, Michel Saint-Denis concentrated on gesture and diction; gesture was stylized and diction modulated until it bordered on incantation. The sound of the text, independently of the sense of the words, was used to convey the intensity of feeling to be expressed, and the dialogue became a musical accompaniment to the action, which approached ballet in its formalism.<sup>11</sup>

This description of the methods and effects of the work by the Compagnie des Quinze would, in many ways, also suit those of Cousin's theatre. The admixture of the ideas of the Cartel and the aspirations of the immediate prewar generation were noticeable too in the work of Barrault, who acknowledges Dullin as his mentor in Souvenirs pour Demain and who says of Copeau: "c'était le grand patron" and "Copeau était pour nous le Père de tout le théâtre moderne". Barrault's subsequent collaboration with Claudel, as exciting and constructive as Jouvet's had been with Giraudoux, produced the memorable Soulier de Satin in November 1943. Cousin saw this production and names it as one of the seminal influences on his own dramatic style:

Je dois beaucoup à Claudel pour la poésie  
de mes drames et l'emploi de chœurs.<sup>12</sup>

The juxtaposition of poetry and dialogue, of chorus and soliloquy, impressed Cousin greatly in these early days of theatrical experience; he mentions their effect upon him in other productions he saw at the time: in Aeschylus' The Persians,

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10. Dorothy Knowles, French Drama of the Inter-War Years, Harrap, 1967, p.225.

11. *ibid.*, p.220-1.

12. G. Cousin, interview in De Linie (Journal flamand), 17-1-1964.

performed by the Groupe Antique of the Sorbonne; and in Jean Vilar's production of Eliot's Murder in the Cathedral in 1945:

C'était une des toutes premières pièces que je voyais. Elle m'a bouleversé, particulièrement le chœur.<sup>13</sup>

Besides occasional visits to the Comédie Française - where he saw Le Soulier de Satin - Cousin also attended their 'matinées poétiques' listening to lectures and readings of poetry and prose works. A year later, in 1944, he began to participate in the evening classes of the organisation T.E.C. (Travail et Culture) which provided practical instruction in art forms such as singing, mime, dance and drama. It was now three years since his first attempts at composition:

Mon premier souvenir de 'l'acte d'écrire' remonte à la captivité, de simples et naïfs carnets de notes, sans savoir exactement ce que je faisais, puis quelques poèmes. Mais si je ne savais pas écrire, ni comment écrire, j'ai toujours su quoi écrire.<sup>14</sup>

Those three years had taught Cousin both the theory and practice of writing for the theatre and the two now became fused. The fusion was to find its full expression during the next two years of his life: the principal influence between 1944 and 1946, the one which helped more than anything else to combine Cousin's enthusiasm for sport with his personal ambition to begin literary creation, together with his newly acquired knowledge of the interrelationship between sports training techniques and modern methods of dance and drama, was his preoccupation with the group of friends calling themselves Les Compagnons de la Saint-Jean.

(e) Les Compagnons de la Saint-Jean

During the last weeks of the German occupation of Paris, a small group of friends all under the age of twenty-six who had been closely involved in the Resistance, decided to flee to the country in order to avoid arrest. With the intention of pursuing their interest in the field of drama, they hid in the woods at Darvault, near Nemours, to the South of the Forêt de Fontainebleau, slept rough in the caves and sandstone quarries

13. G.Cousin, Leçon de mise en scène, interview on Belgian television, 1963.

14. G.Cousin, interview in Sillage, revue universitaire française, novembre 1963.

of that area, and by day studied and practised sport, mime, and dancing. Much of their time was also spent in reading drama and poetry. The group, who called themselves Les Aurochs and who consisted of Jacques Lecoq, Jean Ducroquet, François Hubert, Odette Maquet, Monique de Baillencourt, and Gabriel Cousin and his wife Hélène and six-month old daughter Christiane, continued their primitive existence for about six weeks. Their refusal to submit to life under the Nazis was matched by their intense love of artistic creativity and a desire to live communally.

After the departure of the Germans from Paris in August 1944, the group returned to the capital and were joined by Musy Hafner and François Barre. That autumn, some of the group joined the organisation called 'Travail et Culture'.

'Travail et Culture' (T.E.C.) had been born during the Occupation in Paris. Its aim was to establish a movement after the Liberation which would disseminate popular culture and seek to introduce a less formal system of education than the predominantly academic system then prevailing. As such, it was some twenty-five years ahead of its time in proposing methods of teaching based on oral expression, creativity and the training of the senses. It had little influence outside the capital except through some isolated groups - including one in Grenoble - centred on the trade union movement, which provided a body of interested spectators for its productions. It met in the basement of a building in the Rue des Beaux-Arts, near the Seine.

At the very moment when, almost surrealistically, the horrors of the concentration camps and their degradation of humanity were being revealed to the world, the T.E.C. brought together a host of young people anxious to discover and show their inner feelings and to live and express all this to others. They practised yoga, drama, mime, dance techniques, diction, modelling, and choral singing. The classes began at about five o'clock in the afternoon and often continued until after midnight. The performing arts which were at the basis of the curriculum of the T.E.C. were taught by, among others, Jean Sery (song, dance, and mime), Jean-Marie Conty (sensual perception) and Jean-Louis Barrault (movement).

Jean Sery had been a star of the Paris Opéra but had suffered a long and near-fatal illness and had abandoned the rigorous training of the Opéra to take up a new life in the country after leaving hospital. Not wishing to retire from dancing altogether, he took up teaching it to others, but he abandoned the formal, quasi-gymnastic methods of the Opéra and replaced these by techniques based on improvisation, trance, instinctive reaction and creation through the natural, constructive forces in Man. He thus liberated dance, taught his students to discover how to express their inner selves, and practised the methods of Georges Hébert, concentrating on the spontaneity of invention - as Isadora Duncan, Laban, and Martha Graham had also done.

These classes taught Cousin not only a pedagogical method for physical education, but gave him a model for his subsequent career as a dramatist:

La méthode naturelle de Georges Hébert est celle dans laquelle je fus formé pédagogiquement, celle qui m'a le plus marqué. Or dans cette méthode, pour composer une leçon d'éducation physique, il faut appliquer les principes pédagogiques suivants: la leçon doit être continue, progressive, alternée, dosée, attrayante. On ne peut trouver de meilleurs conseils pour construire une pièce: ne pas avoir de trou; faire monter le drame; alterner la tension et la détente; doser le rire comme la gravité, l'émotion comme l'effort cérébral; et que ce soit aussi - mais en plus - un divertissement.<sup>15</sup>

Jean-Louis Barrault's career had already brought him into contact with Etienne Decroux, the exponent of mime, in the latter years of the nineteen-thirties and both Barrault and Decroux now taught at the T.E.C. classes and impressed their students by the harmony and subtlety of their art. Barrault's performance as Deburau in the film Les Enfants du Paradis illustrated some of these techniques. To Cousin and to the other members of Les Aurochs who were training to become sports instructors - 'maîtres d'E.P.S.' - these methods of teaching movement and expression used by the T.E.C. teachers were enormously attractive. As Cousin puts it:

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15. G.Cousin, Sport et Dramaturgie, op.cit., p.14.

Nous comprenions que nos qualités physiques uniquement tournées vers le rendement compétitif - cela n'était pas suffisant. Il nous manquait... que notre corps serve à exprimer notre âme....La danse moderne, celle de Jean Sery, m'amenait plus près de mon esprit, de ma conscience: cerveau et sens.<sup>16</sup>

These new techniques learnt at the T.E.C. classes allowed Cousin and his fellow students to be less rigid in their own ideas about physical training and it enabled them to discover the close connection that exists between the preparation for, and execution of, physical education, sport, dance and drama. Through such methods, the individual members of the group found self-confidence and self-awareness while as a group they were soon to exploit their new-found power of artistic expression by communicating it to wider audiences.

The following spring, Les Aurochs became the nucleus of a new and enlarged group of students participating in the courses organised by the T.E.C. and the E.P.J.D., all of whom were now anxious to put into practice publicly the teachings and techniques learnt at these schools. In particular, they were interested in the re-creation of mass festivals and the use of psychology-orientated techniques of self-expression on stage.

It was at about this time that a similar group of enthusiasts for such stage techniques was being formed under the inspiration of the now internationally famous Marcel Marceau; they called themselves Les Idoines and were a group whose work was based largely on the use of mime. An abortive attempt was made by Les Aurochs to merge with Les Idoines, but the physical vigour of the former could not compromise with the studied silent movement rehearsed by the latter, and the two groups soon found themselves unable to blend their differing concepts of expressive techniques.

In May 1945, at the suggestion of Conty and Sery, and with the enthusiastic support of Les Aurochs, a group of students from the T.E.C. began preparation for Le Jeu de la Saint-Jean,

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16. G.Cousin, Ma Rencontre avec Jean Sery, notes in my possession.

a large-scale production to take place in the open air at Chartres to celebrate Le Feu de la Saint-Jean, the pagan fire-worshipping myth which coincided with Midsummer, and which was to take place on 23rd. June 1945.

An estimated fifteen thousand spectators were to witness this remarkable theatrical event, performed in the streets of Chartres to celebrate the Liberation. It was presented, in honour of those who had returned from prisoner-of-war camps, as a sort of symbolic purification of the dark days of the Occupation. Part of the presentation took the form of a series of seven mimed tableaux 'representing 'le chemin de croix du prisonnier de guerre' and taking its inspiration from some drawings on the subject by the artist Jean Henri.

Some idea of the success of this venture and of the nature of the popular festival it created can be ascertained from one newspaper report:

A 11 heures, le 'Jeu' commence sur la Promenade des Charbonniers. Chants, danses, pantomimes, farandoles évoquent le culte du feu, envoyé du ciel, qui réchauffe et ranime la vie et la joie sur la terre. La joie aujourd'hui, c'est le 'Retour', retour des prisonniers, retour à la vie. Ils sont là plus de cent venus de Paris visiter leurs camarades chartrains pour que subsiste l'esprit fraternel des camps. Jetée du haut du rempart, la couronne de feu symbolique allume sur la butte le brasier de la Saint-Jean et sa flamme dansante monte face au monument aux morts.

Le sifflement d'un train, un cortège de prisonniers, simulent une arrivée, tandis que les rondes commencent dans l'éclatement joyeux des fusées d'artifice. Et le bal débute. Il se poursuivra tard dans la nuit, sur un parquet hélas! encore trop étroit, dans cette nuit de la Saint-Jean qu'a fait sienne la joie du Retour. 17

This dual celebration of the Feu de la Saint-Jean on Midsummer Eve and the thanksgiving for the return of Frenchmen from prisoner of war camps had resulted in an unforgettable experience for the inhabitants of Chartres and others who had

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17. L'Indépendant d'Eure-et-Loir, 25-26 juin 1945.

congregated in the streets of the town to share the festivities. But the form and nature of these festivities also marked the genesis of a type of large-scale open-air theatrical presentation which was to be repeated in varying forms by this score of actors throughout France during the course of the following year.

The success of the group in Chartres led to an immediate and spontaneous re-naming of their team as Les Compagnons de la Saint-Jean. Their Chartres production, Le Jeu de la Saint-Jean was repeated in Paris at the end of June, within a week of their Chartres première.

At Aix-les-Bains the following month, Le Jeu du 14 juillet commemorated the first anniversary of freedom from the Occupation. At the request of the Comité de Libération of Aix, the Compagnons reconstructed the historical events of 1789 in Dauphiné-Savoie. The presentation lasted only half an hour, but attracted some ten thousand spectators.

At the beginning of the same month, July 1945, the Compagnons were invited to Grenoble stadium to perform a drama on the theme of the Liberation. The invitation came from Georges Blanchon, the founder and president of Les Heures Alpines, a society created in 1928 to organise cultural activities in the town of Grenoble; he later became the director of the Maison de la Culture de Grenoble.

The result of this invitation was a production entitled Un peuple se retrouve which recounted the recent events of French history in six episodes: Avant la Guerre, La Guerre, Occupation, Résistance, Libération, l'Oeuvre de Demain. This dramatic reconstruction, lasting about 45 minutes and given before some twenty thousand spectators, formed part of that town's first anniversary festival of its liberation on 22 August 1945. As in other towns, the drama enacted by the Compagnons was preceded by parades, music and dancing through the streets of the town and this was followed by a dance lasting well into the night.

It was no coincidence that this fervently-felt expression of local feeling should have taken place in Grenoble, in close geographical proximity to Le Vercors, for this was the region which had witnessed some of the bloodiest last-ditch stands

of the Resistance movement against German and Italian forces sent to root them out in the Alps. The official programme of Un peuple se retrouve illustrates the intentions of the production:

Le tableau final "L'oeuvre de demain" nous rappelle que rien de grand ne peut jamais sortir d'efforts ou d'actes de foi isolés. Pour "qu'un peuple se retrouve" pleinement, il faut maintenir le souffle des héros, il faut s'atteler à une oeuvre qui subsiste comme témoignage durable de notre civilisation.

Commémorer ce grand mouvement de la libération c'est donc se souvenir, mais aussi et surtout se tourner vers les tâches urgentes, vers les tâches de demain, car au fond la plus grande partie de ce qui était à faire reste à faire. Promettre de le faire sera le sens même de cette célébration aujourd'hui.<sup>18</sup>

The Compagnons de la Saint-Jean - who had played the principal rôles in Un peuple se retrouve among a cast of about three hundred men and women - had directed this production collectively. The designer had been Jannerrey who, like Blanchon, was a cousin of Le Corbusier, the architect. Both Jannerrey and Blanchon had been members of the Resistance in Le Vercors where their initial aim had been to promote intellectual thought among the maquisards. Among their longer-term ideas on the cultural situation in France after the Liberation, they had outlined plans for creating an educational movement for popular culture outside the universities. The product of these ideas was an organisation called Peuple et Culture (P.E.C.) which was founded in Grenoble in 1945 by, among others, Joffre Dumazedier, a sociologist who became known both nationally and internationally as a specialist in the teaching of leisure activities.

Dumazedier's presence in Grenoble and Cousin's subsequent meeting with him when Les Compagnons de la Saint-Jean performed in that town may be said to be the key factors in determining Cousin's settling there and remaining there since the war.

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18. Grenoble fête l'Anniversaire de sa Libération, programme officiel, 22 août 1945.



Cousin joined the P.E.C. in 1946 and was made responsible for the commission on "culture sportive" at national level which was attached to that organisation. He only finally separated from it after differences of opinion with its leadership in 1953. The P.E.C. had a considerable influence on the largely self-taught Cousin, particularly in regard to the training of the mind - achieved not only through meetings and seminars, but also through a programme of mental training akin to preparation for sport. Dumazedier himself was the creator of this system of mental training and inculcated in Cousin a gift for analytical study. He edited numerous publications dealing with the place of sport in leisure activities and in general culture. In Regards neufs sur le Sport (Edition du Seuil, Paris, 1950) Dumazedier included an article by Cousin entitled Le Sport dans ma Formation. Claude Roy said of this publication:

Regards neufs sur le Sport - ouvrage collectif - est sans doute l'ouvrage le plus intelligent, le plus utile et le plus complet qui ait été écrit sur 'l'harmonisme' du sport.

Il s'ouvre sur un essai très juste de Joffre Dumazedier et par le 'témoignage' extraordinairement direct de Gabriel Cousin qui explique quel enrichissement dans sa vie d'ouvrier fut la pratique du sport, et les horizons moraux, politiques, sociaux qu'il lui a, sinon ouverts, du moins aidé à pénétrer.<sup>19</sup>

Cousin devotes many pages of his poetry to those people whom he admired and learnt from, but it is to Joffre Dumazedier that he attributes his discovery of books, and he dedicates this poem, entitled La Grande Librairie, to him in Au Milieu du Fleuve:

C'était il y a trente ans.  
Après avoir hésité longtemps, j'avais choisi la  
plus grande pour être moins remarqué.  
Jeune ouvrier, il m'avait fallu tant de courage  
pour oser entrer.  
Comme un voleur, j'achetai mon premier livre  
au rayon des occasions.  
Je dérobaï le feu.<sup>20</sup>

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19. Claude Roy, Libération, 1950.

20. G.Cousin, Au Milieu du Fleuve, op.cit., p.115.

If popular culture arises out of the expression of working-class attitudes towards the arts and their significance in working-class life, then Gabriel Cousin eminently characterises those attitudes, and it was thanks to the group with which he was associated, Les Compagnons de la Saint-Jean, that the seeds of a living, popular culture were sown during those post-Liberation years. The aim of the Compagnons, in presenting their entertainments, was to achieve popular appeal and participation in the re-creation of events familiar to the public at large. In their productions, they evoked a good deal of sympathy from their audiences for their interpretation of both past and recent history, and they succeeded in establishing a large measure of community spirit into the bargain. The aims of the directors of the future Maisons de la Culture were to be no less idealistic: it remained to be seen whether they could achieve these aims as brilliantly as the Compagnons - and similar troupes - had done.

During this formative period for the Compagnons, they defined their objectives under four main headings: community living, daily work sessions (specific training in aspects of the theatre in the mornings, play research and rehearsal in the afternoons), search for popular festivals involving the collective team creations for mass audiences. In all, they produced five such creations within the space of ten months and, in addition, one variety performance involving songs, dance, sketches and mime. For their performances they used the simplest of costumes and a minimum of props: a wig or an arm-band would be sufficient to indicate a person's identity, a flag or a notice would explain the place or time of the action of the play, while human emotions were frequently portrayed by appropriately expressive masks.

On September 8th. 1945, the Compagnons provided a show for the first Scout rally after the Occupation. The production, called Chante la Libération, took place on a hill overlooking the town of Le Puy and was attended by five thousand scouts. The story, the theme of which was the Apocalypse and the Liberation of Man, was narrated by an actor representing the

prophet Isaiah. It was enacted by the Compagnons with the assistance of a group of eighty scouts and lasted for about one hour. The director of the production was Georges Douking whom the Compagnons had met and worked with during their stay in Grenoble.

Douking was a former member of Gaston Baty's company and his successor at the Centre Dramatique d'Aix-en-Provence, Jean Dasté, Copeau's son-in-law, often considered the pioneer of the decentralisation movement in French theatre after the war, provided a further connection with pre-war theatre companies, for he had been one of the Copiaus in Burgundy until 1929. He had been invited to Grenoble in September 1945 to organise the first Centre Dramatique in the provinces; however, the attempt failed, and Dasté moved to Saint-Etienne. He suggested to the Compagnons that they become professionally contracted and form a company. Some, including Gabriel Cousin, decided against this proposal but others, Jacques Lecoq, Musy Hafner and René Lafforgue amongst them, accepted the advice.

This split in the troupe did not prevent a smaller group of the Compagnons attempting once more to form a commune at Corenc in Isère. Their home was the Tour des Chiens, an eleventh century tower to the south of Grenoble. However, despite the fact that their aims were similar and unchanged from earlier days - that is, they sought to establish a new, collective life-style while pursuing their creative work as teachers or artists - their ideologies were too heterogeneous to form a united plan of action. Catholics, Protestants, Marxists, anarchists, they sought to bring together their idealism and their talents; however, they were too frequently beset by financial difficulties, and their long discussions and arguments over ideas and policies exhausted their creative energies. Nevertheless, the experience of truly popular theatre had left its mark:

Bien entendu, ils n'ont pas de scène pour répéter. Qu'importe...quant aux comédiens, ils logent là où ils le peuvent avant qu'ils ne découvrent La Tour des Chiens, vieux rendezvous de chasse ayant appartenu, dit-on, à Louis XI, et situé au dessus de la Tronche,

en pleine montagne. C'est là que bientôt toute la troupe louera une villa et viendra habiter. Toute la troupe appréhendait un peu ce premier contact avec le public. Partout grâce à l'appui enthousiaste qu'ils trouvent dans les associations populaires de toutes sortes qui les soutiennent tout au long de cette première tournée, ils vont jouer devant un auditoire chaleureux et vibrant qui a su reconnaître en eux de véritables comédiens amoureux du théâtre.

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During the winter of 1945-6, the Compagnons rarely worked together, but their final piece was to be performed on May 1st. 1946 in the Grenoble stadium. Le jeu du 1er mai was directed by Luigi Ciccione who had continued to work during the previous winter with Gabriel Cousin and Jacques Lecoq. Some indication of the differences of opinion which must have existed between the members of the group living in the Tour des Chiens may be had from the very theme of this new production: 'les luttes du mouvement ouvrier'. Entitled Acier et fer, the play lasted about one hour and was performed before an audience of five to six thousand people.

Within weeks of this performance, however, the group from the Tour des Chiens had disbanded and the Compagnons de la Saint-Jean had ceased to exist, as had the members' attempts at community living.

This disappointingly sudden conclusion to the group's activities would seem to indicate that the best chance of survival that such an amorphous collection of individual talents has in the field of improvised drama lies either in concentrating its efforts in one region - such as the Copiaus had done in Burgundy in 1925-29 or Le Théâtre du Peuple of Maurice Pottecher at Bussang in the Vosges in 1895 and which continues to function each Summer - or in remaining specialists in celebratory theatre, such as is welcome at annual festivals or anniversaries for the entertainment of large audiences. On this last point, it is

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21. Le Théâtre Populaire en France, Dossier Confluent, no.2, Groupe de Travail, Lille, février 1960, p.15.

interesting to note that Gabriel Cousin fulfilled these conditions much later in 1968 when presenting his Vivre en 1968 in the streets of Chatillon-sur-Chalaronne, in the department of Ain.

The uniqueness of the Compagnons de la Saint-Jean lay primarily in the composition of its membership. The common experience of the oppression of wartime occupation of the young men and women in the group united them in a desire to change society - principally its educational system and its forms of artistic expression. As potential sports instructors, Gabriel Cousin and the original 'Aurochs' learnt and felt the relationship between the training methods of athletic and aesthetic activity - both involved the same principle of encouraging their public towards participation. Sport, like drama or dance, is a collective and participatory activity. Equally, it can draw people towards one another in a totally democratic fashion, ennobling each of them by its demands and its rewards, and enhancing their personalities by stimulating self-awareness and self-confidence. There are echoes in this feature of Cousin's life with the experiences in that of Montherlant at the age of nineteen:

Comment cette double révélation, de la vie athlétique, et de la camaraderie avec les garçons du peuple, venant à ce moment de ma jeunesse, fut pour moi importante, je pense le raconter un jour dans le détail.  
Rapprochement des générations par le sport.  
Peut-il y avoir un rapprochement des classes?  
Aristocratique, le sport l'est sans doute, puisqu'il est la sélection des meilleurs physiquement (et ayant en outre de l'intelligence et du caractère).  
Et en même temps démocratique, parce que les conditions sociales y sont tenues pour rien..  
C'est cette passion commune qui fait que l'intellectuel et le manoeuvre, l'homme de trente ans et l'enfant de quatorze peuvent pendant des heures vivre ensemble...Une jeunesse athlétique contient assez de richesse, et de richesse diverse, pour nourrir en quelque chose chaque moment de notre développement intérieur et chaque étape de notre destinée. 22

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22. Henri Montherlant, Préface (1938) to Les Olympiques, Gallimard, 1924.

During the war years, as we have seen, Gabriel Cousin underwent certain radical changes in his life and experienced a new direction of his interests. The period with the Compagnons stands as the culmination of that new experience and change and it was to shape many of his ideas in his subsequent writings for the theatre: it introduced him to the concepts of collaborative creation, the importance and dramatic qualities of other art forms in sustaining a text, and the possibilities of creating a truly popular theatre for mass audiences. All these concepts were examined and exploited in his later work.

Nor can we underestimate the personal pleasure gained from the communal experience of the Compagnons period. Cousin remembers it with affection:

C'était une période très riche - on passait les nuits à discuter - mais très éprouvante, très épuisante. On est très content de l'avoir fait tous quand on se retrouve. C'était très riche pour nous, et puis l'époque nous a permis en nous retrouvant ensemble d'avoir le culot de faire des choses qu'on ne refera jamais.<sup>23</sup>

But perhaps the most valuable part that this period played in his life was its completing of his education for the theatre: the process of self-tuition was over - bar the Brecht experience - and a period of personal creativity could begin.

(f) Mounin and Monnet

Cousin's conscious rejection of his narrow, orthodox Catholic upbringing was accomplished through a realisation of his athletic and literary potential; a third influence, that of politics, allowed him to reassess both his own position in society and France's position in European affairs. This belated awareness of the rôles of political parties in occupied France was accompanied by a search for a moral and political stance for himself. It implied a discovery of, and a subsequent acceptance or rejection of, various dogmas which, in turn, brought him independent judgment and self-identification.

His experiences in captivity and under the Occupation led him to support for a while the tenets of 'gionisme' - the

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23. G.Cousin, Interview avec D.W.Jeffery, juillet 1974.

humanitarian and pacifistic movement seeking absolute liberty for the individual while glorifying the beauty and the force of nature. Giono's virulent attack on modern mechanised society and his lyrical exaltation of the rustic life must have appealed considerably to Cousin who, only years before, had himself discovered the rural world outside Paris and opened his eyes to natural beauty. But despite his feeling for Giono's Le Chant du Monde and its sporting images, he soon abandoned the movement of 'gionisme' and took up a more militant stance against the occupying forces.

On the ideological front, Cousin came into contact with the works of Aragon after the war but again found himself in conflict with the ideas of a known and respected writer. Aragon's campaign for the emergence of a sort of national poetry was supported by the French Communist Party (P.C.F.), and Cousin's rejection of this dogma precluded him from the party's support in his creative activities during his years of membership. Instead, Cousin found patronage with the group of poets following the anti-Aragonian Georges Mounin. Mounin was a militant member of the P.C.F. and one of its officials; a teacher and a linguist by training, he is best known as the 'discoverer' of the poet René Char. Cousin first met Mounin in 1952 and Mounin's appreciation of Cousin's early poetry led him to draw Cousin's work to the notice of the Gallimard publishing house who published his L'Ordinaire Amour in 1958. It was through this recommendation of Mounin's and the contact with Gallimard that Cousin's subsequent work in the field of drama came to the attention of Jacques Lemarchand, the critic of Combat and, after 1950, of Le Figaro Littéraire, who at the time was the director of the theatre section of Gallimard.

Mounin's encouragement extended not only to the love poetry of Cousin's L'Ordinaire Amour but to his political poetry too; Nommer la Peur, a collection of poems on political themes by Gabriel Cousin and Jean Perret, was published by Oswald in 1967 with a preface by Georges Mounin.

Cette tranquillité dans les grands sujets,  
c'est elle déjà qui permet d'apercevoir en  
Gabriel Cousin l'un de ceux qui vont être,

peut-être, les meilleurs des poètes  
politiques français contemporains.<sup>24</sup>

The themes of love and of politics were to become equally important in Cousin's dramatic output later; his plays would portray the barriers separating Man from his fellows and show the hindrances to love caused by social, racial or political differences.

As a critic, Mounin exerted a moral as well as an aesthetic influence on Cousin and other aspiring poets; his humanity was extolled by Cousin thus:

Georges Mounin n'est pas un critique au sens ordinaire, ancien. C'est plus un philosophe exprimant un humanisme au travers de sa critique, de ses conseils, de ses contacts, de sa personnalité. Il ne censure pas, il nourrit, il révèle, il fait sentir et comprendre.<sup>25</sup>

However, the impetus to change from poetry to drama in order to express his views was given to Cousin by another man, Gabriel Monnet. Cousin reported this advice in an interview given in 1959:

Gaby Monnet, le metteur en scène des Nuits d'Annecy (il est maintenant chez Jean Dasté à Saint-Etienne) m'entraîna à faire une pièce: sors de tes poèmes et travaille pour le théâtre, c'est la seule façon d'exprimer le drame, la tragédie de notre époque.<sup>26</sup>

On March 1st. 1954, the Japanese tunny-fishing boat Fukuryu-Maru (the S.S. Lucky Dragon) was caught in the radioactive fallout from the first H-Bomb experiment at Eniwetok in the Pacific Ocean. This shocking event was documented by Cousin in a long, dramatic poem. Monnet persuaded him to reformulate the poetry into a piece for the theatre, which eventually became Cousin's first play, Le Drame du Fukuryu-Maru, published by Gallimard in 1960.

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24. Georges Mounin, Nouvelle Revue Française, no.64 (avril 1958) p.716.

25. G.Cousin, interview in Chorus, nos.2/3, Paris, juin 1962.

26. G.Cousin, interview in Arts, 28-10-1959.



Gabriel Monnet had been Conseiller Technique et Pédagogique pour le Théâtre au Ministère de la Jeunesse, a post to be held by Cousin himself in 1965. Monnet's production of Hamlet at Annecy in July 1954 and the subsequent discussions on the theatre which took place as part of the drama course there, left a firm impression in Cousin's mind that he should turn to the theatre to express his ideas. Monnet held that the contemporary theatre lacked poetry because poets were too hidebound, and they too frequently left drama to sociologists; he was seeking a new drama expressing social and political ideas in poetic fashion and Cousin, he felt, had the inspiration and the imagination to fulfil the needs of a new theatre. Monnet himself later intended to produce Cousin's Le Voyage de derrière la Montagne at Bourges.

(g) Cousin and the Parti Communiste Français

A summary of the influences at work on Gabriel Cousin and his career as a dramatist would be incomplete without some reference to his membership of the P.C.F.: not only did it provide him with a basis for political action and reflection during the Occupation and Liberation years, but it also contributed to the enlargement of cultural ideas and movements which he was experiencing at the time.

During 1943 and 1944, Cousin had been approached by several resistance groups to join their ranks but had refused on the grounds that he was not prepared to participate in violent action. When he returned to Paris late in 1944 after the experiment in communal living with Les Aurochs at Nemours, Cousin began an intensive study of Marxism and attended meetings of the P.C.F. However, he did not join the Party until early 1945 - after his appointment as 'assistant pour le sport' for La Jeunesse Ouvrière for which he had organised a Trades Union affiliated to the C.G.T.

Although Marxism as an ideology and the P.C.F. as its exponent seemed to Cousin to be the only means of changing the social order - he still believes this to be the case, despite the fact that he is no longer a member of the Party - he had

certain reservations about Marxism's relationship to the private lives of individuals.

Cousin postponed any involvement in the activities of the Party until he had settled in Grenoble in October 1945. Then, for several years, he participated in local and national conferences and sat on Party committees; there even appeared the possibility of his taking up a political career with the P.C.F. However, the creative urge was stronger and, now that he had become a fully-qualified sports teacher, he foresaw the opportunity to practise both a full-time professional career in education and continue his writing on a part-time basis. The decision was made; from that moment, his militancy took the form, not of encouraging political activities, but of eradicating social injustices. It may be said to be the foundation of his creative writing too.

In 1948, Cousin became the group secretary of the P.C.F. at the Lycée Technique Vaucanson in Grenoble where he had obtained his first post as a physical education teacher. He remained the P.C.F. branch secretary until the group's suspension and his own subsequent departure from the Party in 1961, the latter decision having been taken because of ideological differences with the P.C.F., particularly in respect of the Algerian war. He had found himself in disagreement with the Party line since 1951: the principal points of difference concerned the position of functionaries within the party and their tenure of posts; the ineffectual policy with regard to youth; the lack of any coherent or valid intellectual policy; prevarication over the issue of contraception; the insufficiency of information contained in the Party newspaper L'Humanité; and dishonesty in relation to the truth - for example, biographical details of individuals, or freedom of expression within and outside the Party.

In 1954, Cousin was leading the electoral campaign for the Party in the village outside Grenoble where he lived at the time, and where he was personally in charge of youth and cultural activities. However, Krushev's revelations about the Stalinist era destroyed Cousin's illusions about the Party as

it did those of many others; after about 1957, he formed part of the movement to reform the Party from within, despite the prohibition placed on such action by the P.C.F. The Algerian war exacerbated Cousin's relations with the Party with whose line he disagreed so strongly and he finally left the P.C.F. in 1961 after writing a letter to his superiors notifying them of his decision and explaining his divergence with Party thinking: despite the differences, however, he confirmed that he would remain a communist at heart and a Marxist in mind.

Cette décision fut très difficile et pénible. Ce fut un de mes plus lourds cas de conscience. Elle fut juste, je le vérifie depuis. D'une part, je ne pouvais rester au sein du Parti et me taire. Et le Parti ne me donnait plus la possibilité de m'exprimer. D'autre part, en tant qu'écrivain, créateur, être dans l'appareil du P.C. et en subir forcément les pressions (dans le meilleur sens du terme, et ceci est inévitable quand on s'engage à fond dans n'importe quel mouvement, action ou idéologie) et même les aliénations - tout au moins le conditionnement - risquait de limiter, de restreindre, sinon de bloquer mon champ de perception du monde actuel et donc ma création.<sup>27</sup>

This conflict in Cousin not only illustrates his personal dilemma in relation to communist ideology, but it also emphasises his desire to seek the truth of events, and the artist's need for the freedom of expression of that truth. If Cousin felt at the time that he may have betrayed his own class and his own background by leaving the Party - just as he may be said to have done in leaving his factory job in 1943 - then his decision certainly had no detrimental affect on his dramatic output. Indeed, the opposite may well be argued, for his energies were henceforth directed towards the expression of his social ideas in the theatre and there has been no curtailment of his activities in this field as a consequence of his political beliefs. The year in which Cousin decided

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27. G.Cousin, Engagement Politique, 10-6-1973 (unpublished).

to leave the P.C.F. was also the year in which he had his first play published - it is perhaps significant that the creative constraints that he felt within the Party were, when he left it, to be released and formulated in the four plays he had published in the following four years.

(h) Discovering Brecht

Un dramaturge qui ne voit pas ou ne veut pas voir qu'aucun théâtre n'est possible aujourd'hui s'il n'a pas été 'marqué', d'une manière ou d'une autre, par le théâtre de Brecht, refuse tout simplement de prendre conscience de son temps et de l'art de ce temps.<sup>28</sup>

Adamov's claim, though justified, cannot be applied in a wholesale fashion to the works of Cousin, despite the latter's own concurrence with the sentiment of Adamov, for Cousin had seen neither the Vilar production at the T.N.P. of Brecht's Mutter Courage in 1951, nor had he witnessed the Berliner Ensemble's momentous production of the same play during their visit to Paris in 1954 which brought about a minor revolution in French theatre production. Similarly, although Jean-Marie Serreau had produced Brecht's Die Ausnahme und die Regel at Les Noctambules in 1949, it was Jacques Lecoq who first introduced Cousin to the play after his production of it in Italy in 1952. Cousin was then in his mid-thirties, and not just thirty as he stated much later:

Moi-même, j'ai appris tardivement à connaître Brecht. J'avais trente ans lorsque je lus Die Ausnahme und die Regel et, ensuite, je vis une représentation du Kreidekreis par Jean Dasté.<sup>29</sup>

Jean Dasté's production, inspired by the Berliner Ensemble's own version of the play during their second visit to Paris in 1955, took place at Saint-Etienne in 1957. It is from this date that the real force of Brechtian drama took effect upon Cousin,

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28. Arthur Adamov, preface to Agnes Hüfner: Brecht in Frankreich, Metzlersche, (Stuttgart) 1968.

29. G.Cousin, interview in De Linie, 17-1-1964.

considerably later than it had influenced French theatre producers such as Roger Planchon.

Cousin's own natural feelings about the techniques of dramatic production learnt from the writings of Artaud and Copeau had therefore preceded this new revolution, and as will be seen later the emergence of a Brechtian style in Cousin's work is clearly visible in the two versions of his first play Le Drame du Fukuryu-Maru.

What is certain, is that Gabriel Cousin's discovery of Brecht represented not so much a cataclysmic revelation as an artistic substantiation of Cousin's own ideas. Chronologically, the appearance of Brechtian drama on the French stage happily coincided with the period in which Cousin was searching for a new dramatic form for his theatre.

La géniale technique théâtrale de Brecht fut pour moi une révélation dans cette voie: je vis un théâtre, dont je rêvais souvent moi-même, possible. Je me rendis compte que je n'étais pas aussi fou que je croyais parfois l'être.<sup>30</sup>

Cousin willingly adopted the Brechtian style of production, although he avoided many of the extreme ideological aspects of Brecht's works. It was essentially the form of Brechtian drama that Cousin acquired; the content of individual plays differed in many respects from Brecht's, as will be shown later.

Brecht a joué un rôle considérable dans le développement de mes conceptions théâtrales. Il m'a permis de 'voir' en quelques années ce que j'aurais mis des années peut-être à trouver.<sup>31</sup>

If it is true that Brecht provided a formula and a form for Cousin's early works, the same may not be said of his later plays - as is the case with Armand Gatti, for example. While Gatti long remained faithful to the Brechtian doctrine of epic theatre, Cousin has, in his most recent plays, developed an individual, more poetic, more sympathetic, and less politicised style. Agnes Hübner's generalisation about the Brechtian

30. *ibid.*

31. G.Cousin, interview with Pierre Lacreux, Theater der Zeit, Berlin, 1967, (Heft 2).

influence on these two French writers, therefore, is an oversimplification of the case, although it was valid at the time:

Dass es sich wirklich um eine Emanzipation [der französischen Dramatik] handelt... beweisen weitere Namen von Autoren, die in dieser Zeit (c.1960) ihre erste Stücke herausbringen, Gabriel Cousin und Armand Gatti. Realismus und Politik sind die Schlüsselbegriffe der neuen Richtung, die eben diese aber auch nur diese mit Brechts Theater gemein hat.<sup>32</sup>

The English theatre underwent the same transformation after the Berliner Ensemble's visit to the Palace Theatre in London in 1956, two years after it had been to Paris. Remarkably similar results ensued and what was reported of that influence might well have applied to the French theatre:

In England, the main impact was made by the sheer power of the productions...Undoubtedly, the season at the Palace Theatre was a turning-point in British theatre history, whether we regard it as the chief cause of the changes that followed or merely as a catalyst for tendencies that already were powerfully at work underneath the surface and away from the centre...The most immediate impact of the three Berliner Ensemble productions was visual, and the most direct influence was on designers.<sup>33</sup>

It was much later, in 1964, that Cousin visited the Berliner Ensemble at its home in East Berlin and the same year he read for the first time the theoretical work, Das Politische Theater, by Brecht's own mentor and contemporary, Erwin Piscator. In view of the fact that Cousin also came under the political influence of Marxist thought through his association with the P.C.F. during this same period of the nineteen-fifties, it is clear that the chance convergence of political doctrine and professional career interests exerted a considerable influence upon him as a creative artist and guided him more positively and more directly than at any previous

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32. Agnes Hübner, Brecht in Frankreich, p.153.

33. Ronald Hayman, The German Theatre, Oswald Wolff, 1975, p.202.

time in his life. By contrast with the multifarious activities and experiences of the first thirty years of his life, Gabriel Cousin underwent, in the following ten years, radical changes in his thinking and in his creativity which were rationalised in a theatre full of purpose and genuine reformist zeal.

CHAPTER VI : THE PLAYS

(a) L'Officina

Gabriel Cousin's first small collection of poetry was entitled La Vie Ouvrière and was published by Seghers in 1950. Derived from his experiences as an engineering apprentice and a fitter, it stood as a testimony to the hardships, but also to the beauties of working-class life. It did not seek to eulogise that life, but to show how it united Man and his labours, how the human and mechanical co-exist through the world of work. This was a theme which Cousin had already explored with the Compagnons in their Le Jeu du 1er mai and which he had written about in his article Le sport dans ma formation in the P.E.C. document Regards neufs sur le sport of 1950. He returned to the same theme in 1951 for his oratorio-pantomime L'Officina.

Despite the disintegration of the Compagnons in 1946, their experience of communal living and collective creation had formed friendships and opened up discussions about collaborative work for the future. It was during the period at the Tour des Chiens that Cousin made the acquaintance of Jacques Lecoq who was later to spend a holiday with Cousin and his family at the Tour des Chiens in September 1950. Lecoq mentioned his own plans for a spectacle based on the human body as a means of expression. It was to be created in Italy by his company, the Compagnia Stabile del Teatro dell'Universita di Padova.

This company included in its ranks the mask-designer Amleto Sartori who collaborated frequently with Lecoq during the latter's tenure at the University Theatre. Sartori had been a teacher at the Padua School of Art where he specialised in sculpture and drawing, but his real talent lay in the design and creation of masks for stage productions and he had worked in France and Germany as well as in his native Italy. He made a systematic research into the processes of mask-making in leather as has been used by the Commedia dell'Arte - in short, he resurrected the old Venetian art of theatre



mask-making. His first commission for Jacques Lecoq had been in 1947 while the latter was director at the University Theatre in Padua, and now it was to Sartori that Lecoq turned for the masks to accompany the production of Cousin's L'Officina in 1951. Sartori later received commissions from the Piccolo Teatro and la Scala of Milan, from Jean-Louis Barrault and Sacha Pitoëff, and several exhibitions of his work were held in Vienna, Venice, and in France. Sartori had also played a heroic role in the Resistance - the Italian resistance to the Germans and the fascists - and his untimely death in 1962 at the age of 46 brought a sad loss to the Italian theatre. "Le premier des sculpteurs de masques de notre temps"<sup>1</sup> was to collaborate many times with Lecoq, and some of his last masks were created for Lecoq when directing Cousin's L'Aboyeuse et L'Automate for the Théâtre Quotidien de Marseille in October 1961.

Jacques Lecoq was born in Paris in 1921 and, like Cousin, he began his career as a physical education teacher. After the war, he worked with Jean Dasté to create the Compagnie des Comédiens de Grenoble. He then left to work in Italy where he became 'maître de mime' at the University Theatre in Padua, then at the Piccolo Teatro in Milan. He returned to Paris in 1956, where he started his own School of Movement in the rue du Bac which prepared actors and mimes for the stage. It was the only such school in existence at that time. Lecoq had developed his interest in mime during his time with the Compagnons de la Saint-Jean and his aims in this direction coincide naturally with the aims of that group as a whole.

Lecoq lays the emphasis on the purity of approach, a stripping away of the inessentials. "It is necessary", he has said, "to express oneself in silence, without technique being outside feeling, in order to give the illusion of life, in the solitude of the body".<sup>2</sup>

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1. Programme of production of L'Aboyeuse et L'Automate, Théâtre de l'Athénée, Paris, 21 February 1963.

2. Garry O'Connor, French Theatre Today, Pitman, 1975, p.94.

As far as the proposed production with Cousin in Italy was concerned, Lecoq wanted to attempt something less purely aesthetic in mood than ballet, and so he sought to introduce an element of political commitment into the work. Lecoq knew Cousin to be not only a poet but also a political militant from the working-class and so he asked him to write some poetry on the theme of 'la condition ouvrière et l'usine'.

In the autumn of 1950, Cousin sketched out a sort of expressionist fresco which he called L'Homme et la Machine, but the scope of this writing was too great for Lecoq at the time, as he had only limited resources available and the project could well have developed into a full-scale opera. Not only was the piece too expansive but Lecoq found himself preoccupied at that time with theatre politics in Italy and could not find the time for such a lavish production as Cousin's work would have demanded. The result was that Lecoq selected only what he wanted from the work, and the six-part 'fresco', requiring a cast of fifteen and lasting nearly an hour became reduced to L'Officina in only three parts, with nine actors and lasting less than half an hour. This shorter version of the fresco has never been published.

Cousin and Lecoq had had to work apart on this text, the major part of which took shape through their correspondence between Grenoble and Padua. The final version was settled and completed by Cousin in January 1951 and he was due to leave for Italy to discuss the production with Lecoq that Spring, but the tragic death from encephalitis of Cousin's one-year-old son Claude prevented his departure. The work was therefore finalised by correspondence and the production took place in March 1951 at the Piccolo Teatro of Milan. L'Officina was one of four pantomime sketches produced by Lecoq's company in a programme whose variety was designed to demonstrate the expressive possibilities of mime. A programme note explained the importance of mime in the art of the theatre, especially in the French theatre of this century:

Jacques Copeau, volendo rinnovare il teatro,  
si interessò in modo particolare al problema  
dell' "Expression Corporelle", vale a dire la

possibilità espressive relative alla persona umana; coperto il viso dell'attore con una maschera neutra, la facoltà di esprimere e comunicare una emozione era lasciata solamente al corpo, con un conseguente allargarsi della efficacia drammatica in diretta proporzione con la capacità del corpo stesso.

Etienne Decroux e Jean-Louis Barrault continuarono questa via e ne approfondirono le possibilità. Gettarono così le basi di una nuova tecnica del Mimo.<sup>3</sup>

With the emphasis being laid on the mime, sustained by a musical accompaniment - in the Cousin piece, the music chosen was Pacific by Arthur Honegger - the spoken word might have seemed superfluous. But the effect of Cousin's poetry was heightened by the accompanying movement and sound and they served to dramatise and intensify it, thus creating a new kind of 'oratorio'. This was the first such experience of Cousin's in this field and one which he clearly favoured, for he was to make further experiments in later plays with mime, masks, and music.

L'Officina is divided into three scenes: The Age of the Artisan, The Age of the Machine, and The Future. In the first scene, the simple crafts of Man are portrayed: the carpenter, the smith, the stonemason. The various craftsmen then unite in collective labour. Time passes and the men discover new techniques to alleviate their hardship and lighten their labour. They use machines - drills, lathes, saws. In the second scene, Man becomes gradually exhausted by machines and loses his true identity: he begins to resemble an iron bar. The too-perfect machine does not relieve Man's fatigue but creates a new kind of fatigue for him; then one day it jams and as a consequence work begins to fall off. The machine tries to start again but the men cannot stand the strain of its rhythm; the machine breaks up and only bits of twisted iron are left. The third scene demonstrates Cousin's optimistic hope for the future of machine-age Man: fervently wanting to live, Man drops the mask and therefore the pretence of an automaton and rediscovers his courage and his hopes.

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3. Programme of production of Pantomime, Piccolo Teatro di Milano, April 1951.

This 'oratorio-pantomime' is clearly already preparing the way for the later L'Aboyeuse et l'Automate. The theme of Man enslaved by the machines he has himself created, ironically to alleviate his labours as an artisan, must have been close to Cousin's own early experiences as a fitter. But he is not bitter: this is no piece of political propaganda, no incitement to 'down tools' or to jeopardise the means of production - which would only harm the worker financially in the short term, anyway - but it is an encouragement and an inducement to him to re-think his rôle in society or his position in the world around him: to subject himself to the state of an automaton is to neglect his free-will. It is to wear a mask. The true self lies beneath and must be allowed to emerge.

This theme of alienation through work is part of the general notion of alienation which one can also see in Ionesco's or Adamov's work, for example, and one which recurs frequently in other writers' works during the nineteen-fifties. What is perhaps most interesting in this piece is that Cousin has already made his rejection: he has rejected conventional theatre to present an unmasked self - expressed through gesture and body movement. The mime's use of 'expression corporelle' is itself a condemnation of stereotyped and stilted theatre styles: in L'Officina, Man finds a conscience and new hopes with which to overcome his enslavement to the machine. The same preoccupation of Man with the problems of the machine-age occurs, not unpredictably, in the poetry of Cousin at this time: La Vie Ouvrière, published in 1950, opens with the long prose-poem Cathédrales Ouvrières which contains the lines:

Les ombres d'une armée d'officiants réglant  
des sacrifices aux verniers des machines brillantes,  
suivent les contours des pièces de fonderie.  
Ils se prosternent avec des gestes délicats,  
pendant que s'élève la forêt métallique, lançant,  
entrecroisant ses bras dans un ordre enchevêtré.<sup>4</sup>

In the later collection L'Ordinaire Amour, some fragments of which had already appeared in a booklet published by S. David in 1955, the poem Rapport de contrôle describes the confused

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4. G. Cousin, La Vie Ouvrière, Seghers, 1950, p.10.

mind of a machine tool worker struggling to conjure up a picture of the girl he loves while he is being harrassed by his boss to complete a piece of work. The resulting mental confusion between the love the worker wants to feel, the expression of that love, and the simultaneous pressure on him to show precision in his work, is portrayed by Cousin by accelerating the interweaving of thoughts as the poem progresses. By the end of the poem, the three sets of thoughts become fused:

Oui monsieur ces pièces-là sont faites...  
 Plus que dix heures à tirer,  
 Elles ont le no.d'ordre...  
 et je contrôlerai ton corps.  
 Tes yeux sont comme la fonte usinée toute fraîche.  
 J'ai oublié le no.d'ordre  
 de mon amour.<sup>5</sup>

Although L'Officina was subsequently performed in Padua, Rome and Venice, it was not a sufficiently substantial work to merit further attention by Cousin. However, the other factors involved in its creation - the collaboration between Cousin and Lecoq, the use of music, mime and masks to heighten the dramatic effect, the realisation by Cousin that he had sufficient talent and enthusiasm to continue the theme in a revised version, his desire to relate his experience of work to an art form in order to express a general moral thesis or even a political tenet - all these remained firmly in Cousin's mind throughout the nineteen-fifties. By 1960, he had drafted a new, extended, and elaborated version of L'Officina which he called Le Jeu de l'homme et du Travail, but this work was destined to remain only a project in draft form - Lecoq was no longer available to see the new project through - and it has never been published or performed.

Le Jeu de l'Homme et du Travail is an Oratorio in eight parts, a didactic piece with choruses and dancers, which is intended to last approximately an hour to an hour and a half. Cousin summarised its action as follows:

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5. G.Cousin, L'Ordinaire Amour, Gallimard, 1958, p.46.

Cet oratorio est l'évocation didactique et poétique de l'histoire du travail de l'homme, depuis les Temps Anciens (la chasse, la pêche, la hutte), l'Artisanat, les constructions collectives (les cathédrales), en passant par les découvertes modernes (machine à vapeur, électricité) les usines (exploitation de l'homme par l'homme).

Puis, c'est le travail à la chaîne, entièrement mécanisé, parcellaire (qui détruit la personnalité et transforme l'homme en robot) avec son cortège de misère, d'oppression, de chômage, du travail mis au service de la course aux armements et la révolte individuelle des ouvriers, matée par la police. Sous la menace du fascisme, les ouvriers prennent conscience de leur état et aboutissent à la révolte collective. C'est la grève et la lutte contre le fascisme et la guerre. Dans tous les pays, ils rejettent l'uniforme militaire et s'unissent.

L'amour triomphe. Ils vont vers la paix et l'espoir marchant vers le soleil et le bonheur.<sup>6</sup>

Cousin's considerable attention to detail in the presentation of this piece anticipates the full production notes and biographical data on the characters in his first plays of the early nineteen-sixties: Le Drame du Fukuryu-Maru (first version), L'Aboyeuse et l'Automate, and l'Opéra Noir, the first of these dating from 1960, the last two from 1963. What characterises all these plays and Le Jeu de l'Homme et du Travail too, is the requirement of a sizable cast. In addition to the five principal characters of Le Jeu a score of singers and dancers would be needed to form the four groups of workers, police, soldiers and fascists. Cousin also gives suggestions for costumes, masks, décor and sound effects. However, there is considerable scope for improvisation by a producer in the area of sound effects and music, use of backdrops to evoke particular settings, even in the choice of words or texts to be sung by the choruses.

The whole effect of this piece is strictly propagandist; it is politically stereotyped and relies solely on symbolic gesture and word from representational types. Thus the workers

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6. G. Cousin, Le Jeu de l'Homme et du Travail, 1960 (unpublished manuscript).

are depicted as 'fiers', 'forts', and 'dignes', while the exploiting masters are 'cruels', 'cupides' and 'intelligents'. The religious element of the piece is represented by a monk who is 'fanatique' and 'halluciné' and a nun who is 'bête' and 'aliénée'. The police are 'bêtes, peureux, brutaux'; they wear helmets completely covering their faces - as do the foreign soldiers - and are therefore reminiscent of American riot police. Even the costumes of the characters serve to exaggerate their counterparts in real life: the exploiting masters wear black tights, capes, and top hats, thus recalling the stylised, but menacing figures of horror films; the cylindrical black masks of the fascists, with their 'croix à branches multiples' might suggest the cross of Lorraine adopted by the Gaullists.

The eight sections of this piece are:

1. L'artisanat
2. L'usine
3. La chaîne
4. La machine - les robots
5. Le chômage - la division
6. La révolte unie - la grève
7. La guerre
8. La construction du monde futur.

All the sections make use of songs, mime, dance and words which are integrated within settings evoked by backdrop, lighting effects, picture projections, or film sequences.

As the play progresses, and the debilitating effect of machinery on men becomes more apparent, so the exploiters increase their efforts to subordinate and dehumanise the workers. A girl worker who is suffering from fatigue is taken from the production line by the boss and soon afterwards reappears as a prostitute; an attempted escape by a young man on the line is quickly foiled by the use of force and, in fear, he bends himself once more to the work under the stern gaze of the boss. The pace of production accelerates and the workers become more rapidly fatigued - neurosis sets in. This is highly

reminiscent of Adamov's theatre of neuroses symbolising Man's fear, both individual and collective, of an authority which is morally and also intellectually questionable. Such fears bring about mental depression or even paranoia in the sufferer, the outward signs of which are physically visible. On a larger scale, whole communities may suffer from their debilitating effect and it is this collective neurosis which Cousin, like Adamov, seeks to illustrate in this play, in order to make the workers conscious of their situation and prompt their demands for social revolution through changes in their working conditions.

The fourth section is surprisingly unpredicted: not only does a couple emerge, aware of their predicament and confessing their love for each other, but first the police then the workers themselves are swallowed up by the machinery around them. This extraordinary introduction of mechanical violence seems to unbalance the rhythm of the play; it becomes a piece of science fiction at this point, thus producing a 'reductio ad absurdum' of its political theory based on overproduction and unemployment. Cousin says in his notes to the end of this fourth scene:

C'est la contradiction fondamentale du régime capitaliste entre la propriété individuelle des moyens de production et le mode de production devenu social.<sup>7</sup>

A more realistic scene follows, portraying moral resignation; one man cowardly becomes the lackey of the bosses and is given an easy job, a girl is driven by hunger to become a prostitute, some workers turn to drink, while others turn to religion - an act of moral cowardice, according to Cousin - , one group withdraws into a world of dreams, another plots an anarchistic uprising.

The sixth scene brings about a balance of forces between the police, the unemployed who have by now turned into a fascist force, and the militant workers who are now striking. As the police and the fascists hesitate, the boss takes fright and flees.

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7. *ibid.*, p.10.



A war ensues, caused by the intrigues of the boss who brings in an army from another country. This threat of an 'overkill' of the workers forces them to express their horror of war and unite in peaceful agreement. However, the bosses of both countries begin to manufacture an atomic bomb.

In the final scene, both groups are lying on the ground. Slowly, beginning with one foreign soldier and one girl worker, they get up, take off their masks and helmets and begin to move towards one another, mixing together, soldiers with fascists with bosses, to become brothers. It is a victory for love and humanity and the whole cast move off through the auditorium to the playing of triumphant fanfares.

Despite the clichés in this piece, we can detect the seeds of two ideas of Cousin which were to flourish in separate plays later: namely, the process of the automation of working people through dehumanising working conditions - which was to become the play l'Aboyeuse et l'Automate, and the evil of atomic warfare brought about by the greed and exploitation of a country's leaders without regard for human suffering or casualties - this theme was used in Le Drame du Fukuryu-Maru.

Perhaps the least satisfactory part of this work, apart from the lapse into the realms of science fiction already mentioned, is the uncritical ending of the oratorio. Without careful and sensitive directing, this could become a parody of propaganda instead of a well-intentioned plea for world unity through the exchange of ideas and the elimination of the dehumanising elements in modern industrialised society. Cousin himself has said that he felt the work to be "un projet à la fois politique et peut-être idéaliste", an epithet which he presumably would not have attributed to the later work on a similar theme, L'Aboyeuse et L'Automate. In this latter play, the form is less bald, the ideology less simplistic than in Le Jeu, while the characters evoke our sympathy and are immensely more credible than in the early work.

What is of more interest by way of comparison, is the distinction of treatment of theme between L'Officina and Le Jeu, written ten years apart, a decade during which - thanks also to Jacques Lecoq - Cousin made the acquaintance of the works of Bertolt Brecht. In the former play, Cousin imagines the outcome of the alienation of Man through work as a spontaneous indignation, and a natural realisation that Man must not submit to the automation of machinery, but overcome this process and fulfil himself. The second version is considerably more vehement in its opposition to Labour in general and it offers a Marxist alternative to the oppression of bosses, police, and machinery alike. Le Jeu is essentially a more committed work than L'Officina which was basically humanistic in outlook: gone is Man's natural goodness, to be replaced by the need to combat his oppressors. Yet it is still a long way from Brecht's overt didacticism and cannot be considered as politically orientated as the work of the German dramatist. In this respect, Cousin's early pieces reflect his quarrel with the P.C.F.: they propose humanitarian solutions to social problems and avoid acute interference in the affairs of ordinary human beings.

(b) L'Aboyeuse et l'Automate

Cousin wrote the first draft of L'Aboyeuse et l'Automate between September 1957 and May 1959; this version was subsequently altered during rehearsals by the Théâtre Quotidien de Marseille who performed it for the first time on 19th. October 1961. This second and final script of the play was published first in Théâtre Populaire in 1962, then by Gallimard in 1963. The Marseille première, produced by Jacques Lecoq and Roland Monod, ran for 120 performances before transferring to the Théâtre de l'Athénée in Paris on 19th. February 1963. Masks for the productions were by Amleto Sartori, décor and costumes by Michel Rafaelli, and music by Pierre Babin. The principal rôles were played by Michèle Moretti and Jean Joannes.

The theme of the play is the alienation of Man by his work. In a large city, a young girl with the ability to bark in various ways corresponding to different types of dogs, is employed by a government tax department to trace dogs whose

owners have evaded payment of their dog-licences. She meets a young man who, after pursuing his studies as an actor, finds himself obliged to obtain employment in advertising in order to make ends meet. His job is to promote the sales of a certain make of brassière by acting with a dummy in a shop window and in the street outside. The young couple fall in love, but, because of the humiliation they each feel as a result of their degrading jobs, they suffer from nervous disorders and hardly dare to see each other again. Unknown to the other, each of them goes to a psychoanalyst for treatment, but still their neuroses get the better of them and they are finally swallowed up in the city throngs, calling out their love to each other in vain.

The play is defined by Cousin as a 'tragédie-farce en 10 tableaux' and the tableaux themselves are separated by scene-change accompanied by music, picture projections, alleged press communiqués and movements of the crowd.

The source of inspiration for this play was a press report discovered fortuitously by Cousin while at a market stall in September 1957. He began the play immediately on returning home. The actual report, published in the Gallimard edition of the work and subsequently appearing in the programmes for the productions at the T.Q.M. and the Athénée, is as follows:

Les habitants de Stockholm sont témoins de scènes surprenantes. Une jeune femme passe dans les rues en aboyant. Elle peut aboyer de plus de vingt façons différentes, selon les différentes races de chiens. Elle est employée par les services de perception de la ville, afin de déceler les chiens qui n'auraient pas été déclarés et dont les propriétaires échapperaient ainsi à la taxe.<sup>1</sup>

The Gallimard edition carries another eye-witness account of a similar happening in Aix-en-Provence and, as if to corroborate the plausibility of the original story, it describes the same neurosis as that affecting the Aboyeuse of Cousin's piece:

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1. Gabriel Cousin, Théâtre I, Gallimard, 1963, p.15.

Tous les cinquante mètres, [la jeune fille] s'arrêtait contre le mur, 'levait la patte' comme un chien, jappait d'un jappement bref, secouée du même tremblement qu'un chien qui pisse... et repartait.<sup>2</sup>

By way of explanation, the witness of this event adds:

Ma belle-fille pense que [la jeune fille] sortait avec ses chiens pour que les gens fassent moins attention. Elle lui parlait fréquemment: lorsqu'elle sentait venir sa crise d'aboiement, elle se mettait à trembler, à se détourner, à s'ébrouer...<sup>3</sup>

However, no explanation is given for the cause of the disorder, although Cousin's decision to attribute it to the stresses of modern society would appear to have a foundation of authenticity. Dogcatchers are not unknown in European society - the London boroughs employ them to prevent pavement-fouling, for instance. Heinrich Böll, writing in and of the depressing postwar years in West Germany when to have any job was better than to have none at all, describes the humiliation felt by many men who accepted even the most demeaning work in order to preserve a small scrap of dignity. In 1953, he wrote the story of a dogcatcher; it is full of wry humour and pathos:

Als friedlicher Spaziergänger getarnt,  
rundlich und klein, eine Zigarre mittlerer  
Preislage im Mund, gehe ich durch Parks  
und stille Strassen, lasse mich mit Leuten,  
die Hunde spazierenführen, in ein Gespräch  
ein, merke ihre Namen, ihre Adresse, kraule  
freundlich tuend dem Hund den Hals, wissend,  
dass er demnächst fünfzig Mark einbringen  
wird.<sup>4</sup>

This sad fifty-year old man suffers no more than pangs of conscience for his pains; nevertheless, his social humiliation is deeply felt:

Ich bin verloren, und manche werden mich für  
einen Zyniker halten, aber wie soll ich es  
nicht werden, da ich dauernd mit Hunden zu  
tun habe...<sup>5</sup>

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2. *ibid.*, p.127.

3. *ibid.*, p.127.

4. Heinrich Böll: Bekenntnis eines Hundefängers in Erzählungen 1950-1970, Kiepenhauer & Witsch, 1972, p.105.

5. *ibid.*, p.107.

Cousin enlarges on the problems of the degradation of personality and the loss of dignity that such work entails: inherent in the vacuous nature of the work, he believes, is an alarming risk - that of causing psychological, and possibly also physiological, stresses on the person, stresses which cannot be eradicated in later life. Cousin also adds to this theme his own interpretation of society's degradation through mechanisation and automation; in so doing, he discovers an approach to the theme of frustrated love which had preoccupied him in a similar way in his early poetry. The common thesis of the poetry and this play is that the monotony of some kinds of work destroys personality and imagination in the individual. A society such as that depicted in l'Aboyeuse et l'Automate is by no means unthinkable. Indeed, it is remarkable how Cousin is able to capture the essence of society's defects without always experiencing them himself at first hand; this will also be the case with l'Opéra Noir, in which Cousin captured the feelings of racial hatred in the Southern States of America. In the present play, he seems to have portrayed life in a large city of the Northern States of America with remarkable verisimilitude, for one critic wrote:

Je suis sortie du Théâtre Quotidien de Marseille complètement démoralisée. Car, pour tout vous avouer, je reviens de passer cinq semaines à New-York. Et l'humanité décrite par Cousin, ce monde qui peut vous paraître invraisemblable, avec ses automates et ses psychiatres et ses meneurs de publicité, c'est exactement celui que je venais de quitter. Visages de bois, yeux morts, gestes saccadés, obsession de l'argent, obsession de la guerre, dévitalisation de l'individu, impossibilité de rencontres, discipline et mort de l'âme. Ce monde qui est plus qu'une obsession, un cauchemar. 6

Cousin is clearly appalled by this phenomenon; he feels its tragic nature so strongly that there is a need to express his horror in writing. The original news item from Sweden becomes a potent motivating force behind his work: it is the point de départ from which his imagination will operate, but not to the extent that the original facts are themselves obliterated. It will be characteristic of Cousin's dramatic

work in general that he will accurately retain the factual sources of inspiration while at the same time elaborating upon them to express a general conclusion - frequently on the subject of frustrated love in a society which alienates the individual from his fellows. This domination by the facts over the author, and the tendency for a topic to dictate itself to him, has been referred to by Cousin as the 'imposition' of a theme:

Le personnage extraordinaire de cette aboyeuse qui s'imposait, me guidait vers une pièce.<sup>7</sup>

Le couple 'l'Aboyeuse et l'Automate' s'imposa.<sup>8</sup>

We have some idea of the subsequent processes of elaboration on this theme from Cousin's own notes to the play. He provides us with the biographies of the young couple, together with production notes and suggestions for additional material to be used in any performance of the play. The essential differences between the Aboyeuse and the Automate and the rest of the characters are those of depth and credibility. Despite their idiosyncrasies - or perhaps because of them - we must recognise the couple as people we might meet in the street today. Their credibility as humans lends tragedy to the play for it heightens the verisimilitude of the problem posed. By contrast, the crowd may remain caricatured as types.

In this respect, it is interesting to examine the differences between the first draft of the play and the final acting version by Cousin in conjunction with the T.Q.M. company. Cousin himself admits that he re-wrote about two-thirds of this original version during the two months of rehearsals. The first draft had been 'une version plus farce, plus tendre aussi peut-être'<sup>9</sup>, whose style was 'un peu dans la tradition des amoureux de Peynet'<sup>10</sup>. The conception of the unity of the play had differed too:

7. Théâtre I, p.15.

8. *ibid.*, p.16.

9. *ibid.*, p.120.

10. Gabriel Cousin: Entretien avec Nicole Zand, Le Monde, 23-2-1963.

Un chanteur aveugle sert de lien entre les tableaux avec ses chansons qui préparent ou soulignent l'action. Ce chanteur aveugle était accompagné de plusieurs personnages (exerçant ce que l'on appelait, hier, 'les petits métiers de la rue'), qui connaissaient tous les gens et toutes les choses du quartier.<sup>11</sup>

It is quite evident, therefore, that this version underwent considerable changes: the burlesque treatment of the theme - which would surely have weakened the argument of Cousin whose aim was:

La dénonciation des métiers où l'être humain perd sa qualité<sup>12</sup> -

was given weight and actuality in rehearsal to create a thoroughgoing tragedy of modern times. After the transformation, Cousin wrote to Dr. Robert Millon, the psychiatry specialist who subsequently wrote a preface to L'Aboyeuse et l'Automate:

La pièce est épurée, passant de la grosse farce à l'humour noir et au tragique-poétique... J'en suis très content.<sup>13</sup>

A modification to the initial order of the tableaux was made, the 'cinema' tableau (Tableau III) was added, and Michel Raffaëlli and Pierre Babin began work on the creation of the décor (using photographic enlargements, posters, collages, and printed texts) and the musical score (including unpublished versions of some American jazz numbers) for the production. What is fascinating about this development of the structure and style of the piece is the natural way in which it occurred: as the actors took on the identity of their characters, they reacted more stringently according to type, and as types, they stereotyped word and gesture, thus parodying Cousin's own original parody. The result was farce - puppets performing in a representational street the symbolised movements of a crowd. This evolution of the play from burlesque to tragic farce was assisted in no small way by the introduction of masks

11. Théâtre I, p.120.

12. - *ibid.*, - p.16.

13. - *ibid.*, - p.17.

for the crowd. It rendered the drama at once more menacing and more didactic - in the manner of Brecht. Cousin describes the striking change which came over the play at this point in revealing detail:

Nous n'avions tout d'abord pas prévu de masques pour l'Aboyeuse et l'Automate: la foule, dans la première version de la pièce, était individualisée, représentée par des personnages typiques, comme l'agent de police, le flâneur, le facteur, l'élégante, les 'petits métiers', le soldat, le retraité, la prostituée, etc... Mais, après une semaine de répétitions, Jacques Lecoq décida - et son point de vue me parut juste - que mieux valait présenter une foule anonyme, sans aucune caractéristique individuelle. C'est alors que nous avons envisagé d'utiliser des masques. Amleto Sartori, qui relevait d'une grave opération, réalisa en trois semaines douze masques de papier maché et entoilé. Lorsqu'il nous les apporta à Marseille, nous fûmes un peu effrayés: nous ne nous attendions pas à voir des traits aussi accusés, des caractéristiques aussi marquées. Mais une fois les acteurs revêtus de leurs costumes 'de foule' grisâtres, il fut évident que la mise en scène venait de passer sur un autre plan. Cette foule 'standard' n'était plus la simple représentation de celle que nous rencontrons tous les jours, sans la remarquer, dans la rue, mais l'expression de la condition de l'homme vivant aujourd'hui dans les grandes villes. Les comédiens se sentirent immédiatement plus à l'aise, et trouvèrent dans leurs gestes le grossissement, la stylisation, le rythme que nous nous étions efforcés de leur indiquer. Grâce aux masques, le jeu étroitement réaliste, les attitudes conventionnelles disparaissaient. Et chaque comédien découvrait de nouvelles possibilités qui enrichissaient le jeu de la foule tout entière. Pour le public, la 'distanciation' obtenue grâce aux masques s'avéra également efficace. Devant cette foule, le spectateur reconnaissait sa propre condition, non des visages à la fois familiers et étrangers. Ainsi la pièce avait-elle acquis sa véritable efficacité.<sup>14</sup>

The second version of the play had thus reached an acting stage through close collaboration between the writer and producer, and with the technical expertise of the mask-maker,

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14. Notes sur Amleto Sartori et les masques de "L'Aboyeuse et l'Automate", Théâtre Populaire, no.45, 1962, p.98.



Amleto Sartori. This early experience of Cousin's was to set a precedent for further such collaborative productions and determine the future course of his work in the theatre. His works were to become more than just plays: they were 'spectacles', the texts for which represented only a starting point from which constant elaboration and reshaping took place. This approach to the composition and staging of a play allowed the actors themselves the freedom to extemporise:

Cette pièce est une tentative de reconnaissance de chemins peu empruntés au théâtre et de mise en valeur du jeu corporel des comédiens. C'est aussi un essai de réalisation d'un spectacle qui soit visuel et auditif d'abord, sans pour cela sacrifier le fond, satire de notre société actuelle. C'est également une tentative pour redonner, dans notre théâtre contemporain, la place du chœur antique (ici la foule dans la rue). De plus, il s'agissait d'exprimer non littérairement la double névrose de l'Aboyeuse et de l'Automate, car s'il est difficile pour un homme normal de s'exprimer, cela l'est encore bien plus pour un malade.<sup>15</sup>

The Aboyeuse and the Automate are, as we have seen, realistic characters against a surrealist background. They have similar features and experiences - both are tall and elegant, both have lost their families, both find themselves in monotonous jobs. They are in no way grotesque; on the contrary, Cousin is trying to convince us of their credibility as human beings.

As the play progresses, the similarity of their situations, their fears, humiliations, and attempts to cure their neuroses build a symmetrical pattern on stage. At the same time, there is an emphasis on the stark contrast which exists between the couple and the crowd - this is achieved both by Cousin's written text (the crowd speak in chorus, using stereotyped phrases, while the Aboyeuse and the Automate converse naturally - until overcome by their afflictions), and by the stage techniques (constant movement by the crowd, relatively static positions of the couple).

Traditional theatre's customary commitment to the psychological development of a love theme is here replaced by a series of tableaux depicting separated moments of time

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15. Théâtre I, p.120.

in the lives of the young couple. Even the link between the tableaux was transformed from the repetitive blind singer of the first version of the play to the heterogeneous interludes of the second. The language of the play moves from the poetic to the mundane, from the colloquial to the stereotyped.

These features of the play, together with Cousin's free use of song, poetry, recorded voice and back projections, all indicate his enormous debt to Brecht and to Artaud. Recognition of such a debt is freely given in Cousin's notes on the play, in which he indicates his attitude to the place of the text in the theatre as a whole:

Je pense qu'au théâtre le texte est toujours un outil à partir duquel se fait le travail de création d'une pièce....De toute façon, à condition que le sens donné par l'auteur à la pièce et aux personnages soit respecté et que la mise en scène cherche à 'servir' d'abord un spectacle - ce qui est le propre du théâtre.<sup>16</sup>

In acknowledgement to Artaud, and as if to consolidate his own theories on the nature of theatre, Cousin quotes from Artaud's definition of theatre as 'une sorte de nouvelle poésie dans l'espace'.

The play itself is prefaced by a quote from Brecht's Die Ausnahme und die Regel which, as we have already seen, greatly influenced Cousin both in its technique and in its theme. L'Aboyeuse et l'Automate contains many similarities to this disturbing Brechtian parable of modern society written in 1930. Both are parodies; both brutally eradicate the personal feelings of individuals trapped in a society where anonymity and lack of compassion are the rule; in both plays masks are worn to indicate these distasteful features of modern life. But Brecht situates his play in a fictitious and artificial background, while Cousin clearly intends his to represent western European society of the mid-twentieth century. On the other hand, Brecht's play is more didactic than Cousin's:

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16. *ibid.*, p.123.

indeed, it is the exhortation to the audience which Cousin uses here in his preface:

Wir bitten euch aber:  
 Was nicht fremd ist, findet befremdlich!  
 Was gewöhnlich ist, findet unerklärlich!  
 Was da üblich ist, das soll euch erstaunen.

Wir bitten euch ausdrücklich findet  
 Das immerfort Vorkommende nicht natürlich!  
 ...damit nichts unveränderlich gelte.<sup>17</sup>

Cousin's work does not display the blatant didacticism of Brecht's plays; both authors are undoubtedly writing committed literature, but whereas Brecht is an overt propagandist, Cousin merely demonstrates social injustices; Brecht is openly Marxist in his philosophy while Cousin is attacking the inhumanity and injustice of society by reference to the dehumanising factors within it. Both authors show sympathy for the oppressed people in any society and hence call upon their audience to feel compassion for them.

Perhaps the greatest contrast between Brecht and Cousin lies in their illustration of the problems of society. Brecht creates a hypothetical situation to demonstrate a social injustice, Cousin transposes real society - by altering its rhythms and exaggerating its defects - to show the dangers inherent in those defects. Brecht is cold, rational, and dogmatic; Cousin has warmth, poetry, and conscience. An examination of L'Aboyeuse et l'Automate will show this approach of Cousin's and reveal more clearly the differences with Brecht.

No actor's voice is heard for the first few minutes of this play: the scene is set in the Prologue by an invisible, recorded voice reading the latest stock-market figures from an unseen but audible teleprinter. Parody transforms the real world of big business into the ultimate absurd potential of that world: the stock-market report on the state of the oil, steel and textile industries is followed by that of the

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17. Bertolt Brecht: Die Ausnahme und die Regel in Fünf Lehrstücke, Methuen, 1969, p.94 and p.118.

Société Anonyme des Soutiens-gorge Fruits. Cousin accentuates this absurd juxtaposition by the use of humour: "Pour trouver de nouveaux débouchés et surtout pour aider les pays sous-développés, le marché papou est maintenant envisagé." The teleprinter is the mechanical embodiment of big business automation and, as such, is reminiscent of the unseen, but frequently referred to and omnipresent "le consortium" in Adamov's Le Ping-Pong.

In Tableau I, a crowded street shows itself subjected to similarly automated processes - the people are masked, caricatured in their appearance, and they move with frenzied haste. The scene reminds us of those accelerated film sequences of street scenes which show a crowd's inevitable, if not unwitting, subordination to the rule of order and regulation - by means of traffic lights, pedestrian control systems and even the use of whistles and megaphones to dictate movement. The Automate - a combination of an actor manqué turned publicity agent with the stylised gestures of a striptease artiste - erotically strips a shop-window dummy down to her brassière. He is advertising for his firm, the brassière manufacturer, Fruits. It is this stylisation of movement which his job demands - and which, as an actor, he wants to perform to the best of his technical ability - that will eventually cause his impotence when he is faced with a real person. If the advertising technique of employing eroticism to command attention is plausible, its exaggeration here, together with the perfection of the mime techniques of the Automate, associates in our minds the amoral demands of the advertising world with the consequent demoralising demands of those engaged in it.

Cousin uses the technical facilities of the theatre to demonstrate the automation of life in general: through lights (flashing neon advertisements, pedestrian control lights, car direction indicators), sounds (bell ringing to indicate the imminent closing of the shop, car engine sounds, noise of crowds), and a taped voice of the Automate's conscience.

Here is another parallel with Adamov's Le Ping-Pong - in which the lights of the pin-table, central to the play and its theme, flash constantly to attract the customers in the bar.

When the Automate has finished his work, he is seen to be affected by a nervous twitching. This work-induced neurosis had been a feature of Chaplin's portrayal of the conveyor-belt worker in Modern Times, itself inspired by René Clair's film A Nous la Liberté.

During the change of scenery before Tableau II, the audience hears the press communiqué about the girl who barks - the Aboyeuse. The wording of this communiqué is identical to that of the newspaper report which Cousin had read and which caused him to write this play.

Tableau II takes place in the tax office where the Aboyeuse works. Here, Cousin uses farce to ridicule the employees and their situation: the secretary, Mlle Arthur, and the director repeatedly move their shared table lamp to suit themselves; the secretary, who is seated on a car tyre, types with exaggerated heaviness and utters puerile comments to the director who, after making some small mental calculations, suddenly launches into a brilliant mathematical treatise which would defy the capacities of a computer. The director mentions that the taxes which his office collects are used to support the army. This absurd correlation between the income from dog licences and its contribution towards the national defence only serves to emphasise the burlesque nature of this piece. Indeed, the same piece of information is repeated and emphasised later by the Minister of Finance in his memorandum to the director. In it he stresses the urgency of collecting the taxes from dog licence evaders in order to finance "notre immense et magnifique armée, laquelle, vous le savez, est le signe de notre grandeur, le gage de notre puissance, l'avenir de notre gloire." This epithet, to be repeated in similar form later in the play, has such a false ring to it that Cousin is undoubtedly satirising not

only the sentiment expressed, but the very existence of an army, supported as it is by unsuspecting donors in the form of dog-lovers. This military tone - and, hence, Cousin's anti-military stance - is echoed both in the menacing 'interrogation' of the Aboyeuse and in Mlle Arthur's references to her father, a colonel. Likewise, the mock 'torture' of the Aboyeuse forces her against her will to imitate all the different dogs' barks she learnt as a child.

This exploitation of her abilities by men engaged on nothing more than tax-collection is, by these references to the glory of the army thus subsidised, given added potency, because men motivated by a desire to improve society by a show of military strength are hardly likely to question the means by which they can raise the money to support such forces. The result for the Aboyeuse is the hypocritical approval of the methods of tax-collection, the spurious flattery of her capabilities, and the resulting dehumanisation of her as an individual. She is subordinated to her work and becomes a petty functionary of the state - despite the attempt by the director to enhance such a rôle as hers by calling it 'une fonction nationale patriotique'.

The nature of the work, and the harrassment by the director of the Aboyeuse therefore combine to cause her extreme nervous anxiety and tension which culminate in an unedifying neurosis, visible to the public and painfully humiliating to the Aboyeuse herself. She feels intense shame, and yet she appears so dominated by her superiors that she cannot escape from the rôle she is performing. Her inner conflict is so intense that she simultaneously howls uncontrollably like a dog and weeps like a child at her predicament.

As in the previous scene, a bell abruptly halts all work in progress and the director, as if subject to an automatic response mechanism, promptly dismisses his staff. Gontard, one of the two tax-collectors, is recalled to give an account of the day's activities and he lapses into Ionesco-style clichés on the good day, the weather and the crowds in the streets. These commonplaces serve to indicate a lack of

communication between people.

As an introduction to the next scene in front of a cinema, a loudspeaker voice advertises Fruits brassières, then announces its attractive films as "nos films sup-panoramic-vaticanocolor-super-production", a parody of the big-budget films which began life in the cinemas of the nineteen-fifties. However, as with the references to the army in the previous scene, there is a suggestion of ulterior motives behind the production of such films. This first reference to an equation between happiness and the act of cinema-going - "soyez heureux et souriants dans notre pays en pleine prospérité"- underlines Cousin's attachment to that part of Marxist theory which would see such a capitalist-materialistic entertainment as cinema-going as the opium of the people: as with religion, its soporific effect dulls their senses and allows their minds to be controlled by outside forces.

At the opening of Tableau III, Cousin suggests that his 'Chanson des amours de l'Aboyeuse et l'Automate' should be sung. This song is in the Brechtian mould - it resembles the prologues of the Lehrstücke in many ways. Firstly, it exhorts the audience to pay attention to the story and to judge the problems it poses. Secondly, it asks the audience to notice particular features of the problem ("voyez leur désespoir"; "Font-ils là des métiers/dignes de leur amour") and, in case there may be any doubt as to what the author has in mind, the message is spelt out clearly: "Mais les hommes et l'argent/ la bêtise et le temps/ se dressent contre les amoureux/ dans la bataille épuisante des jours."

In this tableau, only the Aboyeuse and the Automate speak aloud and are not masked: Cousin wants to place them against a background devoid of humanity and warmth, a world of clichés and trivialities, and where disciplined efficiency has taken the place of individuality. The published text of l'Aboyeuse et l'Automate dates the play accurately in the pre-television era of the early nineteen-fifties; however, Cousin, in a footnote, characteristically allows of variations

to update the settings and he himself altered this setting to suit the television version he wrote in 1973, in which the couple meet on a building site and have a common interest in motorcycles. It is clear that Cousin intended the play to remain topical - he says in the footnote that he would willingly agree to modifications to the text "afin de conserver au texte son caractère d'actualité" - and he considers l'Aboyeuse et l'Automate the play which will survive the longest of all he has written. This published version of the play, dating from the period 1957-1959, includes a dialogue among the crowd about the current advances in space technology. The first earth satellite - the Russian Sputnik I - had been launched in October 1957 and was followed in the next two years by Russian and American rockets to the moon, culminating in the first unmanned moon landing by Russia's Lunik II in September 1959.

Among the platitudes of the crowd's conversations there recurs the phrase "c'est idiot de s'enfermer" - it indicates an awareness of the folly of mass identification, yet shows people's impotence to change the routine of, for example, Sunday afternoon cinema visits. It is a fine spring day, but outside the cinema there is "une file d'attente sans fin". Mass identity is apparent as a motivating force in their conversations too: "Le gigot était très bon", "nous avons bien mangé", "quelle belle journée" - phrases reminiscent of the platitudes expressed in the opening scenes of Ionesco's La Cantatrice Chauve - are spoken by the crowd in chorus. The collective expression of a mass ethos takes on a more menacing tone when the restless crowd make a concerted call for discipline as a queue-jumper takes advantage of the general mêlée outside the cinema. The indoctrination of the public by advertising is noticeable in the copywriters' jargon they repeat to each other: "tout en mangeant ces délicieux Touaregs qui laissent dans la bouche la fraîcheur des nuits sahariennes" and this in turn induces self-deception: "nous allons bientôt commencer à être heureux", "Ah! quel



bonheur de vivre à cette époque". Their chanting of such phrases and, in addition, the exclamation of "notre culture s'approfondit" are perhaps Cousin's bitterest comments in this play on the state of the nation. His condemnation of the trivialising forces behind advertising, of the destructive potency of oft-repeated platitudes, and of the elimination of the individual and his values by the supra-nationalism of the cinema industry - "Notre premier film: 'La Mitraillette à balles amoureuses' a été tourné en Yougoslavie, dans des décors polonais, avec une figuration espagnole," - are all expressed with great satirical power in this crowd scene. Above all, Cousin satirises the apotheosis of the cinema: "Ah! les longs baisers cinématographiques! Ah! les étreintes cinématographiques! Ah! Toutes les choses cinématographiques!"

Against this background, the Automate and the Aboyeuse appear as private individuals, untouched by the subversion of mass psychosis. Although they are tainted with some of the phraseology of the indoctrinated - "C'est quand même dommage de s'enfermer", "aujourd'hui, il fait si beau" - they are able to extract themselves from the celluloid world of film and question people's motives and attitudes: "voir tous ces visages...Mais à quoi peuvent-ils penser tous?" The tableau ends on a note of optimism as they both criticise the uniformity of society and its effect on the majority: "Ah! cette publicité!", "On se laisserait abrutir, si l'on ne faisait pas attention". Yet the Automate, while deploring the demise of the horse - "Bientôt on ira voir les chevaux au zoo" -, has no hesitation in recommending the scooter - "Ça ne vaut pas un scooter!"

Before the following scene, a press communiqué announces an extraordinary advance in psychotherapeutic techniques: the bark of top quality dogs may now be silenced by these techniques so that they will be conditioned to bark only at family gatherings - in this way, the new methods of collecting dog-licence fees may be avoided! To the French, addicted tax-evaders, this suggestion would probably be even more humorous than to an English audience. However, the implication that for every government measure there can exist a counter-measure

to obstruct the intrusion of the state into private affairs, is still present and valid as a criticism in the context of l'Aboyeuse et l'Automate.

Tableau IV shows the Aboyeuse at work. She does not speak, but her conscience expresses her shame and her fear of meeting the Automate in the street. Their short conversation together in the café where they go to avoid the cinema must have revitalised and re-humanised her: "Qu'est-ce qu'il m'a dit? Comme une musique". What is significant here is the emphasis Cousin places on the importance of direct speech contact: the individual human voice projects warmth and personality, whereas the indirect or non-human voice, such as in recorded cinema announcements, advertising slogans, or the bark of a dog, represents the insidious dehumanisation of people. The attraction of the Automate's voice for the Aboyeuse outweighs her dislike of her director's exhortations which she now finds so false.

The press communiqué between scenes IV and V announces the setting up of institutes throughout Europe to promote bust-development with the erotically-expressed aim: "Il n'y a plus qu'à les installer dans leurs somptueuses demeures que sont les soutiens-gorge Fruits." The next tableau continues these erotic fantasies in the form of a discussion between the members of the Fruits company. A misguided conception of the esthetic is provided by one member who toasts "toutes les femmes qui embellissent maintenant nos rues avec de superbes poitrines et qui font ainsi la grandeur esthétique de notre pays". This misconceived notion of national pride is akin to the distorted chauvinism of the director of taxes shown in Tableau II.

This company meeting is a satire on the attitudes of a ruling class - but it also expresses the fears and hopes common to businessmen in such a position of power. They fear heart attacks, reprisals by villagers against landowners, and the demands of their workers. There are references to their connections in high places such as Matignon, to the actress-mistress of one of their number, and to their positive enjoyment

of 'old-boy network' meetings such as this one. But it is the advertising world which Cousin is here castigating most - the seeking of new ideas to encourage sales: "La publicité! La publicité! Indispensable! Elle conditionne..."; the baffling of the public by spurious scientific jargon: "Les soutiens-gorge Fruits: poire, pomme, citron en raison de l'extension du lacto-naturisme-végéta-naturel-céréalien"; the use of the terminology of privation: "On pourrait aussi lancer un soutien-gorge pour moins de seize ans. Vous savez que le mot 'interdit' attire le peuple!"

At this point in the discussion, there is a suggestion that they should sponsor writers and poets to write their advertising copy. This is Cousin's comment on the degrading attraction of money to creative minds - and possibly a plea for a just recognition of the writer in society in which he can earn a living from his artistic talents and not feel obliged to become a 'hack' to exist comfortably.

The chairman of the company becomes slowly more ecstatic about the possibilities of extending the awareness and influence of bosoms - by the surrealist introduction into the everyday world of breast-shaped objects such as babies' bottles, pillows, and hot water bottles, all symbols of physical comfort. But the Automate responds to this paranoiac eroticism by refusing to continue his work: "Si je continue, je suis perdu. Si je continue ce travail...Non, Je deviens fou!" He admits that his nerves are already affected by the automation of his job and, like the Aboyeuse, he fears recognition by the one he loves. The tableau concludes ominously with his observation "Je ne suis plus qu'une bête publicitaire".

The first half of the play - Cousin suggests that any interval found necessary in the production should be positioned after Tableau VI - ends with the first private meeting of the Automate and the Aboyeuse. All starts well, there is a deceptive appearance of normality as the couple echo the sentiments "Quand nous sommes ensemble, tout change" and "Oui, nous sommes bien". Their imaginations are in full play: they conjure up a beach, a green lawn wet with spring dew and birds

delicately hopping on the blades of grass. They liken themselves to scudding clouds; the Automate thinks of the slender birch tree as a young girl moving delicately and elegantly with the wind. But this beautiful harmony of Man and Nature is suddenly destroyed as the distant crowd freezes. The Automate amuses the Aboyeuse with his miming, but as their conversation turns inevitably to his work, his happiness fades and he soon becomes inarticulate. As if to mirror his anxiety, the Aboyeuse begins to sing a love song but the words stick in her throat and her voice falters. For her too, the mention of her work is sufficient to bring on a neurotic disorder and she just manages to prevent herself from barking loudly. However, she utters a small bark which attracts the attention of the Automate, but then dismisses this by turning the conversation towards his work. In his turn, the Automate is afflicted by a neurosis and they take leave of each other in haste.

The structure of the play so far has shown logic and symmetry as can be seen from this diagram of the Tableaux:

- Tableau I - Automate (at work)
- Tableau II - Aboyeuse (employers: the tax office)
- Tableau III - The couple together (with crowd)
- Tableau IV - Aboyeuse (at work)
- Tableau V - Automate (employers: the company meeting)
- Tableau VI - The couple together (without crowd)

The second half of the play continues and accentuates this symmetry. Tableau VII brings the inevitable and predictable meeting of the young couple at work in the same street. Both seek to pretend that they have met while off duty, but both are suspicious that they have been seen at work. They find a pretext for parting again quickly; the Automate fears he will lose his bonus for neglecting his job - a similar fear haunts the Aboyeuse in the next Tableau.

During the change of scene before Tableau VIII, a young couple illustrate the contemporary attachment to mechanical forms of entertainment, and of music-making in particular, by dancing a rock number while embracing the juke-box.

The next tableau introduces a new element into the play: a long narration of army life by Gontard, the tax-collector

who works with the Aboyeuse, is a parody of the absurdity and the inanity of army hierarchy, which satirically demolishes its *raison d'être*. The scene takes place in a bar in which a prostitute holds the attention of Gontard while his colleague Marius grumbles to the Aboyeuse about losing their bonus because of her stopping work to talk to the Automate. However, when Gontard is reminded of the product of his work - namely, financial support of the army - , nothing can prevent him from eulogising it, for he considers it to be "la grandeur de la nation, la pacification du monde, l'ordre de l'état". Despite constant mockery by the prostitute - an individual example of private enterprise, not dominated by the state - , he launches into a lengthy account of a procession he once took part in while in the army. "Il faut ce qu'il faut" and "il faut de l'ordre" are justification enough for its existence and notwithstanding the negligible reasons for which his superior officers entered the forces, he admires them excessively for the wrong reasons: the corporal, the sergeant, the adjutant, the lieutenant, the captain and, finally, the commanding officer all impress him so much with ceremony and the inspection they carry out, that he faints in telling the story, just as he fainted on the day of the parade. A pathetic scene follows as he is revived, drunk, and begins to weep. Meanwhile, the Aboyeuse is dreaming of a happy future with the Automate - this dream, the evocation of happiness expressed in physical contact with her lover, resembles some of Cousin's poetry of L'Ordinaire Amour.

The press communiqué following this scene recalls the current American military concern about a nuclear strike force and de Gaulle's French equivalent: "la force de frappe". Cousin ridicules this by employing the term for the force used to protect the financial interests of the casino in Monaco, and then suggests a "force de frappe féminine" by recommending the wearing of Fruits brassières!

The climax of the play is reached in the psychoanalyst's clinic in the long Tableau IX. Desperately seeking a cure, the couple are bewildered by the psychoanalyst's pseudo-scientific

analysis of their problem which, instead of alleviating their neuroses, only seems to perpetuate them. The clinic is geared to achieve maximum efficiency: the doctor treats ten patients at a time. Automation is the basis of the operations: transistor radios are tuned to a pre-recorded voice which hypnotises the patients into relaxing while the equally automated doctor bluffs the patient in the opposite consulting room into believing that there will be a successful outcome to his treatment. This satire on psychoanalysis is therefore twofold: the hypocrisy of overconfidence on the part of the doctor towards the patients he does not trouble to listen to, is matched by the equally unfeeling, automated atmosphere of the clinic itself. If the patients succumb to such treatment - and at the beginning of the scene, the Automate enters as if he is normal, - then they must be deluded by the methods employed. If this treatment is successful, then psychoanalysis itself stands in question, for what is represented here is no more than spurious sophistry uttered in the name of medical science.

However, the satire itself cannot be taken too seriously, for the doctor himself is clearly suffering from the same kind of morbidity as his patients and, by extension, society itself. This would suggest, as Dr. Millon pointed out in his Préface to the play, that the psychoanalyst is doubly tainted - both his professional techniques and his conscience are dubious. Yet Dr. Millon accepts the ideological caricature that Cousin paints, for he is aware that some of his colleagues are so tainted.

The visual symmetry of this Tableau on stage is an aid to its satirical content: the Automate and the Aboyouse are treated simultaneously on either side of the stage in their respective rooms. Both undergo the identical treatment, consisting of some preparatory flattery, the subjection to hypnotic voices calling on them to relax, and the farcical diagnosis of their condition by means of a pseudo-analysis of a single word in their conversation. By an exaggerated use of punning and the nonsensical semantic analysis of the words "accentués" and "renforcés" in this scene, Cousin makes a virulent attack on the methodology

of psychoanalysis and the public's docile acceptance of it. Gullibility and the readiness to accept pseudo-scientific jargon are fatal flaws in the make-up of the average modern person; however, Man himself is not entirely to blame - society is responsible for introducing this kind of therapy to combat the conditioning it has forced upon people in the first place. Without such social conditioning, psychotherapy would become unnecessary.

A more plausible phase of the treatment follows: the doctor prompts the patients into self-confession by asking them to recount their dreams. Finally, he proposes the course of action he believes necessary for each of them: "Vous allez lui faire le don de votre névrose". As they practise this suggestion in their rooms, the doctor and his secretary take the patients' places, thus indicating their own need for psychiatric treatment.

Throughout this scene, Cousin uses a subtle mixture of quackery and credible medical practice and although there is sufficient material within the conversations between the psychoanalyst and his patients to begin to persuade us that this is a true picture of such treatment, the overall effect is that of a satire. This effect is brought about by the use of exaggeration: the punning, the inhumanity, the recourse to automation, the self-disparagement, and the reversal of rôles at the end of the scene all demonstrate the falseness of the situation.

The final scene of the play, Tableau X, begins optimistically: the couple are to meet at the Automate's room and he shows all the normal signs of emotional excitement and attention to detail in apprehension of the visit of the Aboyeuse. After her arrival, the couple share the enjoyment of poetry, which affords them an escape from the real world. However, they appear to find conversation strained and an attempt at an embrace is abortive as the Aboyeuse suddenly retreats, holding her hand to her mouth for fear that she will utter a bark. Their neuroses have returned, their attempts at reaching one another are thwarted, and they find themselves incapable of breaking away from the situation. The room itself disintegrates and the scenery disappears to leave

them in the middle of town, thus representing the plight of many of their contemporaries. The end is as rapid as it is tragic: the couple are sucked into the vortex of crowds and town, enveloped separately by the mechanical, masked masses and crying out in unison their last despairing words of "mon amour! mon amour!" The crowd, whose demands have caused their impotence, resemble the Greek Furies who steal mortals from the world and, submerging their ideals, surround the lovers by darkness and drown their cries in a pervading urban pandemonium.

L'Aboyeuse et l'Automate, then, does not simply portray in arid fashion the unconscious submission of stereotypes to society's norms and show the resultant mental bereavement of all human beings; it contains many recognisable elements of human behaviour and human personality and thus warns us of the dangers inherent in our contemporary society. In his Preface to the Gallimard edition of the play, Dr. Robert Millon states that he felt himself obliged to accept the psychiatrist as an identifiable character when he realised that this man was tainted with the same social afflictions as the Aboyeuse and the Automate and therefore harmonised with them perfectly in the consultation scene in Tableau IX. Had the psychiatrist not been the victim of morbid behaviour himself, he might have been expected to diagnose the symptoms of the Aboyeuse and the Automate correctly and effect a cure. By showing that this man suffers from the same neuroses as his patients, Cousin is suggesting that society cannot provide the means to eliminate social diseases. As Dr. Millon points out, the ideological caricature is clever and contains some element of truth, but the psychiatrist alienates his subjects by enclosing the instinctual field of the two patients: the successful doctor would stimulate dialogue, not inhibit it. Cousin is using this fact to demonstrate that society as a whole is similarly afflicted: a general social malaise exists precisely because human beings no longer have the ability to communicate on an individual basis; they are subjected to automatic processes in their work which destroy the natural human potential to communicate within



them; they suffer from extreme nervous tension which results in their being prone to obsessional 'tics' - as Dr. Millon points out - and, as the neurosis spreads, the chances of alleviating such diseases diminish.

While Charles Chaplin, in his Modern Times, and Cousin in this play illustrate this neurosis in society, Brecht takes the argument one stage further: from the mechanical conditioning of the brain by modern technology to the social conditioning of the mind by ruthless politicians is but a short distance. As Dr. Millon says:

Les gestes de l'ouvrier totalement automatisés sur les chaînes de fabrication se conditionnent merveilleusement et se font de plus en plus vite 'sans y penser'; parallèle facile avec la descente rapide d'un escalier qui doit se vivre aussi dans les muscles des jambes plutôt que dans la tête, vertige de la vitesse, y introduire la réflexion, c'est la chute...<sup>18</sup>

It is at this point that the individual is vulnerable to social or political manipulation. The dreadfully exploited rice-barge coolies of Brecht's Die Massnahme are taught to escape from their miserable condition by the young Communist agitator; the three airmen of Brecht's Das Badener Lehrstück vom Einverständnis are browbeaten into submission until they reach a point of self-negation and finally accept the total eradication of their individual identities:

Jetzt wisst ihr:  
Niemand  
Stirbt, wenn ihr sterbt.  
Jetzt haben sie  
Ihre kleinste Grösse erreicht.<sup>19</sup>

When Man reaches his "kleinste Grösse", he has become an automaton, a thoroughly malleable object under the hammer of a superior force. Brecht's final stage in this dehumanisation process is the illustration of that superior force.

Dr. Millon concludes his comments on the play by acknowledging that Cousin considers the young couple to be incurable:

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18. Théâtre I p.18.

19. Brecht, op.cit., p.38.

Bon ou mauvais le médecin est impuissant à effacer cette infamie de leur Destin dans un monde où la déshumanisation des valeurs du travail engendre de tels monstres.<sup>20</sup>

His insistence on the term "monstres", mentioned earlier in his preface:

..la parfaite harmonie des personnages des patients et du psychanalyste, vivent dans la même dimension morbide, la maladie de leur propre métier, dans l'ordre tératologique de l'activité humaine,<sup>21</sup>

is most apposite in the context of the dehumanisation and alienation of Man in society, a theme not uncommon to the perplexed, even sometimes grotesque, characters of the Theatre of the Absurd. Here, both physical and metaphysical bewilderment reigns, and the pathetic victims of unspecified forces are the indirect descendants of Herr Schmitt in Brecht's Das Badener Lehrstück vom Einverständnis, the highly gullible and exploited human being whose very body is hacked slowly away by the prevailing forces of evil around him.

In many other respects however, Cousin shows dissimilarities to the Theatre of the Absurd: in the plausibility of the two main characters, in the visible contemporariness of their situations, and, above all, in the quasi-realism of their dialogue. Nor is the dialogue of the stereotyped crowd far from reality - it certainly stands at a great distance from the spasmodic and often incomprehensible mutterings of the characters peopling the plays of Ionesco and Beckett. As one critic has put it:

Il s'agit là d'un 'absurde' plus localisé que général, plus social que métaphysique, d'un langage situé et enraciné dans l'actualité.<sup>22</sup>

According to Dr. Millon, the principal characters also "symbolisent une certaine Réalité Sociale malade" - in contrast

20. Théâtre I, p.21.

21. ibid., p.18.

22. Gabriel Cousin ou l'Ordinaire Amour, Théâtre Populaire, no.45, 1962, p.32.

to the metaphysical sickness of the couples in La Cantatrice Chauve, for example, or the nihilistic meanderings of Oh! les beaux jours (which, incidentally, arrived in Paris the same year, 1963, as l'Aboyeuse et l'Automate).

Cousin's closer affinity with the human needs of society is reflected in this attachment to realism; his sympathy for 'the masses' shines through the curtain of bewildered responses that hides their anxieties. This predilection for enhancing the lot of the crowd by showing them sympathy - as befits the socialist writer that Cousin is - and elevating them to the rank of 'heroes', is amply seen in Cousin's own commentary on his plays in an interview for a German publication in 1967:

Die Helden unserer Zeit sind nicht mehr nur die Prinzen, sondern vor allem die kollektive, anonyme Masse, die arbeitet und leidet, die handelt und nur sehr wenig Zeit und Kräfte zum Träumen hat. Das ist die Masse der Menschen, die durch Kriege, Revolutionen, Fanatismus, Dummheit und Elend hindurch die Welt baut.<sup>23</sup>

It is the crowd, moreover, who carry along the action, create the rhythm of the piece. "C'est la foule de la rue qui.. conditionne le déroulement du drame" said Jean Malrieu of the T.Q.M. production at Marseille, and Michèle Grandjean comments:

La mise en scène .. est percutante, bâtie sur le rythme de la rue, feux rouges et feux verts, syncopée, saccadée, avec des temps de pause et des heures de pointes, elle a pris une allure de respiration faussée, touchant au vif les nerfs du spectateur.<sup>24</sup>

The première of the play in Marseille by Michel Fontayne's T.Q.M. - with the director himself in the rôle of le Directeur des Impôts - was received enthusiastically by the critics. Their experience of a play whose text was subordinated to equal ranking with the music, choreography, lighting and other forms of expression was clearly enlarged by this performance:

23. Werkstattgespräch mit dem französischen Dramatiker Gabriel Cousin, in Theater der Zeit (1967, Heft 2), Berlin, p.23.

24. Michèle Grandjean, Le Soir, Marseille, 20-11-1961.

Cousin est le premier dramaturge réellement modeste que je rencontre dans un théâtre. Il a compris que voir vaut aussi bien qu'entendre; il a compris la grande règle du spectacle d'aujourd'hui, qui, tirant du cinéma ses réactions en chaîne, veut que le spectateur soit frappé de tous les côtés à la fois. 25

Il est difficile de résumer en quelques mots une oeuvre où justement les mots perdent leur sens habituel et ne cherchent plus qu'à exprimer des situations où les protagonistes n'ont plus que l'apparence de l'être humain et tendent à incarner la fonction. 26

Claude Sarraute sums up this attitude towards the author with approval, appreciating the value of teamwork in modern theatre and its effect on the audience who witness the spectacle:

L'auteur qui accepte de récrire, de couper, de modifier à volonté, toujours prêt à ajouter une réplique, à déplacer une entrée, c'est le rêve de Planchon, ce mariage spontané du geste et du mot, ce constant dialogue par-dessus la rampe, cette recherche commune, ce travail d'équipe. 27

This statement of Claude Sarraute demonstrates the essence of Cousin's writing and its novelty in the French theatre of the period. Jacques Lemarchand also spoke of this originality:

[L'Aboyeuse et l'Automate] est une oeuvre étrange et pure, d'une profonde originalité, que le directeur du T.Q.M. peut s'honorer d'avoir choisie. 28

This same critic found the subsequent Paris production at the Athénée, sixteen months after the Marseille première, even more rewarding. In particular, he notes the effectively obsessive movements of the crowd, the rapid pace of the production "à la vive allure de la farce", the brilliant burlesque of Roland Monod's psychiatrist, and the equally sensational parody of the

25. *ibid.*

26. Hélène Cingria, Lettres Françaises, 16-11-1961.

27. Claude Sarraute, Le Monde, 13-12-1961.

28. Jacques Lemarchand, Le Figaro Littéraire, 23-12-1961.

board meeting scene. The critic of Lettres Françaises, C. Olivier, found the play more interesting than many current Paris productions and praised the acting in particular.

However, although press reviews showed the critics to be generally enthusiastic about Monod's performance in the play, and about some individual scenes too, L'Aboyeuse et l'Automate received an overall hostile reception in Paris. The hostility was attributable to a feeling of dissatisfaction with the text itself rather than with the production as a whole. It is noticeable from the reviews that those critics who found the play shallow nevertheless showed disappointment with this very fact, for the theme of the play interested the critics who believed that the public was ready for the genre of avant-garde 'tragédie-farce' at this juncture in the history of social drama in France. Paul Morelle commented:

La mise en scène, malgré d'ingénieux dispositifs, ne parvient pas à compenser cette faiblesse congénitale. Ici, il s'agit d'une avant-garde qui stagne, qui mange son acquit, qui se nourrit de ses anciennes découvertes. Le phénomène est d'autant plus regrettable qu'il s'agit d'une forme de théâtre, inspiré par la vie de tous les jours, dont la veine, pourtant inépuisable, est jusqu'ici peu exploitée en France.<sup>29</sup>

The critical rebuff which Cousin suffered at the hands of the Paris reviewers only served to illustrate the general dichotomy between them and their provincial counterparts. The former frequently exercised an - albeit spurious - intellectuality and aesthetic snobbishness over provincially produced works of art, while the latter, accused of naïveté and triviality, would reply by dismissing the capital itself for being out of touch with reality. The severest Paris critics accused Cousin of an "amateurisme fervent"<sup>30</sup> writing "un océan de banalités et de platitudes...de conventions et de clichés archi-fatigués"<sup>31</sup>.

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29. Paul Morelle, Libération, 1-3-1963.

30. Bertrand Poirot-Delpech, Le Monde, 28-2-1963.

31. Paul Morelle, op.cit.

In Cousin's defence, however, it must be remembered that these were the stock-in trade of the crowd intentionally limited to such commonplace. There was a lack of any appreciation of the play as a total spectacle by the critics - rather they concentrated on criticising its various elements quite separately. This is an error of judgment, for it presupposes a type of criticism which is alien to this sort of production; that is, it categorises the play before deciding whether it can be categorised in conventional terms.

Comme il n'y a pas la moindre notation lyrique dans cet ouvrage, il est impossible d'en prendre le 'message' au tragique, ce qui lui enlève beaucoup de son intérêt et de son efficacité... La tragédie étant inconsistante, que se passe-t-il du côté de la farce? Pas grand'chose non plus..<sup>32</sup>

Cousin's Notes de composition et de mise en scène for the play specifically call for a non-realistic production, in which the text may be of minor significance: "les situations et le jeu scénique se trouvent être plus importants que le texte"<sup>33</sup>. It is the global, combined effect of many arts which forms the spectacle. Cousin's disappointment with the critics for failing to recognise this feature of the piece was expressed in a television interview in Belgium shortly after the Paris production in which he indicated his intentions vis-à-vis the staging of l'Aboyeuse et l'Automate:

Je pense que le théâtre, c'est bien plus qu'un texte. C'est pourquoi, lorsque la situation le permettait, j'ai placé des tableaux muets. Cela a permis entre autres, aux metteurs en scène d'avoir un rôle encore plus complet: celui de solliciter et de stimuler l'auteur par exemple, mais surtout cela a permis aux comédiens de participer au travail de création d'une manière bien plus essentielle qu'en apprenant seulement leur rôle.<sup>34</sup>

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32. Claude Baignières, Le Figaro, 25-2-1963.

33. Théâtre I, p.121.

34. Leçon de mise en scène, interview télévisée avec des séquences de pièces, 1963.

The provincial critics appeared to appreciate this effect more readily: ironically enough, as it happens, for the play surely presents a picture of life in a large city, such as Paris, and not one of provincial life. It was labelled 'une fantasmagorie'<sup>35</sup> and 'une sorte de show'<sup>36</sup> after performances in Grenoble and Clermont-Ferrand, while the Avignon critic called it "un des spectacles les plus intelligents et en même temps les plus prenants..depuis longtemps"<sup>37</sup>. Some provincial companies discover in Cousin's work excellent opportunities to develop team work and experiment with new ideas on sets, music, or simple logistical exercises in scenery-changing, group entrances and exits and the like. L'Aboyeuse et l'Automate provides such opportunities and Bordeaux and Geneva were two towns which witnessed interesting experimental productions of it.

Il y a eu ce merveilleux travail de recherche que nous imposait la pièce en faisant appel à toutes les ressources de l'art théâtral, celles du mime et du silence, de la musique, de la lumière et de la poésie unis dans une forme neuve et dynamique du théâtre où les mots ne sont pas les seuls à compter. Alors nous avons pensé que Gabriel Cousin avait apporté quelque chose au théâtre, un accent nouveau et qu'il était dans notre rôle de le faire connaître. (Mise en scène de Raymond Paquet au C.R.A.D. de Bordeaux).<sup>38</sup>

Le travail de Gérard Zambelli et de son équipe est constamment valorisé par des idées, nombreuses, exploitées avec un constant souci d'équilibre.. Bravo la régie du son et des éclairages! (La troupe des Trois p'tits Tours de Morges).<sup>39</sup>

Indeed, Cousin himself delighted in this opportunity to unite different talents in one project:

35. Le Dauphiné Libéré, 26-3-1963.

36. A.C., La Liberté, 21-3-1963.

37. Jean Boissieu, Le Provençal, 10-7-1963.

38. Programme of L'Aboyeuse et l'Automate for production by C.R.A.D., Bordeaux, February 1966.

39. Eric Vogel, La Tribune de Genève, 30-10-1967.

Pour moi, rien n'est plus exaltant, rien n'est plus beau, rien ne me rend plus heureux qu'une tâche où chacun apporte, où chacun peut se sentir bien et à sa place, où l'on n'est pas seul, où son travail s'enrichit de l'apport de tous, où il y a une équipe. J'ai de ce point de vue connu de grandes joies avec la troupe du T.Q.M. pour la création de l'Aboyeuse et l'Automate.<sup>40</sup>

There remains to be discussed the problem of the 'message' of the play: is it optimistic or pessimistic? Most critics would agree that Cousin has none of the ideological didacticism of Brecht; nor has he the morbidity of metaphysical anguish expressed in the plays of Ionesco or Beckett. Cousin presents the problems of modern society with the passionate zeal of one intending to warn that society against itself, if not to solve its problems. He sympathises with Man's lot, but categorically states at the same time that that lot is unjust and may be revised. The method by which Cousin chooses to demonstrate such problems is simple and direct: it is through the plainest language and with the maximum of satire. He is not, like Sartre, a thinking man's playwright, nor, like Anouilh, an actor's writer: he lies between the two. Cousin commands our attention by exaggerating the situations in which his characters find themselves; he emphasises the desperate impossibility for ordinary people of escaping their fate; he intensifies the theatricality of his plays by demanding equal status for the visual and auditory effects as well as for the text itself. The result - a spectacle satirising social reality - is generally pessimistic in tone, but not necessarily pessimistic in its effect upon the spectator. The grimmest of black humour can cheer.

Jean Malrieu has stated:

Il s'agit d'une mise en garde, d'un appel à la vigilance. Malgré la noirceur de son dénouement, la pièce reste optimiste. Car l'atroce cri de l'Aboyeuse qui aboie son amour perdu reste en nous comme une écharde. La plaie des Temps Modernes coule. A nous d'enrayer le mal.<sup>41</sup>

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40. Interview in Chorus, revue d'avant-garde, Paris, juin 1962.

41. Jean Malrieu, (unidentifiable) press review, October 1961.



Two ideas must be retained when appraising the work of Cousin. First, it is quite wrong to castigate the author for the simplicity of language used, for the banality of statements by the leading protagonists, or for the hyperbole of their social situation. If these features of the work of Cousin are present, it is intentionally so, and they are only present in proportion to their value in the play itself - that is, on equal terms with the scenic and audio-visual effects. Secondly, it is unjust to criticise Cousin adversely for the lack of a dogmatic or plain Socialist message; he is a demonstrator of problems, not a solver. As Ross Chambers has put it:

[L'Aboyeuse et l'Automate] escapes all suspicion of ideological narrowness: it argues for a change, certainly, but not for changing one System in favour of another; it argues for a personal living-space in a world beset by social organisation, and defends a concept of human dignity and value - the dignity and value of Everyman - which it is hard not to share.<sup>42</sup>

As such, Cousin's theatre is accessible to a great number, and that is possibly the most important asset of the work as a whole. To say, like Paul Morelle, that it has "tout un populisme de surface"<sup>29</sup> is to sneer. L'Aboyeuse et l'Automate is sympathetically but accurately summed up by Michel Corvin, literary adviser to the Grenier de Bourgogne:

[C'est] un spectacle complet, humain sans mièvrerie, violent sans gratuité et chatoyant sans facilités.<sup>43</sup>

Finally, Cousin's own optimistic view of the work's durability is a guide to its nature and its attraction to actors and directors alike:

On s'aperçoit que cette pièce est peut-être celle qui va le moins vieillir. Il y a une ou deux jeunes troupes qui montent l'Aboyeuse et l'Automate tous les ans.<sup>44</sup>

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42. Ross Chambers, Meanjin Quarterly, Melbourne, Dec.1965, p.479.

43. M. Corvin, Revue du Grenier de Bourgogne, juin 1970.

44. Gabriel Cousin, interview avec D.W. Jeffery, 30-7-1974.

(c) Le Drame du Fukuryu-Maru

Cousin began work on his first full-length play in 1954. He describes its genesis in these words:

C'est à la fin de 1954, après le drame des expériences atomiques, que j'écrivis Le Drame du Fukuryu-Maru (nom du bateau japonais, en français: Dragon chanceux) pour me libérer de l'angoisse dans laquelle m'avait plongée ce fait qui n'est plus que divers. Et ce fut en partie sous l'impulsion de Gabriel Monnet qui me poussa à sortir de ma forme d'expression, uniquement à l'époque constituée de poèmes ou d'oratorios. Le Fukuryu-Maru est donc ma première pièce.<sup>1</sup>

After careful and exhaustive documentation of the facts during the following year, Cousin began to write the play in 1956 and, after many revisions, completed it in April 1957. This play, which relates the tragic fate of some Japanese fishermen caught in the fallout from an H-bomb test in the Pacific, was to undergo some interesting stylistic alterations in the following seven years.

At the Comédie de Saint-Etienne in 1957, Jean Dasté staged Brecht's The Caucasian Chalk Circle; Cousin saw the production and this was to be a significant factor in the subsequent development of Le Drame du Fukuryu-Maru, a second version of which shows how deeply influenced Cousin had been by Brechtian dramatic techniques in the Dasté version of Brecht's masterpiece. Indeed, Cousin expressed his regret that he had not been aware earlier of the revolution brought about in the French theatre by the visit of Brecht's Berliner Ensemble to Paris in 1954.

J'ai découvert Brecht tardivement, puisque le Drame du Fukuryu-Maru était presque rédigé quand j'ai vu la première pièce de lui, Le Cercle de Craie caucasien, par la Comédie de Saint-Etienne. Bertolt Brecht m'a aidé à trouver une forme, un style qui soient l'expression de la sensibilité, des préoccupations des hommes de ce moment-là, dans le ton, le rythme, la langue, et les éléments scéniques pour le théâtre.<sup>2</sup>

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1. G.Cousin, quoted in the programme for a production of Le Drame du Fukuryu-Maru by the Théâtre Universitaire de Caen, March 196 .
  2. G.Cousin, interview in Theater der Zeit, Berlin, 1967.

The version of Le Drame du Fukuryu-Maru completed in 1957, and later referred to as the 'first version', was published by Gallimard in 1960 in their series Le Manteau d'Arlequin. However, the play had already attracted the attention of Jean Vilar who had read it the previous autumn and who had intended to produce the work as an example of contemporary drama by young authors in his 1959-60 season at the Récamier theatre:

A Récamier... nous représenterons les toutes premières oeuvres des jeunes auteurs contemporains. Car il s'agit bien de rechercher les jeunes auteurs de demain, considérant que les jeunes auteurs d'hier ont déjà reçu leur chance ici ou là... J'ai choisi, pour ouvrir ce Théâtre Récamier T.N.P., Le Crapaud-Buffle d'Armand Gatti... Cependant, mes lectures depuis le 1er mai en vue d'établir le programme Récamier m'ont permis de découvrir l'oeuvre d'un auteur nouveau, et celle-ci m'a paru susceptible de s'accommoder du plateau de Chaillot. Il s'agit de l'oeuvre de Gabriel Cousin: Le Fukuryu-Maru.<sup>3</sup>

Regrettably, the death of Gérard Philipe in November 1959, the serious financial difficulties facing French theatre directors at that time, and the fact that the French government may have been on the point of exploding an atomic bomb that winter, all contributed to Vilar's inability to produce Cousin's play.

Cousin and Dasté worked together on the second version of the play which, before its stage première, was given a public reading by the Troupe du Théâtre Vivant at the Théâtre des Nations. The first production of the play, by Dasté's Comédie de Saint-Etienne, was achieved with the assistance of Jacques Lecoq like Dasté, a wartime friend of Cousin's. The première took place on June 8th. 1963 at the Festival des Places Publiques, with décors by J-B. Manessier and music by André Chamoux; it was subsequently taken to Paris and was performed four times at the Festival du Marais that summer. This second version of the play was published by Gallimard in 1964.

Apart from Dasté's personal friendship with Gabriel Cousin - and this memory is evoked in the letter to Cousin which prefaces the two editions of the play - , and bearing in mind the Brechtian influence on Dasté since 1954 which would have steered

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3. Jean Vilar, Bref no.29, octobre 1959.

him towards socially-committed plays, a third factor can be detected in Le Drame du Fukuryu-Maru which would have encouraged Dasté to produce the play. That factor is the Japanese setting of the work.

Since Dasté first went to Saint-Etienne in 1947, he had been following in the wake of Jacques Copeau, experimenting with mime, the use of masks, and the incorporation of a dramatic chorus in his productions. He had tried out these ideas in Greek tragedy (Antigone), in Shakespeare (Macbeth) and in the Japanese Noh plays Sumida River (La Sumida), and Kagekijo. L.C. Pronko relates<sup>4</sup> how these last two productions were performed in a stylised fashion adapted to Occidental sensibilities and not in an authentic Noh manner. It was therefore but a short step for Dasté to take up Gatti's Un Homme Seul - evoking Mao Tse-tung's Long March of 1934 - and Cousin's Le Fukuryu-Maru, and to continue his experiments along the lines he had already adopted. In this respect, he follows the previous experimentations of Brecht himself in his Good Woman of Setzuan and his didactic plays, for example, which had derived from Brecht's reading of Waley's translations in The Noh Plays of Japan (1921), and Klabund's adaptations of Chinese theatre in the original Caucasian Chalk Circle story, called simply The Chalk Circle, of 1924. In the same tradition lie Artaud's fascination with the Balinese theatre and Claudel's study of Japanese forms of drama.

Cousin had seen Dasté's Noh plays, he had read Claudel's studies and those of other authors on Japanese theatre, and he had witnessed a Japanese dance troupe on stage. Thus Cousin, with his Fukuryu-Maru and his Voyage de derrière la Montagne (published together in 1964), follows very closely in the tradition of those authors who were to exploit the Oriental theatre for its use of legend and, above all, for its techniques. Cousin's use of these techniques approximates most closely to those of the Japanese Kabuki theatre, a more realistic form than the stylised and bare Noh theatre which had been 'discovered'

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4. L.C.Pronko, Theater East and West, University of California Press, 1967.

by Claudel while he was ambassador in Tokyo from 1921 to 1927. Cousin's ability to capture unfamiliar situations in an accurate fashion will be a feature of his work - one which will be acknowledged by critics of his later plays. In this play, he has succeeded in impressing Pronko by his points of contact with the Oriental tradition: the close relationship between actors and audience, the synaesthesia of the various elements of the play, the use of masks, music, dance and the changes of scene visible to the audience.

Although the Fukuryu-Maru is a moving and important human document, I wish to stress the play's theatrical aspects. Cousin has miraculously succeeded in creating a play that lies close to the spirit of Kabuki - miraculously, because he has never had the chance to witness a Kabuki performance.<sup>5</sup>

Common to many of Cousin's plays are the faits divers which prompt their creation, and the documentary detail which they rely on to provide authenticity. For Le Fukuryu-Maru, Cousin paid particular attention to the pronouncements of Albert Einstein, Dr. Schweitzer, Robert Oppenheimer, and the book L'Heure H a-t-elle sonné? by Charles Noël Martin. He includes much of this documentary evidence and opinion in the second published version of the play, together with press reports of the effects of the explosion of March 1st. 1954 at Bikini Atoll in the Pacific. The programmes of the productions of the play include such documentation, thus complementing the spoken words of the actors with factual evidence of the historical details. A performance of this play, as with other of Cousin's works, therefore represents a complete expression of Cousin's thoughts on the subject of the dangers of atomic explosions. But it does not merely serve to alert our political attention to these dangers: the play arouses our sensibilities too, for it is also the artistic expression of Cousin's feelings towards the terrible events of 1954.

So far we have ascertained the accuracy of the facts behind this play, and shown the care with which Cousin researched those facts and how, in addition, his interest in the Japanese theatre

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5. *ibid.*, p.133.

and its techniques led him to construct a play thoroughly in the oriental mood - using such features of traditional life in Japan as the tea ceremony and the superstitious reliance on the gods to protect the Fukuryu-Maru and its crew. Cousin also takes care to use Japanese names for his characters which have a bearing on their rôle in the story. Whereas all these facts and details are based on truth, the love story incorporated into the action is fictitious.

But Cousin is anxious to stress a third element in this play - one which is to recur in Le Voyage de derrière la Montagne - that of the conflict between the old and the new life, between the traditional Japan and the modern, which in turn represent old and new ways of thought. The notion of introducing such a theme into Le Fukuryu-Maru came from his research into the subject-matter of the play; it is akin to Brecht's treatment of the dawn of a new age and new ways of thinking which he brought into his Life of Galileo. Cousin explains his intentions in the Notes de composition et de mise en scène:

Au cours du travail de documentation...j'ai découvert le message qu'Einstein adressa aux savants italiens en 1950 et alertant sur la nécessité de rechercher une nouvelle manière de penser. D'où ce troisième thème, et s'il apparaît secondaire dans la pièce, il est, je pense, le plus important. Car l'histoire des pêcheurs japonais, c'est déjà le passé, alors que la recherche de la nouvelle manière de penser c'est l'avenir de l'homme, notre avenir. Ce thème, représenté par la lutte entre les anciennes et les nouvelles formes de vie et de morale, m'a semblé particulièrement propice à être évoqué dans le cadre du Japon d'aujourd'hui (passé d'une société féodale à une société capitaliste moderne en soixante années et particulièrement en quelques mois après la défaite de 1945.)<sup>6</sup>

A study of the two versions of the play reveals that this third theme - the contrasting traditional and modern ways of living and of thinking - is an addition to Cousin's original

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6. G.Cousin, Théâtre II, Gallimard, 1964, p.271.

scheme for the play, for it does not feature in the first edition of 1960. Other points of divergence between the two editions, those of 1960 and 1964, point to precise influences on Cousin at that time: the discovery of Brechtian dramatic techniques and the related influence of the producer Jean Dasté. Other producers made minor changes to the text in 1964 - Walter Tillemans staged the play in Dutch at the Royal Netherlands Theatre (K.N.S.) in Antwerp on January 16th. 1964, and Deryk Mendel produced the Belgian première at the Théâtre Royal du Parc in Brussels on December 7th. 1964, with décor by Michel Raffaelli. The definitive second version was completed in June 1964 and published by Gallimard later that year. In this new edition, Cousin considerably expanded his notes on the characters in the play, added more details to the historical background, and more than doubled the amount of Notes de composition et de mise en scène. In addition, he included many of the documents he had researched for the play, together with an extract from an interview on French Radio with Karl Jaspers, and a letter from Bertrand Russell sent to him in June 1963 which Cousin uses to preface the second edition.

The result of adding such an abundance of detail and suggestions is to increase the knowledge of the reader - and audience - about the background to the play and to strengthen and delineate the themes. Thus, the first edition offers only a scanty description of the characters, whereas the second details many more of their attitudes and places them in the context of the theme of 'l'ancien et le nouveau'. As already mentioned, the significant change in the second edition of the play is one of emphasising this 'nouvelle manière de penser' of the characters. For instance, the first edition limits our knowledge of Matsuyama to seeing her as 'la jeune fille, dont la légende est racontée et mimée scène 8'. In the second edition, she is representative of a whole generation and a symbol of the need for change:

Elle a vécu, en effet (enfant élevée aristocratiquement), les formidables bouleversements de la guerre, de l'après-guerre et de l'occupation. Toutes les anciennes valeurs se sont trouvées remises en cause,

puisque l'échec de la nation a été complet. Avec Urashima, elle a pris contact avec le peuple et les perspectives révolutionnaires de la classe ouvrière du Japon.<sup>7</sup>

Cousin says of her:

[Elle] se situe entre l'ancien et le nouveau monde. Ce que je veux montrer, c'est son passage de l'un à l'autre. Et, par elle, montrer la nécessité pour nous tous de trouver une nouvelle façon de penser et de vivre dans un monde qui est menacé par la bombe atomique.<sup>8</sup>

From these last two statements of intention, it is clear that the thinking of Cousin underwent some radical changes. The references to the social class of Matsuyama, and the revolutionary perspective which Cousin introduces through her, indicates a clear move towards the Marxist thought of Brecht, while the new details of her wartime upbringing cannot fail to recall to all Frenchmen their own experiences of their country's occupation in the war. This one example proves the value of revising one's opinions, which is what the play is advocating: it therefore stands both as a warning of the dangers of outmoded philosophies in the Atomic Age, and as a reminder of the constant need for a revision of those philosophies.

The structure of the second version of the play differs from that of the first version in three major ways: the overall number of tableaux is reduced from sixteen to thirteen, scenes 7 and 10 of the original version are omitted, and scenes 15 and 16 are partly re-written and combine to form the new final scene. There are two further alterations to the order of scenes: the depiction of Onono's assault on Matsuyama, and the description of the changing colours of flowers both occur earlier in the second version of the play. The other main difference between the two versions lies in the content of the story itself: Matsuyama's attempted suicide is omitted from the second version; instead, greater emphasis is placed on her seeking

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7. *ibid.*, p.261.

8. G.Cousin, interview in De Linie (Belgium), 17-1-1964.



plastic surgery to combat her feeling of humiliation at her disfigurement caused by the Nagasaki explosion.

A diagrammatic list of scenes will clarify these structural changes:

|           | <u>1st. Version</u> | <u>2nd. Version</u> |
|-----------|---------------------|---------------------|
| Tableaux: | 1                   | 1                   |
|           | 2                   | 2                   |
|           | 3                   | 3                   |
|           | 4                   | 4                   |
|           | 5                   | 5                   |
|           | 6                   | 6                   |
|           | 7                   | -                   |
|           | 8                   | 7                   |
|           | 9                   | 8                   |
|           | 10                  | -                   |
|           | 11                  | 11                  |
|           | 12                  | 9                   |
|           | 13                  | 10                  |
|           | 14                  | 12                  |
|           | 15                  | 13                  |
|           | 16                  |                     |

A closer examination of the second version will reveal in more detail the effects of these changes and confirm their new Brechtian emphasis.

Le Drame du Fukuryu-Maru (second version) is the story of a young Japanese couple who are struggling against old prejudices and the demands of modern life. A young girl from an aristocratic family, Matsuyama, disfigured and sterile since the atomic explosion at Nagasaki, refuses to accept the love of a young fisherman, Urashima. While Urashima and the other members of the crew of the Fukuryu-Maru are out fishing, they suffer the radioactive effects of an H-Bomb explosion despite the fact that they are well outside the reported limits of those effects. On their return, Matsuyama accepts Urashima's love and decides to undergo facial surgery. During her absence, Urashima dies from the effects of atomic radiation. Matsuyama, whose operation has been highly successful, returns to the village

where Urashima's funeral is taking place. Distraught, she vows to rejoin her fiancé in death, but the villagers prevent her from doing so: now that she has regained her former beauty, she will be needed as a symbol of hope to give others the courage to continue living.

It is appropriate that the play should open with a street scene, for this is essentially a play concerning the everyday lives of ordinary Japanese folk in the immediate post-nuclear age. Modern Japan is represented by the choruses of women, workers, and seamen in the play; various street-traders - balloon-seller, newspaper-seller, noodle-seller - ensure the necessary contact between people in the street and act as information-givers to the public at large. They also fulfil the important function of stimulating and reflecting public opinion - and hence embody the changes in Japanese society which Cousin wishes to convey.

The opening scene introduces us to the grotesque, self-pitying character of Onono, a legless street-singer whose outlook on life is, at the least, cynical, and for the most part anti-life altogether. Cousin's biography of him stresses this:

Il est l'animateur du spectacle. Présent presque en permanence, il surgit pour critiquer, souligner chaque événement. Il est à la fois le clown, le clochard, le révolté et l'annonceur du destin. Il établit le lien avec la salle.<sup>9</sup>

He is the symbol of war, aggressively and selfishly against change because he cannot participate in the modernisation of society himself. Hope vanished for him after the war when his heroic and godlike position as a kamikaze pilot was eroded by his chance escape from death, and the lack of a pension as a war-wounded survivor diminished his role in society to that of a beggar. He is filled with hatred, bitterness, and a nihilistic antagonism towards his country, religion, and society in general.

Cousin's demonstration of the need for Japanese society

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9. G.Cousin, Théâtre II, p.260.

to undergo a change, from the old traditional and feudal life to that of a modern capitalist society - 'l'ancien et le nouveau' as he puts it - is of prime importance in Le Drame du Fukuryu-Maru, and it is stressed more positively in the second version of the play. It divides generations: the aged Michizane embodies the ideals and the living standards of the older generation which finds itself in conflict with the more materialistic, work-orientated modern generation. It also divides people of the same generation: Matsuyama is frightened by Urashima's approach to life. The transition from the old to the new is not merely one of a changing emphasis in the structure of Japanese society; it involves a radical change of thinking, and it is this need for a mental revolution which presents the greatest difficulties to both Michizane and his granddaughter. Matsuyama expresses such fears to Urashima already in the second tableau:

Vos idées m'effraient. Elles sont trop belles  
et trop compliquées.

She is concerned here with Urashima's ready acceptance of the new bomb tests in the Pacific ("on peut faire beaucoup de choses avec la science et la technique, au lieu de revenir en arrière"). But Urashima is also politically more modern in outlook than Matsuyama. His father insists on the importance of solidarity with fellow-workers and supports the activities of his son as a Trade Union delegate. This latter rôle of Urashima appears in the second version of the play and clearly reflects the Brechtian influence on Cousin.

Even the traditional dignity of Matsuyama's 'vous' form when addressing Urashima is questioned by Urashima himself, irritated by the formality of his girl friend:

-Ne sois pas distante. Ne me parle plus comme à un seigneur.  
Dis-moi tu...  
-Oh! je ne pourrai...  
-Alors, je te dirai vous!  
-Oh! Non! Ne vous éloignez pas de moi! Ah! je ne sais plus!

The confusion in the mind of Matsuyama is increased when she visits her grandfather for advice:

Mon coeur est déchiré, mon esprit est divisé,  
mon âme a perdu son chemin.

This torture of the soul is rooted in the uncertainty of life since the Nagasaki atom bomb disfigured her. Her pain is, however, physical as well as psychological: "Je suis lasse comme après les semaines qui suivirent la lueur". Thus Cousin makes the correlation between the purely physical (anatomical) effects of the bomb on individuals such as Matsuyama, and their subsequent mental after-effects which cause troubled minds, making them question the values of the modern world. Matsuyama tries to express the new values to Michizane: "Il faut être à l'heure et travailler vite. La ville l'exige", but Michizane only deplores her plight as a "prisonnière du temps", unable to appreciate the values of "chaleur", "quiétude", "sagesse" and "beauté" and incapable of distinguishing any longer between good and evil, right and wrong. As in Brecht's Das Leben des Galilei, science has forced a new way of thinking upon ordinary people. Likewise, the gods have changed and the new goals of socialism and agnosticism perplex Matsuyama: "Comment comprendre et faire que la justice soit détenue par ceux qui ne la détiennent pas, et que le pouvoir soit à ceux qui ne possèdent rien? Comme il était bon d'être assurée de l'existence des dieux". Michizane feels rejected and humiliated by such values, values of a society in which "il n'y a plus de poètes". Something of the same pathos and regret filled Resnais's film Hiroshima mon amour, based on a scenario by Marguerite Duras. Michizane's anger is sublimated by drowning his sorrows in saké - the first time in his life he has drunk it - and by a mimed 'combat' with beauty to which he accedes power, thus assuaging his feelings.

In the first version of the play, Matsuyama is anxious about the future after this meeting with her grandfather. She finds his counsel futile and realises the impossibility of depending on past tradition to foretell the future course of events and thus decide a present course of action. In the second version, Cousin omits Matsuyama's return to Yaïdzu and the couple do not meet again until Tableau IX, the lyrical love scene in the hospital when Urashima is dying from the effects of radiation. It is left to Michizane in Tableau XI to express

the final regrets about modern society and, in particular, about Matsuyama's desire for plastic surgery to lend her greater appeal to Urashima. Such an action must displease the gods, and Michizane is afraid of the consequences of tampering with nature:

Nous avons voulu changer nos manières de vivre.  
 Nous avons ignoré les dieux qui faisaient la sagesse  
 du Japon. Nous allons être punis.

The punishment meted out to Matsuyama may be seen in Urashima's subsequent death, the ironic negation of the very cause of Matsuyama's action. At the last moment, then, their acceptance of each other's fate - and Matsuyama's change in addressing her lover with the "tu" form - is denied its full expression and Matsuyama enters the realm of symbolism, her beauty providing the necessary counterweight to the evils of the nuclear age and lending the people a new will to live. It is not until the final scene that she rejects her grandfather's interpretation of beauty as "une preuve des dieux". She rejects the gods themselves: "Les dieux? Je ne les connais plus!".

If Michizane's generation fears the wrath of the gods for Man's moral demise, then the succeeding generation, that of Shoki and Kwannon, fear the impotence begotten by Man's scientific advance: the biological impotence of future generations and the political impotence between such forces as the A-Bomb and H-Bomb. In Shoki, we see resignation and a new fatalistic view of the future: "Urashima dort. Il se repose. Ne le réveille pas! Dans cette maladie, il y a des hauts et des bas. Le médecin nous l'a expliqué". Kwannon feels her impotence more personally; she suffers the agony of a mother who, like Brecht's Mother Courage, cannot prevent the enormity of war from taking her offspring from her:

Ah! il n'y a pas de dieu pour que nous souffrions  
 ainsi! Déjà ses frères ont péri en guerre! La  
 Mandchourie! La Nouvelle-Guinée! L'Indochine!  
 Partout, on appelait mes enfants! Et jamais ils  
 ne sont revenus! Et il ne faudrait rien dire?  
 Ah! Qu'est-ce que nous pouvons faire?

Her incomprehension: "Ah! quelle Maladie les hommes ont-ils inventée!" and her inability to nurse Urashima back to life again - echo the sentiments of all mothers: "Mais nous souffrons, nous! Tu entends, les mères...C'est nous qui les avons faits!"

But her agony also stands for the universal agony of war, and her son's horrible death after a period of delirium captures the futility and the suffering of ordinary mortals at the hands of technical progress in military fields. The second version of the play emphasises this aspect of 'le nouveau' more poignantly than the first version: it is made more moving by Kwannon's incredulousness and impotence; the play's message is conveyed in more politically violent terms too:

Conditionnées par l'éducation, emprisonnées par les lois, étouffées par la morale, nos consciences savent maintenant. Chacun pour être tranquille se confectionne une bonne conscience.

This is considerably severer than the first version's "Nos consciences artificielles, nos consciences emprisonnées par l'éducation, le métier ou la morale savent maintenant." Considerable importance is thus given to the theme of 'l'ancien et le nouveau' in many scenes of this play: its prominence serves to weld together the themes of love, the personal conflicts brought about by these new changes in thinking, and the nuclear threat to Man. These themes are fundamentally pessimistic in tone. The threat to Man's existence due to his own search for scientific progress is not an uncommon theme in literature of this period; as for the theme of love thwarted by circumstances beyond the control of those concerned, it is common to Cousin's work in general: in L'Opéra Noir, racism prevents the lovers from meeting; in L'Aboyeuse et L'Automate, it is the neuroses caused by society's dehumanisation which keep the couple from communicating with one another.

In Le Drame du Fukuryu-Marû, the theme of the threat to Man's existence by the H-Bomb is portrayed both factually and emotionally. In factual terms, there is mention of the changed colour of flowers and the contamination of fish. Both these changes spread fear among the population: the first phenomenon upsets the traditional values and feelings for the beauty of flowers among Japanese people, the second is seen as a direct attack on the livelihood of the population. Such cataclysmic effects upon nature itself represent an affront to the gods

themselves: Michizane says: "cette vie ne peut durer, l'offense aux dieux est permanente", and any beneficial advance in scientific knowledge which may offset these changes, such as the success of plastic surgery, are unacceptable, since this is tampering with nature and will inevitably displease the gods. Cousin's comment on such experiments in nature takes the form of a rhetorical question: "L'homme, est-il bon à la terre?" spoken by the choeur des voisins and reflecting public anxiety. In emotional terms, the Bomb creates in the crew of the Fukuryu-Maru feelings of anxiety and incomprehension. Cousin details the effects of an A-Bomb explosion as it actually happened: the crew see the first red glow in the sky, then they hear the explosion and experience the subsequent freak storm and high sea waves. They see the cloud, feel the heat and are caught in the fallout of 'white rain'. In the long central scene of the play at the end of Part I, we suffer with the men the after-effects of the explosion - their sickness and fatigue, the peeling of their skin and the loss of their hair. Cousin's accuracy of detail in portraying the grotesque effects of the Bomb on the uncomprehending fishermen is extended in length in order to express fully the anguish and impotence of the crew members. The facts of the event are in themselves sufficiently ugly to convey the horror without the need for any elaboration or over-dramatisation by the author.

However, Cousin does draw attention to the ignorance of some of the crew, although it seems unlikely that any sailor will not know that the sun rises in the East. He also depicts the more practical and enlightened approach to the events by Urashima himself: it is Urashima who brings reality and actuality to the superstitious and outmoded thinking of his fellows. The second version of the play emphasises this aspect of his rôle; he is at once a teacher and a preacher to the others: his suspicions of the nature of the phenomena they are experiencing lead him to instruct the others and to castigate them for their atavistic notions: "Nous ferons un pèlerinage. Nous irons prier nos dieux et nos ancêtres". Urashima is angry at them for proposing such solutions: "Vous

n'êtes plus des marins comme au temps des samourais, non?", and he tries to rationalise with them: "Faites revenir votre raison". This exhortation to see sense and not to lose control: "Courage, amis! Il faut vivre" replaces the panicky cries of the seamen in the first version of the play - again demonstrating the greater politicisation of this version. However, reason will not prevail: the men's stubbornness and above all their fear, cause them to reject Urashima's words, and the first half of the play ends on a pessimistic note:

Ah! nous sommes malades!  
 Nous ne savons plus rien!  
 Laisse-nous, délégué!  
 Laisse-nous tranquilles!

A similar note of despair is echoed by Nomura in Gatti's La Cigogne: "C'est le désespoir, rien d'autre qui nous pousse à inventer une vie comme celle des autres. Nous sommes seuls." As in Cousin's play, the ordinary people feel abandoned by their gods and, at a funeral ceremony, they beg their forgiveness:

Morts ne venez pas  
 Nous sommes sans murs  
 pour vous accueillir,  
 sans eau pour rafraîchir  
 tous vos visages, sans  
 riz pour vous nourrir.  
 Nous avons perdu les mots  
 qui permettaient de  
 vous ensevelir sous  
 le langage d'autrefois.  
 Morts ne venez pas.<sup>10</sup>

In Le Drame du Fukuryu-Maru, Onono's comments on the explosion are equally pessimistic, but also grotesque: "Tiens, les savants s'amusement!". He embodies the grievances of the afflicted, yet selfishly sees the disaster as a social leveller. For this reason, he appears as contemptuously pleased with the horror as does Cottard in Camus's La Peste: "puisque lui-même a vécu dans la terreur, il trouve normal que les autres la connaissent à leur tour. Plus exactement, la terreur lui paraît alors moins lourde à porter que s'il y était tout seul." Onono also incarnates the universal anger at the atrocities of the misuse of science, later expressed by the Choeur des Voisines:

Les hommes meurent, les champs noircissent,  
 les animaux ne ressemblent plus à eux-mêmes

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10. Armand Gatti, La Cigogne, Seuil, 1971, p.62.



et les enfants des hommes ne ressemblent plus  
à des hommes.

It is appropriate that the egoistic and sarcastic Onono should be given the final statement in this scene (Tableau VII):

Et les savants sont en train d'ajouter un peu de poivre à leurs oeufs sur le plat! Les mathématiciens écoutent de la grande musique, pour se reposer de leurs calculs! Et pour leurs rendez-vous, les ingénieurs resserrent le noeud de leur cravate en descendant de voiture.

This justifiable indignation at the scientists who have perpetrated such horrors on an unsuspecting people is expressed with equal bitterness by Trompette in Gatti's play:

Il n'y avait aucune nécessité à faire éclater le soleil au-dessus de nous. Vous avez rallongé la guerre, uniquement pour avoir des cobayes.<sup>11</sup>

The theme of the love between Urashima and Matsuyama is played out on a minor level - Cousin devotes fewer scenes to this theme than to the other two - but it does contain the same desperate tragedy of the theme of the Bomb. The most movingly lyrical scene in the play, Tableau IX, takes place in the hospital where Urashima is dying and it is a noticeably more purely personal scene than that in the first version of the play, where the couple's conversation is interspersed with several refrains by the Choeur des Marins.

While Urashima can happily accept Matsuyama disfigured: "l'amour est au-delà de la morale, au-delà des lois, au-delà de la famille", Matsuyama continues to regret the loss of her former beauty: "Ah si je pouvais être belle pour toi" she repeats twice. Their situation is degraded, however, by the curiosity they arouse among those not afflicted by the Bomb and they feel themselves to be the objects of pity of their contemporaries. This, coupled with the knowledge that they will never be able to conceive children, denies them the humanity they need to survive in society. Infertility is death and the cri de coeur: "Vivants, nous sommes déjà morts!" sums up their hopelessness.

The Bomb is the cause of the couple's despair; it not

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11. *ibid.*, p.34.

only separates them by rendering them infertile, but it is also, ironically, indirectly responsible for the tragic circumstances of Urashima's death: had Matsuyama not yearned for perfection and left her country to undergo facial surgery, she would have been able to comfort Urashima and bring him a final degree of solace by her presence. A consequence of the rift that thereby occurred between the couple was an everlasting mistrust of life itself - Matsuyama must logically reject the gods whose precepts that life was based on - and she contemplates the next logical step, that of suicide: "Dieux! Faites que je meure! Que la cendre me donne la Mort! Que je meure avec toi!" At this point in the play she is close in mood and will to a classical heroine but she will be persuaded that self-destruction is inadmissible for two reasons. First, Urashima's father reminds her that his son fought for the right to live, not to die; the sea captain and the sick crew support this argument by asking Matsuyama what Urashima might think if he saw her changed, albeit beautifully - no, she must match his courage by her respect for him and continue his fight for the survival of mankind. Thus Matsuyama will recognise her new rôle, assume Urashima's mantle of responsibility towards her people and so honour his name and purpose. Secondly, the people themselves have need of beauty and demand her presence to inspire and encourage them in their search for a peaceful existence. She thus becomes the figurehead in the new struggle: "Son visage sera le fanal dans la nuit de l'appareillage vers la haute mer de la paix".

Cousin adds considerably to the first version of the play in presenting this final image of Matsuyama; in so doing, he enlarges on the symbolic rôle of the surviving Matsuyama and extends his call to future generations, that they should alert the world to the perils of the atomic age. It is a call for a new way of thinking: "Comme nous avons appris avec les outils, nous devons apprendre à manier la paix", a warning of the dangers to the human race: "N'attendons pas que la radio-activité s'étende comme l'hiver sur le genre humain!", and a repeated cry of feminine anguish: "Nous ne voulons pas que nos ventres se dessèchent! Que les femmes appellent à la raison!". The play closes with the Cantata to Peace, Cousin's poetic

evocation of the beauty and pleasure experienced in the smallest manifestations of love and in the simplest of actions of everyday life.

The impact of this drama derives not merely from the theatrical devices it employs and the universally important appeal of its message, but also from its frequently bitter tone which underlines the resentment at the tragedy that befell Japan at the end of the Second World War. This resentment is typified by the sayings and actions of the street-singer Onono.

From the beginning he sows discord, doubt, and unpleasantness in society, a society he has come to abhor for its indifference towards his wartime heroism: "Dans les adieux se glisse le mensonge pour l'au-revoir, les gestes sont faux". While relishing the prospect of infidelity among women in general, he pursues Matsuyama for himself: the blatantly sexual advances he makes towards her are matched by the eroticism of his words: "Quand je te vois, ma langue s'allonge vers toi". His physical attack on Matsuyama is brought forward to Tableau IV in the second version of the play, giving the audience no doubts about his character from the start: he is inadequate as a man and desires Matsuyama to compensate for his lost pride. However, he clearly intends to exploit her grotesqueness by putting her to work in a night club where he has elaborate plans to use her in a striptease number. Onono's own grotesqueness is never in doubt; both physically (he has crutches or a wheelchair) and mentally (he breaks down pathetically at the end of Tableau IV), he is an object of our pity; he is the living catharsis of our emotions towards war in general and the mutilation of the human body in particular. Cousin makes him more disturbingly frightening and more erotic than in the first version of the play.

Indeed, Onono's remarks are frequently in poor taste: when the Fukuryu-Maru returns to port, and the crew's faces are seen to be burning from the heat of the bomb explosion, he remarks: "Comme ils sont bronzés!" and later he says of the catch: "Le capitaine ne doit pas être content! Avoir pêché des cendres!". Such examples serve to show the rôle of Onono

as an agent of alienation in this play: without his constant observations on events and people, we would easily identify with the plight of the Fukuryu-Maru and its crew and feel compassionate towards the sufferers. Onono lends the play a Brechtian objectivity which presents the spectators with a condemnation of scientific progress at the expense of mankind. This rôle is evident in Tableau VIII, in which Onono sees in the Captain's remarks about respecting the permitted fishing zones and his traditional superstition of painting the sign of the goddess on his ship, as analagous with his own experiences as a kamikaze pilot - he too respected orders, signs, and zones, but to no avail. It is significant that it should be Onono who remains on stage at the end of the play and turns to the audience to deliver his final remarks:

Regardez-les! Hier, nous suivions la guerre!  
 Sur l'Asie, la terreur nous précédait, les  
 incendies nous entouraient, les famines nous  
 suivaient. La cruauté nous animait. Aveuglés  
 d'uniformes, nous allions, le nez dans les fesses  
 du voisin! Ils suivent la paix, aujourd'hui!  
 Ils roucoulent comme des pigeons!

Cousin's condemnation of a generation dedicated to war is aptly spoken through the mouth of this grotesque beggar, the incarnation of evil and revenge; it is for the next generation to seek the light and beauty of peaceful coexistence. Cousin's contribution to the universal plea for such a peace is applauded by Bertrand Russell in a letter to him and which is used to preface the published second version of Le Drame du Fukuryu-Maru.

This is an iconoclastic play. It paves the way for new thinking about the effects of advanced technology, it dismisses religion as an outmoded form of moral despotism, and it takes Japan and its people out of the past into a more perplexing but more progressive and productive present. Einstein's message to Italian scientists quoted by Cousin at the head of the two editions of the play: "Une nouvelle façon de penser est essentielle si l'humanité doit survivre", lends scientific weight to the argument, while Brecht's political theory is remarkably similar in tone: "Und was den alten grossen Brauch

betrifft, so sehe ich keine Vernunft an ihm. Ich brauche vielmehr einen neuen grossen Brauch, den wir sofort einführen müssen, nämlich den Brauch, in jeder neuen Lage neu nachzudenken."<sup>12</sup>

Cousin has succeeded in welding the historical facts of 1954 and their position in the continuum of Japanese life to the Brechtian style of drama and has produced a moving, but also objective assessment of their value to contemporary audiences. Le Drame du Fukuryu-Maru stands as a testimony to that prise de conscience of Cousin which morally and emotionally obliged him to communicate his fears to others - Jean Dasté's letter which prefaces both editions of the play expresses the same sentiment on the value of Cousin's work in the theatre: "C'est la sauvegarde du vrai théâtre que de le rendre au souci de son temps".

After the French première by Dasté, Gabriel Marcel expressed his approval of the theme of the play and applauded its attempt to create an awareness in the audience of the ethical and human implications of the Bomb. However, he did not accept Cousin as a sufficiently great poet to be able to express these implications in moving theatrical terms. According to him, the form of the play was regrettably reduced to that of reportage, and, while inviting comparison with the work of Claudel, it stood very much in the shadow of that man:

Cette tragique idylle n'aurait vraiment pu être traitée dignement que par un très grand poète...Malheureusement, Gabriel Cousin n'est aucunement poète. Le don souverain de l'expression ne lui a pas été accordé.<sup>13</sup>

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12. Bertolt Brecht, Der Neinsager, 1930.

13. Gabriel Marcel, Les Nouvelles Littéraires, 4-7-1963.

Marcel's harsh judgment was no doubt clouded by the fact that the production of Dasté's which he saw in Paris took place in the clearly unsuitable surroundings of the Hôtel Sully. His further remarks that the play would have been better received at the Festival d'Aubervilliers than at the Festival du Marais bear out this qualification.

The production of Le Drame du Fukuryu-Maru by the Royal Netherlands Theatre (K.N.S.) in Antwerp the following January was by Walter Tillemans, working in conjunction with Cousin himself on a slightly adapted version. It elicited greater acclaim than the French production, and critics spoke of its "valeur exceptionnelle" as "une oeuvre réaliste, dure, hautement humaine" and one which the public had accepted warmly:

Il y a dans la pièce de Cousin une force de persuasion énorme. Au tomber du rideau, la salle entière se leva pour donner une ovation chaleureuse et méritée aux interprètes et collaborateurs de la pièce.<sup>14</sup>

That same winter, Jean Dasté was on tour with the play. It had an enthusiastic reception in Provence where one critic reported: "J'ai rarement assisté à un spectacle aussi prenant, aussi convaincant, aussi poignant"<sup>15</sup>, and in Champagne where another critic wrote: "La soirée a été saluée d'une douzaine de rappels parfaitement mérités".<sup>16</sup>

Later in Luxembourg, one critic appreciated the rhythm of the language of the play, which united the everyday and the poetic. The same year, 1964, Le Drame du Fukuryu-Maru was presented in Switzerland and the German director Piscator had plans for staging it in Berlin in 1965. Unfortunately, these plans were abandoned soon afterwards.

The Belgian première at the Théâtre Royal du Parc on 7th. December 1964 received mixed notices in the press. In contrast to the original Dasté production in Saint Etienne at the

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14. Volksgazet, Stockholm, 17-1-1964.

15. Le Provençal, 9-2-1964.

16. L'Union, 18-3-1964.

Festival des Places Publiques, at which forty-five minutes had been cut from the text, the full version was staged for this production by Deryk Mendel, with décor by Michel Raffaelli. Robert Abirached made the interesting comment (Le Nouvel Observateur, 5 décembre 1964) that Vilar's adaptation of the Kipphardt play, Le Dossier Oppenheimer, was playing at the same time in Paris at the Théâtre de l'Athénée. The latter is more of a théâtre-document than Cousin's piece, although both are based on historical facts. Abirached describes Le Drame du Fukuryu-Maru as an oratorio dramatique: it had been lent this tone by the producer, Mendel, a one-time choreographer and dancer with Sadlers Wells and the Ballet des Champs-Élysées.

Both Abirached and André Paris found longueurs in the play which destroyed its effect upon the audience:

La belle image d'un 'soleil' insolite se levant  
à l'ouest est si souvent répétée qu'elle a l'air  
d'une antienne et qu'elle en perd toute efficacité. 17

This same critic was equally unmoved by the language of the play, a fact he attributed to poor acting and a hesitant production which he refers to as having "un ton monocorde et distancié qui confine parfois à la litanie". He was harsher still in talking of the overall effect of the play on the audience who, he thought, would find little dramatic quality or depth in Le Drame du Fukuryu-Maru:

Il y a trop de fausse poésie, de naïveté  
involontaire, de phrases banales, de situations  
mal exploitées pour que l'intérêt ne s'émousse  
pas tôt ou tard. 18

Failure on the part of the producer, Mendel, was also blamed for the disappointment felt by another critic, R.P.:

Malgré d'incontestables trouvailles de mise  
en scène, Deryk Mendel n'est pas parvenu à  
éviter que ne soient ridicules les interventions  
du vieux Japonais qui s'accroche à un passé révolu,  
mélodramatiques les réactions des parents qui

17. André Paris, Le Soir, Brussels, 9-12-1964.

18. *ibid.*

perdent leur dernier fils, puérils les appels à la conscience universelle en faveur de la paix.<sup>19</sup>

He felt too that Cousin was in the difficult position of a Westerner portraying an Eastern culture as the background to the play: the consequence is that, far from being a true Noh play or similar, Le Drame du Fukuryu-Maru falls into the trap of becoming "une sorte de pastiche, où - à de rares séquences près - tout nous paraît faux, laborieux, fabriqué."<sup>20</sup>

Jacques Lemarchand's review of the Brussels production is more sympathetic than that of many other critics:

Ce qui m'a le plus touché dans le drame de Cousin - et touché autant que je l'avais été à sa lecture - c'est sa simplicité: une sorte de naïveté populaire et qui ne doit rien à l'imitation de ce genre entre tous redoutable: la complainte. Il y a dans ce gémissement japonais, né du coeur d'un poète grenoblois, une authenticité qui lui donne une résonance universelle.<sup>21</sup>

Yet he too recognises the same problems facing Cousin that the critic, 'R.P.', had mentioned:

Le danger de ces minutieuses japonaiseries est qu'elles éloignent ce Drame ... de nous. Le public belge, ou français, risque de se dire qu'après tout le Japon est fort loin. Or il est tout proche, et c'est bien ce qu'a voulu dire Gabriel Cousin.<sup>22</sup>

The differences apparent in the comments of these two critics illustrate very clearly the inherent dangers of Cousin's plays in general, namely that they are likely to arouse less genuine sympathy for the causes they espouse than they would, had those causes been closer to the experience of the average Frenchman. Lemarchand is right when he proclaims

19. R.P., La Dernière Heure, Brussels, 9-12-1964.

20. *ibid.*

21. Jacques Lemarchand, Le Figaro Littéraire, 31-12-1964.

22. *ibid.*



the universality of the message of Le Drame du Fukuryu-Maru; it is Gabriel Cousin's conscience which dictates the content of his plays and his conscience operates according to his own personal experience. If that experience is gained from reading of the problems of other countries, then we cannot condemn him for situating his works in those countries. The effects of the H-Bomb were most acutely and lastingly felt in Japan, just as the racial problem may be most keenly experienced in the Southern States of America, yet this does not render France, nor the French, immune from these issues. Le Drame du Fukuryu-Maru and L'Opéra Noir were the natural products of Cousin's encounter with such problems. It is essential, therefore, that the universality of the play's appeal and its inherent didacticism should be assessed before any reference to the details of its production. Cousin himself wrote of Le Drame du Fukuryu-Maru:

Je souhaite apporter par cette oeuvre une modeste contribution à la nouvelle manière de penser que demandait Einstein, indispensable pour que les hommes se comprennent mieux et vivent en paix.<sup>23</sup>

The critic Pierre Philibert, aware of the import of the play, called it "un drame qui n'est ni celui d'une classe, d'une société, d'un peuple, mais le drame de l'humanité entière". He found certain imperfections in the work:

Le ton dont [Gabriel Cousin] use ne convient pas toujours aux exigences de la scène; le rythme semble parfois se perdre; le style - ses ruptures - confère au drame un certain aspect statique accentué encore par la pratique trop usitée de réflexions en marge d'un véritable dialogue. Enfin, le chœur final, d'une intense et très réelle poésie, se devrait - mais n'est-ce pas là une sorte d'incident imputable à la seule première? - de passer la rampe avec plus de facilité.<sup>24</sup>

Despite these reservations, this critic thought the work "un travail collectif de haute portée" and that on stage "il demeure un grand spectacle".

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23. Quoted by Pierre Philibert, Le Drame du Dragon Chanceux, Lettres Françaises, 20-26 juin 1963.

24. *ibid.*

Marcel Houde, a colleague of Cousin's at the Lycée Technique Vaucanson in Grenoble, an amateur actor, and an academic familiar with the work of Bertolt Brecht, saw in the play's complex themes and structure a real originality of writing, a humanity of feeling, and a fascinating challenge for any theatre producer. Three years before Dasté's production of Le Drame du Fukuryu-Maru, Houde outlined his thoughts on the play's potential strengths. His evaluation represents a fine understanding of Gabriel Cousin's work in general.

On pourrait peut-être voir dans "Le Drame du Fukuryu-Maru" une intention didactique, et sans doute cette construction qui suit la forme thèse-antithèse-synthèse pourrait confirmer cette appréhension. A vrai dire, je pense que si G.Cousin a eu une intention, s'il y a une leçon à tirer de la pièce, elle n'apparaîtra qu'à la méditation. Mais la représentation nous donnera surtout un spectacle touchant (je veux dire: qui touche d'abord les sens) propre à nous faire réfléchir sans doute, mais capable d'abord de nous captiver. Car ce sera un spectacle complet par la poésie, la musique, l'emploi des masques, la rigueur plastique des costumes et des décors, bien que l'auteur veuille éviter trop de richesse ou trop de surcharge qui risquent de détourner notre attention de l'histoire elle-même.<sup>25</sup>

Cousin would undoubtedly agree with this assessment. For the producer of Le Drame du Fukuryu-Maru, the essential aim is that of balance - the visual variety within the play's structure must not be allowed to dominate its serious verbal content; the symbolic elements must not overshadow what is fundamentally a human tragedy; the Japanese context of the action must not detract from the universal import of the play's message: that humanity must be open to new ideas if it is to survive the demands made of it by new military, social, or political forces.

(d) Cancer sur la Terre

The basic document for Cancer sur la Terre, which Cousin subtitled Le Livre Vivant de la Faim, consists of a collection of texts on the theme of famine, duplicated and loosely bound in a soft-cover edition in 1965 by the Centre Régional de

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25. Marcel Houde, Notes pour une mise en scène du "Drame du Fukuryu-Maru" de Gabriel Cousin, 1960, unpublished notes in my possession.

Documentation Pédagogique de Grenoble. The arrangement of the texts was made by Pierre Frat and Jacques Gimel and it covers forty-six pages. For the purposes of presentation, there exist also supplementary notes for producers, a series of sixty photographic slides, one record of some of the texts by T.N.P. actors, and other teaching and technical guides.

This montage-spectacle was conceived initially for use by youth organisations and was first performed on November 15th. 1965 at the Palais de l'UNESCO, and subsequently on December 29th. 1965 at the Théâtre Récamier in Paris for the Ligue de l'Enseignement.

[Ce montage-spectacle] tente - par l'alternance de poèmes, de diapositives, de textes, de montage cinéma, de jeux dramatiques et de musique - de cerner le public par la vue, l'ouïe, la raison: non dans un but esthétique, mais comme un moyen didactique, afin de le sensibiliser aux problèmes de la faim et du sous-développement dans le monde. Il se propose de montrer qu'un livre vivant à base audio-visuelle et d'art dramatique, composé sur un thème difficile et austère, peut aussi constituer un spectacle d'une grande tenue artistique.<sup>1</sup>

This creation of Cousin's, arising out of his knowledge and experience as a teacher as well as from his preoccupations as a dramatist, has been performed in many regions of France by school and youth groups and by drama groups in the Maisons des Jeunes et de la Culture. A Grenoble University theatre group presented it in Paris and at the International Student Drama Festival in Nancy in 1967, and took it later to Switzerland.

In school productions, Cancer sur la Terre may be used in a passive form, by the simple audio-visual technique of listening to the recording of the texts while watching the slides. However, the active form of presentation is highly recommended to group leaders who prefer to present the material in a more dramatic fashion. A stage presentation has the advantage of encouraging other groups within a youth club

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1. Gabriel Cousin, Présentation du document "Cancer sur la Terre" (unpublished).

to supplement the material provided by their own initiative: by additional photographs, music, exhibitions, son et lumière shows, or by extension into project and discussion groups. This document therefore provides excellent opportunities for personal research and creativity - thus resulting in the sort of cooperation and collaboration which Cousin himself puts into operation during the production of his plays. The degree of originality and effort displayed by groups in such projects clearly will reflect the power of didacticism in the document itself.

In his notes for a stage production of Cancer sur la Terre, Cousin stresses the importance of the delivery of the texts: the reader must be self-effacing and allow the dramatic intensity to come from the text itself. At the same time, care must be taken not to produce a monotonous effect upon the listener; good articulation and individual sensitivity towards the subject-matter will bring out the fundamental message of the theme. To intensify the effect of the presentation, spotlights should be used on each reader in turn and the variety of effects to be thus achieved by different positioning of the readers will be determined by the number of possibilities available in given circumstances. The positions adopted by the readers, for example, may depend on where the screen is placed, while the narrator will remain apart from the other readers, even standing among or behind the spectators. These arrangements will draw attention to each particular text and retain the interest of the audience. In addition, music may be interspersed with the readings; this should be exclusively music from countries of the Third World such as Brazil, India, Algeria, Chile, or Africa, and should evoke the suffering and hardship of life in those countries. It may be played softly as background music to the readings or, between the readings, increased or decreased in volume to sustain the dramatic appeal of the whole performance. Similarly, picture projections may be varied to create and sustain interest: alternate use of black and white or colour pictures, a 'zoom' effect if the projector permits this, superimposition, fading in and fading out effects.

The short three-scene playlet lasting half an hour called Le Cycle du Crabe - later known as La Descente sur Recife - is placed in the penultimate position in the document. Cousin indicates that the production of the playlet must not be realistic, otherwise it will disturb the balance and effect of the whole; instead, continued use must be made of projections and music to illustrate mood, while the script is read or spoken flatly and with little gesture or body movement. The essential point is to retain the rhythm of the previous readings; upon this rhythm depends the success of the whole performance. Finally, Cousin recommends that, after the performance, the audience be guided towards a debate on the subject of famine.

It has been constructive and necessary to dwell on Cousin's notes and recommendations for Cancer sur la Terre for a number of reasons. First, it gives us insight into how he himself visualises the production of his material - the global effect created by the multiplicity of media used - and how he wishes to convey this visualisation to others. Secondly, it shows the degree to which Cousin as a teacher and animateur collates the material available from various sources and integrates his own creations with that material to form a whole. Thirdly, it reveals his priorities as a dramatist: the insistence upon finding a rhythm for the delivery of speeches and textual readings; the need to involve the audience as fully as possible in the activity on stage and in the auditorium, and to stimulate an emotional response to the material presented; the emphasis on a stripping-away of inessentials by the actors in order to bring out the force of the texts themselves. In short, the guidelines provided by Cousin for a performance of this work clearly illustrate his theory of the theatre, and may stand as a statement of his intentions vis-à-vis the text in relation to its didactic elements and scenic possibilities.

In order to situate the problem of famine in a contemporary context, Cousin recommends that the first reading

be from a current news item on the topic. The first text of Cancer sur la Terre strengthens the impression of actuality by retelling the story of Tom Thumb and adding the following statement:

Ainsi dans notre fond commun de légende même, la faim est présente. Il n'y a pas si longtemps qu'on abandonnait les enfants chez nous, les parents ne pouvant plus les nourrir. Quand nous entendons le mot FAIM, ne pensons pas à un problème lointain, exotique, situé dans des pays inaccessibles. La faim est à notre porte. Elle frappe. (page 1)

Cousin's opinion of the Western world is a cynical one and it is through cynicism that he shows the West its indifference towards the Third World. By contrasting the advanced Western world with the underdeveloped Third World, he hints at the political immorality of the richer nations:

Aujourd'hui l'Occident s'amuse.  
Le ventre plein, on danse poussif.  
On boit, on est bien jusqu'au suicide.  
On se tient par les mains entre Occidentaux sur-  
développés. (p.2)

This style is sustained in an appeal to the audience's conscience:

Le développement de la technique nous frappe d'une aveuglante lumière. Allons-nous fermer les yeux et nous endormir dans le ronron de nos réfrigérateurs, de nos voitures, de nos téléviseurs, de nos couvertures chauffantes? (p.4)

There follows a catalogue of famine dating from the time of Ancient Egypt to twentieth-century India, then an account of an eleventh century famine. Michelet's story of his youth introduces the concept of indignity associated with enforced hunger:

Je calculais alors sur ma route ce que je pourrais bien acheter pour tromper ma faim. Le plus sage eût été d'entrer chez le boulanger; mais comment trahir ma pauvreté en mangeant mon pain devant mes camarades? D'avance je me voyais exposé à leurs rires et j'en frémissais. (p.8)

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2. Gabriel Cousin, Cancer sur la Terre, Centre Régional de Documentation Pédagogique de Grenoble, Mise en page et présentation de Pierre Frat et Jacques Gimel, 1965.

Cousin suggests that this episode, recounting the subsequent sufferings of Michelet at school, is suitable for treatment by ombres chinoises; it would undoubtedly be attractive to schoolchildren as a piece of mime or drama.

Humiliation due to poverty, and spiritual hunger as the result of physical hunger, were themes developed by Cousin in both Le Voyage de derrière la Montagne and Le Cycle du Crabe. In Cancer sur la Terre, an extract from Josué de Castro's Géopolitique de la Faim indicates the connection between malnutrition and racially stunted peoples such as the Chinese, the Japanese, or the Pygmies. Hunger is therefore seen as the very cause of prejudiced doctrines of racial inferiority and superiority which are frequently based on physical appearance. Josué de Castro makes the analogy between these peoples and the small race of ponies from the Shetland Isles, which also owe their size to mineral deficiency in their grazing lands. Man has thus come to resemble these animals in his degradation - a comparison which recalls the cri de coeur of l'Homme in La Descente sur Recife: "Est-ce que je ressemble à un homme?"

Cousin implicates religion in this account of the degradation of humanity by producing the example of Hinduism, which prevents sacred cows from being slaughtered to feed the healthier members of the herd or, indeed, human beings. For religious reasons, Nehru was unable to introduce revolutionary legislation affecting territorial division with the intention of creating work and improving agricultural efficiency. The dependance on natural factors, such as the monsoon, is outlined in an extract from an Indian novel called The Rice and the Monsoon by Kamala Markandaya.

Exploitation as a product of human insufficiency is detailed in an extract from Camus's Chronique Algérienne:

Il est méprisable de dire que ce peuple [kabyle] s'adapte à tout. Dans l'attachement d'un homme à sa vie, il y a quelque chose de plus fort que toutes les misères du monde. (p.16).

This sentiment finds an echo in the works of Cousin on the theme of hunger; indeed, Camus's La Peste, chronicling the spiritual sickness of a people ravaged by the scourge of plague may also

be equated with Cousin's treatment of similar themes in his theatre. In the bibliography at the end of Cancer sur la Terre, Cousin lists two plays which also date from the period of Camus's early work, that is to say, the immediate prewar years: they are Numance by Cervantès, and Barrault's La Faim, based on a work by Knut Hamsun, both on the theme of famine. These two works, dating from 1937 and 1939 respectively, helped Barrault establish his career. It is interesting to speculate on their importance to Cousin, who was to wait until the postwar years brought a renewal of interest and concern for worldwide social problems, and thus engender his own plays on the subject. To colonialism, another form of exploitation, are attributed the problems of South America: the North-East of Brazil in particular has suffered from an over-production of sugar cane to the exclusion of other products such as fruit and vegetables. The population are thus deprived of the necessary variety of foodstuffs for survival. Cousin also quotes the case of South Africa to illustrate his argument about colonialisaton leading to nutritional poverty.

At this point in the document, Cousin turns to the remedies we may offer to improve the situation for underdeveloped nations. The first of these remedies is education and the conquest of illiteracy. However, all efforts in this direction will be cancelled out if the birth rate is allowed to increase at the rate of the Chinese, for example. The most undernourished peoples of the earth are also the most fertile, a fact recognised by the Romans who called them 'proletarians'. Such a statistic may only be explained by psychological and physiological factors, which act as compensatory mechanisms. It is these mechanisms which Cousin is attempting to represent in Le Cycle du Crabe and the related plays.

Cousin here inserts poems from Chile and Brazil, and the sad, popular Brazilian song of the dying ox which he also uses in the plays:

Et cette chanson et cette danse expriment naïvement  
non la beauté et la noblesse de la bête, mais sa  
faiblesse, sa maigreur, sa misère. (p.23)



This demonstration of Man's mental and emotional dominance over his physical indigence expresses itself through singing, dancing, or procreation; however, the craving for food is not entirely subordinated:

Dans cette région, l'obsession de la faim est telle que les réjouissances, comme le langage, prennent leurs comparaisons poétiques souvent dans des scènes ou des images évoquant les nourritures. Quand une chose est bonne, elle est par exemple 'pain blanc'. Quand une situation est difficile, on dit qu'elle est 'anguille'. (p.24)

These observations lead to a quotation from Edouard Bonnefous's book La Terre et la Faim des Hommes concerning the droughts in Brazil's North-East region, in which he describes the terrible trek of thousands of the population towards the Pacific, such as occurred in most recent memory in 1958. This extract leads on naturally to a sequence of photos of the sertão - the Brazilian North-East - accompanied by a poetic commentary which became the Prologue to Le Cycle du Crabe. The short play, La Descente sur Recife, followed, and then a call to action, an appeal to the fraternal spirit among men:

Devenons les Soldats de la Faim  
 Construisons la nouvelle armée au service des hommes.  
 Uniquement au service de tous les hommes.  
 N'acceptons de revêtir que l'uniforme intérieur,  
 l'uniforme invisible, celui de l'amour fraternel.  
 Déclarons la seule guerre encore à mener contre  
 la plus ancienne, contre la plus cruelle, contre la  
 plus puissante de toutes les dictatures.  
 La Faim. (p.27)

Cancer sur la Terre finishes with a reminder of the depressing colourlessness of life in a village of the Third World, the text of which formed the Prologue to Le Voyage de derrière la Montagne.

The documentation on the theme of hunger in Cancer sur la Terre is completed by a series of texts, extracts from speeches, reports and writings from all countries, some economic facts, and a bibliography of books, both fiction and non-fiction, films and plays on the subject of famine. Cancer sur la Terre is a compelling and comprehensive document which is also an indictment

of the Western world's attitudes to the problem of famine. It is a catalogue of human misery, of political inadequacy and social disaster which, rightly, calls upon the spectator to take action against these failures. It is a social document, but it is also a political one, as is emphasised in the Epilogue:

Pour tous les hommes la solution au problème de la faim passe par la libération des intelligences et par un plan mondial d'organisation et de coopération.<sup>3</sup>

Conscious that the problem of famine in the world is ever-present, and that the dramatist's rôle is to stimulate a reaction to such a problem through a 'prise de conscience' in his audience, Gabriel Cousin stipulates in the carefully documented notes to this 'montage-spectacle' the need for any producer to remain topical in his presentation of the theme:

Il est bon de faire précéder le spectacle-montage d'une prise de parole s'appuyant sur le fait le plus récent et le plus significatif du problème de la faim dans le monde.<sup>4</sup>

Equally important to Cousin is the active participation of his audience in his dramatised thesis on the question of famine - this may be achieved by extending the drama presentation to include a discussion afterwards:

Il est recommandé d'essayer d'amener le public à un débat après - si l'on dispose d'une personne pouvant répondre aux questions d'un problème aussi complexe que le sous-développement et sa conséquence majeure: la faim.<sup>5</sup>

Cancer sur la Terre thus blends the talents of Cousin the dramatist with the enthusiasm of Cousin the educator; in this 'montage-spectacle', the dramatic and the pedagogical elements fuse admirably to form a balanced, instructive, and moving presentation.

3. *ibid.*, inside back cover.

4. Gabriel Cousin, Quelques Notes Pédagogiques sur la présentation scénique du montage de "Cancer sur la Terre" (unpublished)

5. *ibid.*

(e) Le Voyage de derrière la Montagne

When Georges Mounin introduced Cousin to the translated version of the Japanese story Les Chansons de Nayarama by Schichiro Fukazawa<sup>1</sup>, Cousin at once saw the dramatic possibilities of the original Japanese legend; its plot and characters lent themselves excellently to a play on the general theme of famine:

Cependant, je n'ai pas voulu situer l'adaptation au Japon: l'action peut se passer aussi bien dans les Andes qu'au Tibet, en Sicile ou sur les hauts plateaux brésiliens. C'est-à-dire dans une des régions du tiers monde où la faim sévit de façon chronique.<sup>2</sup>

The theme of world famine, and in particular Third World famine, was to preoccupy Cousin for a long period of time. He collected documentary evidence of famine, took note of the developed world's sensitivity towards it over many years, and produced from this documentation a series of writings in various forms, of which Le Voyage de derrière la Montagne was the first to be published in 1964.

This play was written between May and September 1962. Even before its publication, Gabriel Monnet had read the script and wanted to produce it at the Centre Dramatique de Bourges in the 1963-1964 season. It was also due to be performed in Lausanne in March 1964, but both of these projects had to be abandoned because of insufficient preparation. A further complication inherent in the play itself led to production difficulties: the final pilgrimage of Part III required a large, adaptable set in order to create the atmosphere of the length and duration of the march. Few theatres could offer such possibilities and the director's constant worry of having to adapt movement to suit the stage, especially problematical if the play were to be taken on tour, placed constraints on his artistic creativity.

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1. Schichiro Fukazawa, Les Chansons de Nayarama, traduites par Bernard Franck, Gallimard, 1959.
  2. Programme for Le Voyage de derrière la Montagne at the Jeux Dramatiques d'Arras, June 1966.

The première took place on June 14th. 1966 at the Jeux Dramatiques d'Arras. The production, by Françoise Lepeuve, was put on outdoors at the Palais Saint-Vaast and it subsequently received the Prix du Jury in the Concours des Jeunes Compagnies. Although this was the first theatre performance, there had been a radio production of the play in September 1965 on Inter-Variétés by the Comédie des Alpes.

The setting for the story is not specified by Cousin, and although the characters bear Japanese names, the village may be situated, as Cousin indicates, anywhere in the Third World where famine reigns. Part I of the play illustrates the poverty in the village, the solitude and anguish of its inhabitants, and the overall silence caused by the reigning famine. An old grandmother, O Rin, reflects on her past life and seeks a new wife for her widowed son Tappéi. News arrives of a suitable girl called Tamayan who is coming from a neighbouring village. Meanwhile, Tappéi is angry at his son Keisakichi for eating some food which had been offered to the local god at his shrine; Keisakichi has also been seen at the Fête de la Montagne de derrière with a young girl called Fumiko, who is obviously pregnant. Tamayan arrives at the village during the Fête. Tappéi worries about where food for his family will come from, especially if O Rin, an expert in finding mushrooms and catching fish, leaves on the pilgrimage to the Mountain traditionally taken by the village old folk to relieve the younger generations of the burden of feeding them. Like others of her generation, O Rin will voluntarily die of starvation to protect her remaining family; to allay any suspicions that she still eats food, she breaks off her teeth. In Part II, the family is anxious about how to feed the expected new member of the family - Keisakichi and Fumiko's baby. The theft of potatoes and peas by a villager has terrible consequences. Keisakichi persists in trying to encourage O Rin to leave on the next pilgrimage to the mountain, and, during the ceremony the night before the departure, the rules of conduct for the pilgrimage are spelled out by Térugan, the oldest villager to take part. O Rin shows

Tamayan how to find food for the family and now feels ready to leave. Part III portrays the journey that O Rin makes to the mountain on Tappéi's back. They pass many skeletons of the old who have previously undertaken the pilgrimage. With the pretext of waiting for the god, O Rin stops and, huddling on the mountainside, allows herself to die. Whereas Tappéi returns to the village below and its customs, Keisakichi, less resigned to a fate such as that of his grandmother, dreams of a better life and hopes one day to go to the other side of the mountain where famine is unknown and men are said to have discovered oil and fly in planes.

Two major problems confronted Cousin in adapting the original Japanese novel of Fukazawa to the stage: first, the difficulty of transposing the novel form to an acceptable dramatic form while preserving the flavour of the original, and second, the question of universalising the adapted work to make it applicable to any country of the 'undeveloped' world where famine dominated people's lives. Josué de Castro, whose book on the world problem of famine<sup>3</sup> was seminal to this and subsequent plays of Cousin, says in his Préface to the Gallimard edition of Le Voyage de Derrière la Montagne:

Utilisant avec virtuosité les formules techniques du théâtre classique japonais, de type récitatif, déjà employées par W.B. Yeats, se servant aussi des expériences récentes de l'expressionnisme germanique, telles que Brecht les a menées à bien, l'adaptateur a réussi, par un véritable tour de force, à recréer sur le plan dramatique l'angoissant roman de Fukazawa, de construction plus musicale que théâtrale. Cousin, en transposant sur la scène toute la 'poésie du roman' de l'oeuvre originale, a su imprégner son travail de cette intense 'poésie du théâtre' dont nous parlait souvent Cocteau.<sup>4</sup>

Josué de Castro considers that Cousin, by his successful modernisation of the theme of famine, has also brought to the play a certain degree of political commitment and social

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3. Josué de Castro, Géopolitique de la Faim, Editions Ouvrières, 1952.

4. Josué de Castro, Préface, in Cousin, Théâtre II, Gallimard, 1964.

criticism. Speaking of Cousin's translation of the original oriental symbolism into a more universally accessible play touching an audience's sensibilities about the world hunger problem, he says:

La réalité de la faim devient ainsi transparente, plus facile à pénétrer, et à être comprise dans son contexte social, comme dans ce qu'il y a de tragédie humaine. Ainsi, Cousin a donné à l'oeuvre poétique de Fukazawa, composée d'allégories philosophiques et de subtilités mystiques, un nouveau sens: celui d'une vraie critique sociale. C'est par cet aspect engagé dans l'aventure du monde, dans le destin de l'homme moderne, que cette pièce me semble avoir un rôle important à jouer dans la formation d'une nouvelle conscience politique mondiale, si impérieusement nécessaire dans cette phase de mutation de l'histoire de l'homme.<sup>4</sup>

Josué de Castro's interpretation, or expectation, of the work as a quasi-political tract is, however, a little too idealistic. There is not the overt didacticism here that exists in the later play Le Cycle du Crabe which deals with the same theme and which was also inspired by a work of de Castro, Des Hommes et des Crabes. The voice of change is that of Keisakichi, yet he appears often only as a truculent adolescent, aggressively anti-religious and anti-paternal. It is not until the last scene of the play that he expresses his hopes with any degree of conviction:

Moi, je n'irai pas à la Montagne de derrière!  
J'irai vers les autres pays! Là-bas, les hommes  
vivent nuit et jour. Là-bas, la nourriture coule  
dans leurs veines!

Yet this surely does not constitute any sort of political or social answer to the problems facing the villagers. They require a change of mood, they need a new leader who will teach them how to overcome their dilemma of insufficient food-supplies for a population constantly threatening to expand; above all, they must produce a positive political solution to extricate them from their own past with its stultifying traditions. Keisakichi cannot fulfil this function.

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4. Josué de Castro, Préface, in Cousin, Théâtre II, Gallimard, 1964.

In this sense, this is not a political play in the way that Le Cycle du Crabe is: Keisakichi is not João, Keisakichi's revolt is selfish and bears no relation to Che's revolutionary ideals.

Cousin points out that he does not wish to alter the meaning that Fukazawa lends to his story:

Il s'agit...d'une morale de soumission, et non de révolte contre certaines conditions de vie matérielle que l'homme n'a pu encore dominer dans ces régions, mais je n'ai pas voulu - par respect pour la pensée de Schichiro Fukazawa - changer le sens de cette histoire.<sup>5</sup>

It is in this statement that we can discover Cousin's real attraction to the subject of the play: namely, the willingness of the elderly to accept death in order to relieve suffering. Voluntary euthanasia is a phenomenon close to Cousin's sympathies, one on which he has elaborated on more than one occasion. Among his thoughts on the subject, written for an American translation of Le Voyage de derrière la Montagne by Gretchen R. Besser in 1972, Cousin stated:

This story may serve as a warning to us, Americans and French alike, at a time when we seem to be losing our motives for living - particularly, our youth - and seeking escape through drugs or suicide from a life to which we no longer feel committed. I am reminded of a recent news item that appeared in the Paris papers, reporting the suicide of an eminent scholar, director of the Pasteur Institute. Many years before, he had drawn up a will in which he announced his intention of taking his life when he felt his mind beginning to slip. It was his wish to be the master of his own death. At the age of 87, he jumped out of a window. What exemplary idealism: refusing to accept degradation, but retaining control of his fate and dying by a deliberate act of will! Dying out of a powerful thrust of self-integrity! What an admirable act! For us Westerners, who seem to have forgotten the quality and the value of life, what an example we find in [this anecdote].<sup>6</sup>

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5. G.Cousin, Théâtre II, p.3.

6. G.Cousin, quoted in Bettina Knapp, The Contemporary French Theater, Avon Books, New York, 1973.

This episode postdates the publication of Le Voyage de derrière la Montagne; nevertheless, it supports Cousin's philosophy admirably. Henri de Montherlant's suicide in 1974 served to strengthen this philosophy and Cousin himself has said:

Des gestes comme ceux de ces vieillards dans cette pièce, ou comme ce professeur ou comme Montherlant me semblent très importants. Personnellement, c'est ce que je souhaite faire. Mais cela, peut-être que je le traiterai, ce problème: c'est un problème qui me préoccupe.<sup>7</sup>

There is no doubt in Cousin's mind that such a philosophy represents a superior form of morality - the conquest of the body and the emotions by the intellect. It is the ultimate altruistic act:

Ce Voyage de derrière la Montagne est aussi la représentation, l'aboutissement d'une morale en elle-même supérieure: la maîtrise pour chaque vieillard dans la décision de sa propre mort, dans le désintéressement le plus absolu: le don de son restant d'existence en faveur des autres vies.<sup>8</sup>

The attention Cousin gives to the plight of the elderly in this play, to their responsibilities, and to their exploitation by the young, does not detract from the secondary theme of the play: that of the opposition between the old and the new customs of a society. This, a general underlying theme of Cousin's work, takes second place here to the previously mentioned theme of voluntary euthanasia; yet throughout the play there are fears for the future generations of villagers - their very survival is in doubt and their usefulness in society is in jeopardy unless they can learn from their elders. However, as the teachings of the latter are themselves in doubt, the question arises in the spectators' minds as to whether the traditions of the village are worth continuing. The omnipresence of the terrible conditions of living around them provokes ill-feeling between

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7. G.Cousin, Interview avec David Jeffery, 30-7-1974.

8. Théâtre II, p.3.



generations and exacerbates purely family quarrels until these become more universal: the imminent birth of a child is sufficient to produce anxiety among all those affected; Iki Mo meets a horrifying death at the hands of his incensed son; O Rin, conscious of the mockery and anger she might arouse for having preserved her teeth intact, suffers dreadfully when she sets about knocking them out of her mouth.

The hunger which the villagers endure aggravates their attitude towards those who try to take advantage of others. Thus, the theft of some potatoes and peas results in the immediate distribution of the spoils of the theft among those who capture the thief, and the thief and his family leave the village in disgrace. This sharpening of the sensibilities of poor and degraded human beings is the one feature of the play to bring their suffering into perspective: it is only through such violent reactions that these people can express their feelings and create a rough form of justice within their community, by which they may be able to continue living. This is where the political message of the play lies: the harsh living conditions which prevail in the community lead directly to a rough and instant form of justice; to obviate the latter, we must first eliminate the former. The self-inflicted ostracism of the potato-thief's family is as natural in this play as was the lynching of black people in l'Opéra Noir; society inflicts wounds on its own members in proportion to its physical well-being. That well-being may be expressed in purely physical terms, such as in the quantity of food supplies it possesses, or in spiritual terms, as in the provision of justice. Thus the famine endured by the villagers is both physical and spiritual, as Cousin readily recognised:

Personnellement, au travers de ce thème de la faim physique, je pense que l'on peut aussi trouver l'image symbolique de faims spirituelles.<sup>9</sup>

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9. *ibid.*, p.2.

Keisakichei's professed desire to seek a new world beyond the mountain indicates both a will to break out of the cycle of endemic famine suffered by his people, and a search for a new morality beyond the parochial preoccupation with the provision and preservation of food supplies culminating in the annual bean-feast of the "Fête de la Montagne de derrière". Unlike his father Tappéi, he shows a resolution spurred on by bitterness, yet his motives are too selfish to have any effect on the rest of the community.

If Keisakichi's idealism is not matched by that of other villagers, it is because they lack the mental and moral courage to follow his example. Cousin rightly associates physical famine with spiritual hunger; he also links their opposites: with physical well-being come aspirations and mental discipline - the idealism shown, though egoistically, by Keisakichi.

Nul doute que cette faim physique connue de tous les hommes, n'ait aussi son équivalence dans une faim des nourritures morales, mentales ou psychologiques, se traduisant pour certains par l'aspiration à l'art, à la culture; pour d'autres, vers des idéaux sociaux ou religieux; pour d'autres encore, par la recherche d'un style de vie, que ce soit un ordre monastique, un ordre sportif, ou bien des disciplines artistiques ou scientifiques; pour certains enfin, vers des conquêtes aventureuses, comme les grands navigateurs océaniques d'hier et les cosmonautes d'aujourd'hui.<sup>10</sup>

Le Voyage de derrière la Montagne contains none of these attributes: it is a play of negatives - against a background of endemic famine, characters without aspirations follow blindly the traditions of their ancestors until death is forced upon them by a rising generation in search of food, constantly in limited supply. Their morality is one of submission to their fate, the manner of their dying dictated by the greed and fight for survival of their fellow villagers. There are striking parallels here with some of Brecht's early plays: the use of Eastern legends as the basis of the story, the

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10. *ibid.*, p.3.

subservience of a people to outmoded doctrine, the acquiescence of members of a community to their own death, the symbolic journey across mountains to a promised land. Brecht's Der Jasager and Der Neinsager contain many of these elements; submission to one's death is tantamount to accepting the doctrinal values of the majority and the test of faith is conducted on a narrow mountain ridge from which the cowardly are hurled into the abyss.

Cousin's Notes sur la construction et la mise en scène in the Gallimard edition of the play clarify the questions of the presentation of the story on stage, the use of stylised acting techniques to portray the 'consciences' of the characters, and the general tempo of the piece. The presentation is to be slow, sober, and continuous:

[Cet ouvrage] a été conçu comme une sorte de récit dramatique (en trois parties et cinquante-cinq séquences). D'où aucune rupture, aucun arrêt, pas de changement de décors (sauf pour le voyage-pèlerinage dans la montagne). L'enchaînement se trouve réalisé par le récitant et la musique.<sup>11</sup>

In order to avoid interrupting the flow of the play and in order to add a dimension to the characters themselves, Cousin suggests that they should speak their own 'consciences' while remaining still on stage or by slowing down their gestures; as with other techniques suggested by the author-for portraying the passing seasons or the progress of the pilgrimage, for example - , great store is set by lighting, movable scenery, cinema techniques, simple costumes with possibilities for adaptation and also rudimentary music to symbolise the passage of time.

Included in the Gallimard edition are a number of extracts from texts dealing with the subject of famine. Cousin had incorporated these, together with many others from various sources, in his 'Livre vivant de la Faim', which he entitled Cancer sur la Terre. This 'montage-spectacle' was created for

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11. *ibid.*, p.116.

the Mouvements de Jeunesse which presented it in November 1965 at the Palais de l'UNESCO and also the following month at the Théâtre Récamier in Paris. To any performance of Le Voyage de derrière la Montagne may be added this material from Cancer sur la Terre which comprises texts, film slides, music and recordings by actors of the Théâtre National Populaire.

The Prologue to the play proper, spoken by the Récitant, stresses the monotony of life in a community struck by famine: the regularity of only natural sounds, the silence of existence, the absence of smells normally accompanying cooking, the exhaustion and isolation experienced by every individual.

The general picture gives way to the specific: O Rin looks back on her seventy years of life with a deep sense of regret and sadness; her one consolation is that her prospective new daughter-in-law has no children to feed: "Je pense que c'est une bénédiction". The plight of this village is clearly not an isolated case: the man from the neighbouring village, although first refusing the food offered to him, voraciously consumes the rice ball O Rin hands him later. The very act of providing another wife for Tappéi at once relieves the pressure of finding food on one village, while aggravating the same problem in the other.

Tappéi himself is "distrain" and shows a "manque d'entrain pour quoi que ce soit" - however, this is due less to the loss of his first wife than to his anxiety about his mother's imminent departure from the village on the pilgrimage to her last resting-place on the Mountain.

The prime importance of food to the community and the central position of rice in their diet leads to the personification of the life-giving grains as "Messire le Muguet blanc". O Rin's conscience is troubled by her fine teeth which allow her to chew anything: "Pour ce qui est de manger, je suis vraiment imbattable et je peux dévorer n'importe quoi"; but the Récitant answers: "Et dans ce village c'est une chose qui fait honte". Even Keisakichi

mocks his grandmother by singing a satirical song about her teeth. Although this arouses Tappéi's anger, Keisakichi has clearly abandoned all hope of persuading his father that their way of life is based too firmly on superstition and that a better life awaits those on the other side of the mountain:

Keisakichi: Je lui ai dit au Père: là-bas, de l'autre côté de la montagne, ce n'est pas le dieu! C'est un autre pays d'hommes! Et ils ont des bêtes de fer qui travaillent pour eux.

Un garçon: Qu'est-ce qu'il a dit ton père?

Keisakichi: Il s'est foutu dans une colère!..Pourtant je sais qu'il y a d'autres pays!

Un garçon: Mais tu les a jamais vus!

Keisakichi: Non, pas encore! Mais j'irai! Je ne vais pas rester ici à crever!

The intensity of Keisakichi's revolt is only matched by its diversity - he attacks superstition wherever it occurs, even among his own family; he attacks the godhead by stealing the offerings placed on the tree-stump altar; he is a demythologising influence among the 'bande des jeunes du village' - yet appears to have little effect upon them as a group. On the contrary, he can make little headway against the ingrained superstitions of his own generation who fear his revolt and its consequences: Garçon: "Tu nous fais peur, Keisakichi!". The punishment meted out to such revolutionaries is fearful - privation of food for oneself, while being forced to watch others eat.

There is a sense of impending climax to the story as the various elements begin to fuse at the Fête du Village: it is O Rin's last Fête before her pilgrimage and she is looking forward to the arrival of her new daughter-in-law, Tamayan; Keisakichi is angry that there will be another mouth to feed; at the same time, it becomes apparent that he is soon to marry Fumiko who is expecting his baby. Thus the conjunction of the celebratory Fête and the anxiety about the impending new members of the family bring the play to a climax at the end of Part I. Keisakichi is chastised by his father and sent away from home for daring to marry before the traditional age of twenty, and for bringing opprobrium on

the family by producing a great-grandchild. Here the ignominy attached to childbirth is not related to the problem of feeding thus caused, but to the concept that such procreation indicates the presence of loose women in the family. A great-grandchild thus represents a double transgression of morality. In addition to these problems, O Rin feels it her duty to destroy her magnificent teeth; as her mouth bleeds and the villagers are frightened away, her conscience is salved: "Je suis gracieuse maintenant! Je peux montrer ma bouche!..Je suis une vraie vieille, maintenant!" Ironically, the more she disfigures herself, the greater the praise she knows she will receive.

Keisakichi is less offensive towards O Rin at the beginning of Part II of the play as he becomes aware of the incompetence of Fumiko, who appears unable to light a fire and incapable of looking after their baby. The family are extremely tolerant towards her, even when she eats as much as three people. Consciences are troubled by her greed, however, and also by the imminent loss of O Rin from the family - custom demands that O Rin cannot leave until Tappéi is ready to take her.

The confiscation of the property of the potato thief causes a further rift in the family (Conscience de Tappéi: "C'est mon fils, et je m'en méfie, pire qu'un étranger") the event itself is sufficient to provoke a clash of interests: "Aujourd'hui chacun songe. C'est que le vol est un événement! C'est aussi que la confiscation de la nourriture est une grande affaire! Et cette lutte éperdue est imprimée dans les nerfs de chacun!" Keisakichi's cunning is revealed in his dishonesty and disloyalty to his family: he soaks peas to avoid cracking them in his teeth and showing others that he is eating; twice he says to the others: "Imbéciles que vous êtes". Despite his aggressive intolerance of others, Keisakichi is the only character in the play who speaks his mind openly and it becomes increasingly apparent that his truculence may be able to stimulate a desire for change in the community. Yet the opposition is daunting: it is the whole

inherited, sober, and timorous ethos of a community spiritually and physically starved and starving to death. The pervading silence and immobility which such suffering brings is only broken by the impulsive and instinctive retaliatory action taken upon food thieves such as the members of the family of La Maison-qui-pleut.

The audacious attempts by Keisakichi to change the order of things is counterbalanced by Tamayan's gentle nature and her acceptance of the status quo. To avoid the ignominy of the birth of Fumiko's child, she offers to hide the baby; Keisakichi's proposal is to hurl the baby into a ravine. Similarly, Tappéi's mistrust of his son's motives in encouraging O Rin to make the journey to the mountain the next year is offset by O Rin's own readiness to leave. Her 'conscience' tells her that she may be one of the last to endure such self-sacrifice - society may indeed be changing. In this respect, O Rin prophesies the future. In a biblical phrase reminiscent of the promise of the Messiah, she says: "Un jour..un plus hardi viendra nous montrer le chemin pour aller vers ces pays de lumière et d'abondance! Mais je suis trop vieille! Je dois faire comme les autres ont fait avant nous!"

The ceremony performed prior to the departure to the mountain is marked by rigorously traditional form and solemnity; the journey itself is governed by a set of rules for the participants which are outlined by Térugan, the village elder. Even among the old, there are recalcitrant elements: Iki Mo escapes from his son who has insisted on his father's going on the journey. Unlike O Rin, Iki Mo is not spiritually at ease: "C'est que je ne suis pas sûr du dieu!". Cousin thus accentuates O Rin's good grace - not only does she comply with tradition for tradition's sake, but she is fully conscious that she is serving the next generation's needs by her departure. Her final act symbolising this service to others is to give Tamayan instructions about where to find mushrooms and fish to feed the family. Tappéi's 'conscience' shows his awareness of O Rin's perception and understanding of her mission: "Ma mère regarde partout. Elle ne me quitte pas seulement. Elle quitte sa vie."

The third part of the play, the journey itself, is brief and predictable, but it is nonetheless moving. It is performed in almost complete silence, the movements of O Rin and Tappéi being described by the narrator. Dramatic force is lent to the scene by intermittent elements of the grotesque:

De nouveau, il y eut un rocher. Et au pied  
de celui-ci, des ossements blanchis.  
Les deux jambes..et la tête a roulé par terre.  
Seuls les os des côtes restent appuyés contre  
la pierre. Les bras ont glissé loin du corps.  
Le tout était éparpillé d'une façon telle qu'on  
pouvait se demander si quelqu'un ne l'avait pas  
disposé ainsi par plaisanterie.

O Rin's acceptance of her fate, and hence her acceptance of a god, is exemplified by her calm and happy temperament. By contrast, Tappéi shows fear, the doubt of the non-believer: "Il se peut que le dieu ne vienne pas". This apprehension about his mother's fate is soon mitigated, however, when he sees snow falling, just as O Rin had predicted that it would. The snow will not only act as a shroud to the dead body and symbolically purify it, but it will prevent the mountain's carrion crows from devouring the flesh and nesting within the corpse. Unperturbed about breaking the traditional laws of procedure for the journey, Tappéi retraces his steps up the mountain to his mother and speaks to her: "Ce n'est pas pour parler, c'est pour lui annoncer, avec le coeur pur, que sa chance est bonne. Il faut qu'elle sache que je le sais." Tappéi's safe return to the village proves the insignificance of the superstition surrounding the journey. While O Rin's submission to death relieves him of the burden of responsibility and guilt for it, he may well now reflect on the whole tradition of the journey and its symbolic significance to the old, particularly as it arouses many misgivings amongst them - the sight of Iki Mo and his son struggling on the mountainside before the latter hurls his father into the valley must surely cast doubts in Tappéi's mind on the validity of their customs.

Tappéi, happy that the children now know that O Rin will not come back, receives yet another shock on his return to



the village: Keisakichi and Fumiko have appropriated O Rin's possessions. Keisakichi expresses the hope of his generation for change: "Moi, je n'irai pas à la Montagne de derrière! J'irai vers les autres pays! Là-bas, les hommes vivent nuit et jour. Là-bas, la nourriture coule dans leurs veines!", while Tappéi's final doubts on the wisdom of his actions question the very basis of those actions and of all the other customs by which his people have lived for so many generations: "Et si le dieu tardait à venir pour l'emmener dans son pays de lumière et de nourritures?"

The play ends on a note of conflict, therefore; the younger generation criticise the values of the older generation, greed ousts generosity, the spiritual values of every member of society are put into question. Keisakichi is an agent for both social and spiritual change, and O Rin, while representing the social and spiritual values of previous generations, can support and find solace in those values. She contrasts with Keisakichi as altruism contrasts with acquisitiveness; Nicolas Berdiaeff, in his book Destin de l'homme dans le monde actuel, quoted by Cousin in the Gallimard edition of Le Voyage de derrière la Montagne, draws the same distinction:

La faim pour soi est une préoccupation matérielle. La faim pour autrui est une préoccupation spirituelle.<sup>12</sup>

In order to break out of the vicious circle of famine, death, and survival depicted in Fukazawa's story and Cousin's play, the element of selfishness must be introduced to question the spiritual values which are stultifying progress. In Cousin's piece, the gods are not Christian but simply 'les dieux' - embodying any set of ethical or religious values which require reassessment. If selfishness is a necessary social evil to combat the greater religious evil of a fixed system of values which actively cause death, then Cousin is following Marx in advocating the temporary evil of revolution to justify a flourishing and permanent good. However, Cousin has stated:

In Die Reise hinter die Berge zeigt der junge Dorfrüpel, Keizakichi, das Wagnis, nicht mehr den Weg der Resignation zu gehen. Doch ich berücksichtige zugleich, dass im Rahmen der konkreten Dorfbedingungen in der Gestalt der

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12. *ibid.*, p.124.

alten O Rin diese Resignation einen grossen moralischen Wert gewinnt. Sie ist hier die Quelle der Kultur und menschlicher Erhöhung. Man muss diese resignierende Haltung verurteilen, ohne sie jedoch zu übersehen oder sich über sie lustig zu machen.<sup>13</sup>

Any condemnation of the traditional attitudes of the villagers must be checked by a judgment of their value per se in the life of the community. If we contest those values, then it must be with the full realisation that they have their origin in natural circumstances - the lack of local means of survival - and not in any exploitation of man by man.

The mood of Le Voyage de derrière la Montagne corresponds to the depression felt by the community due to these harsh natural circumstances: it is sombre, slow and silent. Hunger brings its own pace to existence. As in Peter Brook's production of Les Iks at the Théâtre des Bouffes du Nord in 1975, and subsequently at the Roundhouse in London in 1976, the villagers scratch out an existence in their struggle for food, take an instant and greedy delight in some unexpected offering to eat, and eke out their life with spontaneous song and almost futile activity while listening to the desperate and superstitious mutterings of a medicine-man. That play, displaying the tenets of Artaud, presents a macabre picture of a doomed race; Cousin's play contains more spirituality, it shows Man's nobility in the face of extreme hardship, but above all it brings a message of hope to those who face a seemingly irreconcilable fate. Both plays deal with actuality: the Ik, according to a realistic report by Colin Turnbull, are still living in Northern Uganda; they are suffering the same torture from drought and famine as many people in the Third World, a torture similar to that delineated in Le Voyage de derrière la Montagne:

Je n'ai pas voulu..que l'on puisse dire: ce n'est qu'une légende. Ces faits se passent encore aujourd'hui: chez certains groupès d'Esquimaux, les vieillards sont laissés à la dérive sur un iceberg, ou emmenés très loin et abandonnés au milieu de la neige..<sup>14</sup>

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13. G.Cousin, interview in Theater der Zeit, Berlin, 1967, Heft 2.  
 14. G.Cousin, quoted in programme for Le Voyage de derrière la Montagne, Jeux Dramatiques d'Arras, 1966.

Both plays also stand as the testimony of peoples in many parts of the world where famine is rife. De Castro, in his preface to the Gallimard edition, says:

En transposant ce thème de la faim au théâtre, Cousin n'a pas voulu situer sa pièce au Japon mais a essayé de l'universaliser, donnant comme décor à sa narration toutes les régions du monde qui composent le paysage humain de cette tragique géographie de la faim dans laquelle ce n'est pas la terre qui nourrit l'homme, mais plutôt l'homme qui semble n'être né que pour nourrir la terre, après sa mort, avec sa matière organique.

While recognising Cousin as an author primarily concerned with stimulating a 'prise de conscience' in his audiences, critics nevertheless found flaws in this modern morality play:

C'est un auteur à bons sentiments, mais qui ne cherche pas tant à moraliser qu'à alerter les consciences et à sensibiliser les spectateurs aux drames de notre époque.<sup>15</sup>

Il n'est pas facile de faire du bon théâtre avec de bons sentiments, Gabriel Cousin le sait bien; afin de rendre plus efficace cette narration lyrique sur le thème de la faim, l'auteur aurait certainement intérêt à couper des répétitions qui font redondance.<sup>16</sup>

Of all Cousin's plays, this one probably leaves itself open to the criticism that it is repetitive and generally static. The didacticism of the play is very much hidden within the character of Keisakichi and may not be evident at all in certain productions. The tone of the play is sober, the action sparse, but the philosophy expressed is important: famine does not provide its own solutions and life continues until some outside influence changes it. In the case of the Ik tribe, the exterior force, namely that of government politics, destroyed both the life-style and the spirit of the tribe. In Le Voyage de derrière la Montagne, there is at least the hope that the forces of change may be stimulated from within the community by Keisakichi and his band of young nonconformists. If this

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15. R. Abirached, Le Nouvel Observateur, 16-6-1966.

16. Nicole Zand, Le Monde, 15-6-1966.

is the case, then the villagers may survive without violent upheaval or revolution. It is for this reason that the play may be termed optimistic; and for the same reason, the production of the play must emphasise the essential logic and adequacy of the ethos it has created for itself in its everyday living. Cousin himself has stated that the mere overthrow of belief for its own sake is not the solution required: that is a destructive and senseless move. The solution lies in retaining the lifestyle while improving the conditions of living.

For these reasons, it would be imperative to emphasise the relative permanence and conditioning of the villagers to their way of life; any production of the play must stress the slow, measured pace of the lifestyle and bring out the essential goodness of O Rin who lives by that code. Cousin's play may not contain the magic of Artaud, nor the doctrine of Brecht, but it closely resembles Peter Brook's Ik in mood and thought, and it is this feeling in the play which differentiates it most from Cousin's other works. Once the rhythm of the action has been determined, the producer's task is to amalgamate the various and varying elements into the whole. Given Cousin's unwillingness to impose production techniques upon a producer, the latter has an embarrassing choice of alternatives to make in order to co-ordinate the production. At the play's première in Arras, Françoise Lepeuve, a 25-year old researcher for the ORTF, clearly succeeded in uniting the various elements of the play, symbolic or realistic, sung or narrated, and won the prix du jury for her production:

Aidée par l'intelligent dispositif scénique de Nina Riechetoff et par d'excellents comédiens, elle a réussi à donner à ce Voyage une image à la fois sensible et digne, qui en préserve la poésie en même temps que la force dénonciatrice.<sup>17</sup>

A production of the play in 1970 by an amateur group at the Maison des Jeunes et de la Culture du quai de la Pie in St. Maur focussed attention on the ideological aspect of the

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17. *ibid.*

theme of famine. The producer, Jacinto Soriano, made a number of additions to the published text, which resulted in the action of the play becoming of secondary importance to the exterior forces seen to be causing the famine, namely, Western wealth and exploitation of underdeveloped nations. To illustrate the latter, he introduced a group of middle-class archetypes who watch the action of the play in silence. The effect of such an addition was to place the audience in the rôle of jury, witnessing a silent and distant exploitation by bourgeois Westerners and the consequences of that exploitation on the inhabitants of a remote village of the Third World. Recordings of speeches on the subject of shanty-towns by M. Chaban-Delmas and by an Argentinian bishop were interjected to add to this Brechtian effect of alienation. Jean-Jacques Olivier wrote of this production:

Cette distance prise par rapport à l'oeuvre, à son esprit, à son texte, fait de ce travail dramaturgique un essai critique intéressant du problème de la faim. On oublie...les faiblesses des comédiens.. le manque de moyens matériels évident, au profit de la représentation qui ne rend pas compte du 'fait réel' mais de l'idéologie qui l'a construit de toutes pièces.<sup>18</sup>

This interpretation must be considered as a purely personal one: the producer created a Brechtian document out of a Cousin narrative; he added a didactic dimension to a play which strove to follow the original, non-didactic legend. This overt politicisation of Le Voyage de derrière la Montagne would appear to contradict Cousin's intention of portraying a local code of morality fashioned out of the restricted living conditions of a people dominated by the anguish and fear of hunger. It also contradicts the dignity shown by those people in establishing and respecting that code, and replaces it with an over-polarised political viewpoint seeking simple causes and obvious effects. It ignores the value Cousin himself places on tradition and suggests that we condemn that tradition for the wrong reasons.

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18. Jean-Jacques Olivier, Combat, 16-6-1970.

This production, so far removed from Cousin's intentions as a dramatist, would seem to re-align his theatre completely and destroy the innate qualities in the lyricism of the text, itself derived from a poetic legend. It misinterprets Cousin who always eschews the didacticism of Brecht, as many critics have pointed out:

Pas le moindre dogmatisme, chez lui, mais nul fétichisme de la littérature non plus. Pour éveiller au monde moderne la conscience de ses spectateurs, il se fie tranquillement à l'efficacité de la poésie même, qui n'est pas seulement langage, mais gestes, danse, musique, formes, occupation insolite de l'espace.<sup>19</sup>

J'aime aussi que votre théâtre, en prenant à tâche d'alerter les consciences sur les 'problèmes' de notre civilisation malade, se garde du didactisme et de l'endoctrinement; son témoignage y gagne en force persuasive.<sup>20</sup>

Regrettably, Cousin appears to have accommodated himself to the treatment which Soriano lent the play, since he has said:

In order to stress the differences between living conditions as they still exist in the so-called underdeveloped countries and the standard of living in our Western world, a short prologue may be added, or certain elements revolving around the theme of hunger may be introduced as a contrast to this admirable legend. These elements, or this prologue, may take the form of slides, filmstrips, puppets, or news articles. Without being overemphatic or belabouring the point, they should serve as a distant and muted reminder to our conscience.<sup>21</sup>

This compromise would appear to have alienated Cousin from his own ideals with regard to Le Voyage de derrière la Montagne. It would seem superfluous to impose, by tendentious production techniques, an external 'cause' for the hunger depicted in the play; on the contrary, it would be sufficient to portray famine in its most demoralising form and hence to show its effects on the morality of a community. A polemical approach to the production of this play would detract from its symbolic value and its lyrical beauty, while an over-refined or fussy interpretation would surely damage its inherent simplicity and grace.

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19. Robert Abirached, programme for Le Voyage de derrière la Montagne, 11-6-1966.

20. Robert Pignarre, letter to G.Cousin, 29-8-1966.

21. G.Cousin, quoted in Bettina Knapp, The Contemporary French Theater, Avon Books, New York, 1973.

(f) L'Opéra Noir

L'Opéra Noir was written between March 1960 and August 1961. Its first performance took place on February 12th.1967 at the Théâtre Paul Eluard in Stains, a north-east suburb of Paris. After this 'avant-première', it was transferred to the Théâtre de la Commune d'Aubervilliers on February 17th.1967 and later went on tour with the Théâtre de la Région Parisienne in April of that year. The original production was by Gabriel Garran, with music by Mezz Mezzrow, choreography by Patrick Belda, and scenery and costumes by Hubert Monloup. The rôle of Millie was performed by Michèle Moreti who had also played the principal female rôle in L'Aboyeuse et l'Automate in 1963.

L'Opéra Noir has been compared with the American musical West Side Story, since its theme is the thwarted love of a couple divided by racialist barriers. The play is set in the Southern States of America in the late 1920's and 1930's. Millie, a young black girl of twenty who has spent many years in and out of prisons for prostitution, eventually finds work as a blues singer in a cabaret owned and patronised by whites. One day, she meets Prez, who is two years older than her and of Jewish origin. Prez has passed himself off as a negro in order to be able to play the trumpet in a negro jazz band. The couple fall in love, but this causes a dangerous scandal and they are persecuted, arrested and sent to prison. On their release, they attend a fancy-dress party organised by their friends in their honour, but Prez who has disguised himself as a negro, ironically finds that Millie has come as a white girl, each having hoped to be with the other during the party. While embracing one another, a group of racialists, seeing a 'black' man holding a 'white' girl, strike down Prez and then hang him. Millie clasps the lynched Prez to her and begs God to kill her too.

The inspiration for this play came from several sources. The primary source was the autobiography of the black singer Billie Holiday; this book, entitled Lady sings the Blues, was co-edited by W.Dufty, and was later translated into French under the title Ma Vie. A second autobiography, that of the Polish Jew and jazz musician Milton Mezz Mezzrow, provided the background to the difficulties facing a talented but poor New Orleans musician of the nineteen-thirties. This book, called Really the Blues and written by Mezz Mezzrow and Bernard Wolfe, was translated into

French as La Rage de Vivre by Marcel Duhamel and Madeleine Gautier and published in 1946. As in his other plays, Cousin also draws on his personal experience to create individuality and novelty within the factual framework, while his knowledge of the origins of racialism in the Southern States of America lends situational authenticity to the play. One example of personal experience which confirms his concern for the American Negroes derived from his former career in athletics:

Lors des premières tournées des athlètes noirs américains, en février 1935, ce fut une révélation de les voir si beaux, si souples, si décontractés. D'autre part, Hitler aux Jeux Olympiques de Berlin en 1936 refusa, dans la tribune, de serrer la main de la merveille noire, le fameux grand sprinter Jesse Owens. Et ce geste nous révolta.<sup>1</sup>

The inclusion of authentic jazz pieces in the play - and the blues playing of Mezz Mezzrow himself in the first production - added strongly to the overall effect of plausibility and realism.

Pour cadre, j'ai choisi le milieu du jazz américain, qui me permettait à la fois de trouver des éléments scéniques attrayants et vivants - plastiquement et musicalement - et de rencontrer des situations où le problème racial est particulièrement typé et par où la lutte des Noirs américains contre la ségrégation a commencé.<sup>2</sup>

These sources, recorded from books, newspaper articles and reports, deal with a period of about fifty years in the history of the Blacks in America. Prez and Millie represent the synthesis of the lives of many jazz musicians, both black and white. They therefore display the general characteristics of people in a given situation and not the unique character of one person, living or dead, real or fictional. Cousin has amalgamated these recorded facts into a coherent whole, thereby expressing the problems of racial conflict in their totality. There can be no place, therefore, for prejudice, invention or distortion. As in Brecht's theatre, the

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1. Gabriel Cousin, Lettres Françaises, 22-12-1966.

2. *ibid.*



imagination of the author is less in evidence: the play is more a statement of the facts for the audience to reflect on. The presence of the author may however be seen in the presentation of the drama of a given situation and in the ensuing emotional response produced in the audience as a result of this dramatic reconstruction of an event.

La vérité étant dans l'esprit, tout cela  
ne m'est pas apparu gênant ni contradictoire,<sup>3</sup>

says Cousin of his amalgamation. If we are prepared to accept this random synthesis of facts, then we cannot object to the resulting chronological incongruities freely admitted by Cousin.<sup>4</sup> The addition of the details from the story of Jesse Owens, which dates from 1936, to the jazz history of the period 1925-1930, for example, illustrates this desire to present the conflict of racialism in a more global fashion. One effect of such treatment is that it omits any sense of development in the problem - we are thus shown not an accumulating series of smaller problems, but one large and composite problem.

The dramatic appeal of such an authentically documented situation lies in the involvement of the characters in that very situation: caught up in events outside their making or their comprehension; the victims of society suffer the tragedies which the failings of that society heaps upon them through prejudice, injustice, or mere indifference. Edward Albee treats these themes in his play The Death of Bessie Smith, the eponymous central figure being another famous blues singer fifteen years senior to Billie Holiday; but Albee concentrates purely on one individual case history, whereas Cousin introduces a fictional love story into the historically factual L'Opéra Noir. In Cousin's play, the society in question is the racially prejudiced area of the Southern States of America in the nineteen-twenties and its concomitant evils of violence and hatred, where social distinctions are linked directly to

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3. G.Cousin, Théâtre I, Gallimard, 1963, p.266.

4. *ibid.*, p.266.

racial differences. However, the drama proper begins when the natural love felt by Prez and Millie for one another becomes entangled in the unnatural web of racialist prejudice and taboo.

Cousin polarises the racial problem in inverse proportion to historical reality:

C'est délibérément que j'ai voulu présenter les noirs sous l'étiquette des bons et les blancs sous celle des mauvais.<sup>5</sup>

This treatment resembles that of Brecht who constantly supports the socially weak and inferior - generally also the poor - in their permanent struggle against the rich and strong. To Brecht and Cousin alike, the socially weak and their poverty are synonymous concepts; such people must be encouraged in their fight against socially superior forces. In order to correct the imbalance in the social forces at work, both authors present their socially inferior characters with a great deal of compassion, thus endowing them with dignity and allowing the audience to sympathise with their plight. This sympathy will be translated into anger and a desire to combat the social injustices revealed.

Technically, L'Opéra Noir poses some problems. Accommodating a jazz orchestra on stage would be difficult in many theatres, yet for the sake of the unity of the performance and the play's theme, it is essential that the musicians form part of the acting area. Casting the play presents some problems for the producer: according to the author himself,<sup>6</sup> L'Opéra Noir requires a minimum of twenty actors and actresses for some thirty speaking parts. More white actors than black are needed for the principal speaking parts, while more black than white actors are required for the non-speaking parts (crowd scenes, etc.). In his notes published under the cast list Cousin states that:

On peut - si nécessité oblige - n'utiliser que des comédiens blancs (ou noirs, selon les pays). Dans ce cas, on masquera ou maquillera les comédiens de la couleur opposée, en prenant le parti de déclarer carrément cette convention.<sup>7</sup>

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5. *ibid.*, p.267.

6. *ibid.*, p.144.

7. *ibid.*, p.144.

In the initial production of the play, the cast was white, and the actors who portrayed black parts wore black wigs. This was not altogether successful and some critics found the resulting artificiality unnecessarily confusing. It is an understandable confusion, for this artificiality could detract from two features of the play: first, the human misery portrayed in the blacks' condition would be diminished by the audience's knowledge that the actors were not in reality black, and secondly, the fancy-dress party in Tableau XI at which Prez and Millie are themselves disguised would lose its dramatic appeal and lessen the intensity of the effect of degradation displayed in the scene. It is the very crudeness of their disguises which must demonstrate their own naïveté and which heightens the pathos of their personalities.

In the biographical details of the two principal characters given by Cousin in the Gallimard edition of the play there are indications of the direction which the tragedy must take. Cousin gives a detailed description of Millie's home background, of her introduction into the life of a call-girl, of her initiation into the world of developing enthusiasm for jazz music, and her eventual success in rising out of her impoverished childhood state - and, thereby, out of her social class - into the increasingly more middle-class status of a public jazz singer. Prez, a year older than Millie, must embody not only the racial reflexes of the American white man, but also those feelings of personal degradation felt by the European Jew. However, Cousin is in no way attempting to write a play on the theme of anti-semitism: he merely correlates the humiliation felt by these two sets of people. Cousin indicates that the couple must be seen to overcome their social inferiority and rise out of their milieux through the love of their art. However, their subsequent meeting and mutual love will destroy this success and ironically bring them to a tragic end. It is at the very point of their meeting that their unconscious desire for self-improvement and social elevation will begin to fade as the social-racial impossibility of their love becomes apparent.

Black and white attitudes are polarised from the very first scene of the play in the religious penitentiary to which the fourteen-year old Millie has been committed by a Jew who raped her. The girls are separated according to colour, the Mother Superior herself demonstrates the most highly prejudiced attitudes, while the religious instruction in the institution consists solely of chanted racialist slogans. Blacks are taught that Whites have been created by God to stand as good examples in society in order to lead them out of their idle, ignorant, and perverse ways. This doctrine produces in Millie a confusion of racialist thoughts and religious dogma which conflicts with her own personal experiences. She therefore equates the teaching of Jesus being a Jew as evil with the evil deed of the Jew who raped her.

This powerful first scene - one of the longest of the twelve tableaux - reaches its climax with Millie's account of her experiences. Her story provides the material for a rhythmic incantation by both groups of girls to the frenzied movement of the 'Blues du viol', which Millie herself dictates by a mock re-enactment of the episode with the Jew. The incorporation of body movement to express the beauty and tragedy of this scene, the hypnotic visual effect of the swinging dance number, and the strong auditory effect of the accompanying pealing bells of the penitentiary, make this introductory tableau one of the most exciting pieces of drama in all of Cousin's theatre.

The second tableau begins with a jam session between Prez and his friends. Jazz is seen as a musical passport between races, allowing the white Prez to visit black orchestras in their own surroundings. However, stark contrasts between black and white are again visible in the form of white policemen patrolling the all-black night-club. Historically authenticated detail, such as the collection of money by the night-club singers between their knees, or the reference to the

fact that it is only in black brothels that the 'new music' may be heard, add realism to the scene. The prejudices displayed by the Mother Superior in the first Tableau are here paralleled by those of the police sergeant: "Ah! c'est ça! tu est un youpin!" Prez, a less ingenuous person than Millie, punches the sergeant for this provocation, and is promptly beaten and arrested. With the stark polarisation of attitudes shown in these first two scenes, the contrast between the prejudiced white American oppressors and the socially-inferior and oppressed black Negroes is complete. Jazz, a symbol of that oppression, will slowly emerge as a real force to bridge the gap between the two groups, acting not only in the interests of the black man as a palliative to his feelings of guilt and inferiority, but also providing the catalyst for Prez's reaction against racial discrimination.

In Tableau III, the governor of the prison to which Prez has been taken is shown as an authoritarian bigot: "Dites: 'Prez, Monsieur le Directeur.' Cela ne vous fatiguera pas plus et, pour moi, cela sera plus heureux à mes oreilles"; he mixes his prejudice with heavy sarcasm: "une administration pénitentiaire aussi avancée que la nôtre", "ici, nous sommes des gens cultivés, ouverts au progrès, à tout le modernisme"; he is portrayed as ignorant of the true nature of jazz - as essentially improvised music - by suggesting that to attain a high standard of musicianship one needs schooling, and calling jazz "musique de nègres" and "musique de bordel"; he is blatantly anti-semitic: "c'est curieux, mais incompréhensible... en général, les juifs, euh! je veux dire les israélites, vous passez pour des gens assez intelligents, fins " and he all but calls Prez "youpin"; finally, he refuses to pass Prez as coloured, despite the latter's plea that he has 'crossed the line'. His incomprehension is typified by the line: "on est quand même mieux juif que nègre, ici, non?" At this point in the interview with the governor, Prez confuses the latter by his statements "je ne suis pas juif", "je suis noir", "je suis un nègre". The interview degenerates into farce and Prez only escapes from the situation by successfully convincing the governor that he will have less trouble for

himself if he allows Prez to be classified as black. As is common in this play, the end of the scene is reached in a crescendo of music and song as the stage lights diminish.

At the opening of the fourth Tableau, Millie, now eighteen, is in prison and, in a sensual blues number, she laments the fact that she cannot find normal, natural love in such a prejudiced society which imposes racialism and separates man from woman: "que ce soit les blancs, les noirs, les juifs, ou les jaunes, tous pareils! Il n'y a que deux races: l'homme et la femme". Millie's gruesome story of ill-treatment and exploitation in a brothel is treated with realism, while her final blues number in the tableau reiterates the confusion she felt in the first tableau. She is delirious as she recollects these images, and in her dream evokes the vision of a happier life. This theme develops into a second blues number which returns to the theme of the first; it ends with the line: "J'ai besoin d'aimer quelqu'un". The other black girls in the prison enhance the feelings of the song by providing a musical counterpoint. The language of these blues songs is reminiscent of Cousin's early love poetry of L'Ordinaire Amour, in which sentiment and sensuality are fused.

In Tableau V, a pimp fails to attract Millie to his brothel - her previous experiences have taught her to beware of the easy luxuries of warmth, cleanliness, free cigarettes and the symbolic white telephone. She knows now that material objects cannot replace the genuine and natural love of a man which she so desperately wants. Desperate for work too, Millie deceives a night-club owner into thinking that she has been a singer and she thus gains entry to the cabaret where her genuinely heartfelt and anguished singing attracts the clientèle and a sympathetic pianist takes her in hand. Her 'Chanson de la nouvelle call-girl' represents the culmination of her quasi-religious desire for peace, tranquillity and a more gentle life. It is the climax of her religious fervour, embodying the functions that she is prepared to perform as Mary, as a wife now accepting her Jesus, and Martha, acting as the black servant girl, who prepares the room for receiving him.

In giving pleasure to a caller named Jesus, Millie appears to be worshipping a new spiritual ideal and her desire to reject all other callers after Jesus indicates her readiness to put fidelity and stability before pleasure. In symbolic terms, her exclusive acceptance of Jesus shows that she is embracing religion for its promise of enduring love. However, spiritual conflict will occur when the Christian doctrine of loving one's neighbour, even one's enemy, is explained to her by Jesus himself: "Sois tendre avec tous les hommes". Millie finds herself caught between her desire to abandon promiscuity and the demands of Jesus to give happiness to all men.

The following year, Prez and his fellow musicians are also confronted with a dilemma: should black musicians play in white areas of the city? The argument that the contribution of such personalities as Joe Louis, Jesse Owens and Paul Robeson has done more to help the black cause than any number of speeches by socialist politicians is a fair assessment of the practical potential of their movement. What is more, jazz, being rooted in the black people of America, is in itself a unique contribution to art, and not merely an adjunct of a musical art created by whites. During this debate, there is no sense of violence or vindictiveness shown towards white people; Cousin is presenting the case for black integration into a predominantly white society with reason and plausibility.

While the black musicians are generally incredulous that Prez should have voluntarily 'crossed the line', Prez himself pioneers the way to the social ideal: "l'idéal, ce serait qu'on fasse un orchestre avec des blancs et des noirs et qu'on joue ensemble". When one of the musicians questions a white man's ability to play jazz as well as a black man, Prez reprimands him for showing racial prejudice himself; it is a just reprimand and exemplifies Cousin's essential fairness in dealing with the topic of racialism. The blacks are portrayed as a sympathetic group; they are neither underprivileged nor antagonistic but show above all

that they have a sincere desire to bring about social change by the peaceful means of music-making.

The first meeting between Prez and Millie is characterized by timidity and some trepidation, but in her first blues number in Prez's presence, Millie sings of a world in which freedom and beauty are available for all. Cousin's intention in this is shown by his own directive to the actors: "on sent que pour tous les deux, c'est une déclaration d'amour". The feeling between Prez and Millie is thus strengthened by a corresponding harmony in their social ideals. Millie's corroboration of the sentiments just expressed by Prez demonstrates the affinity between them and lends a sense of hope both for their own happiness and for society's eventual improvement too. Life has been given meaning for Prez and Millie ("ma vie a un sens maintenant") at last, but the statements of the lovers at the beginning of Tableau VII are bald and epigrammatic in the Brechtian sense: they alienate us from the couple. Their categorical pronouncements on their new-found happiness are as blatantly unrealistic as their responses to the discovery that Millie was a call-girl and Prez's admission that he is a Jew. Their common grievance against society is expressed and formalised by Millie: "[les hommes] inventent la haine, pour se protéger". More generalisations follow: "Les blancs ne savent pas aimer; ils ne savent pas rire", adding to our conviction that Cousin seeks both to formalise the conflict and to overcompensate the under-privileged by exaggerating their sufferings.

However, Millie already senses the threat to their happiness ("Tu verras que notre amour sera bafoué, déchiré") and this feeling of fatality will dominate her until the tragic but inevitable end of the play. Prez's disregard for this inherent impossibility in their relationship heightens the tragedy, for they agree to live together despite the illegality of such an action. But confrontation with authority is necessary if society's attitudes



are to be changed and both of them face the problem directly, if naïvely.

A year later, while making a film together, Prez and Millie feel anxiety for their own safety and hesitate to sign the contract. Examples of anti-racial laws are quoted by the film-producer and scenes of racial conflict in Alabama are projected onto a screen. However, the producer convinces them that making the film is a worthwhile project and will benefit their cause ("pour avancer, il faut agir") and influence public opinion toward accepting racial integration. Prez and Millie are persuaded that they can help to have the Code of Decency revoked by making this film, so they willingly sign the contract, thus committing themselves to militant action. The soap advertisement slogans ("et si elle utilisait le savon 'Col de Cygne' sa peau s'éclaircirait") endlessly repeated, will, by ridicule, make the situation amusing, but by amusing, it will also eliminate the fear which is at the basis of the colour problem. The film's story, outlined to Prez and Millie by the producer, involves the prosecution of a black woman lawyer for having given supererogatory service to a white client, thereby causing the client's wife to shoot her husband out of jealousy. But although the lawyer was unintentionally responsible for the man's death, the charge against her is clearly trumped up and racist by nature. When the actors rehearse a scene, the white actress playing the wife succumbs to a bout of hysteria and complains that she is not accustomed to playing on an equal status with black actresses - in the film world, they only have a right to play servile rôles, such as prostitutes. The scene ends in uproar as Prez strikes the white actress and is subsequently escorted off the set.

In the ensuing trial, reminiscent of the distorted justice presented in the court scenes of Brecht's plays, the audience become the arbiters of the case presented. Cousin uses strong satire here, with farcical undertones; the journalists' questions "mademoiselle, quand vous vous

lavez, l'eau du bain se colore-t-elle?" - demonstrate their prejudices, while the judge's "Messieurs, n'oubliez pas que vous représentez les journaux du pays le plus démocratique" not only satirises court procedure, but, in view of the case in question, represents Cousin's most vitriolic attack on American race hatred. The judge's connivance at the biased questioning of Prez and Millie and his own rapid interrogation of the couple, allowing no time for them to answer, lends the scene a tone of surrealistic farce. Cousin indicates that the jury, the witnesses, and even the judges may be played by dummy actors with recorded voices. This distortion of the truth at the trial turns into a prolonged and bitter attack on the couple by the judge who, in accusing them of offending public decency, suggests that they are also thereby inciting people to civic and social disorder. Far from uniting the races in their pursuit of love, they have blatantly flouted the moral code by their "mépris...de ce sentiment sublime, de cette fleur délicate". They are seen as "le couple pervers", "l'exemple défendu", "le péché vivant".

In a passage reminiscent of Brecht in his Die Ausnahme und die Regel ("Und der Gott der Dinge, wie sie sind, schuf Herr und Knecht! Und es war gut so."), the judge says: "car si Dieu a créé des races différentes, ce n'est pas pour les mélanger, mais bien pour les séparer." This reversal of the basis of scriptural doctrine of the equality of Man before God is, both in Brecht and in Cousin, deliberately used to bring about a moral stocktaking - 'une prise de conscience' - by the audience and to stress the underlying differences in society between those in authority and the underprivileged. Miscegenation, according to the judge, is a criminal act by which men cease to be human beings and become animals. It is true, of course, that racialism demonstrates the worst aspects of human nature - the rejection of one's fellows - but the total refusal of the authority in question here to see the force for good in the Prez-Millie relationship is indicative of a general

narrow-mindedness and bigotry on the part of such officials as the judge, the police, and even the priests. Fabricated evidence is produced too: drugs planted in the room rented by Prez and Millie are used as evidence of their moral corruption and their "dégradation de l'âme" and "décomposition des sens".

The farce continues as the lawyers chant the anomalies of the proceedings: "falsification - confusion - aggression - exagération". The subsequent realistic description by the police of their arrest of the couple is tempered by the police chief himself who twists the evidence to avoid giving the impression that his men were guilty of brutality. Mime is employed by the defence counsel; this heightens the effect of farcical unreality in the courtroom and leaves the defendants speechless - and therefore guilty in the eyes of the judge: "votre silence sera interprété comme l'aveu même de vos délits". Against the background singing of a negro-spiritual, Prez and Millie declare their love for one another, but they are soon silenced and only granted the freedom of speech to show their contrition. A white Catholic priest and a black pastor provide the religious opportunity for their repentance - religion thus being used as a means of exploitation to subjugate the couple. However, the white priest, far from helping Prez to overcome his situation, arouses his anger by attacking him as a Jew, for belonging to the race who tortured and humiliated Jesus. So religion is also shown to be one of the bases of prejudice, and a close analogy is drawn between white and right, black and wrong - "vous ne discernerez plus le bien du mal, la nuit du jour, et le noir du blanc." There is uproar in court as the black pastor accepts Millie into the House of God, provided that she avoids further sin - this acceptance of "la sorcière noire" even leads to cries of "ce sont des rouges" - a 'reds under the beds' scare hardly applicable to their case, but indicative of the generalised nature of prejudice when fear is rampant in society. In the ensuing uproar, the police make a baton charge at the journalists present and Prez and Millie

are led away by force to prison. Against a background of dying sirens as the scene changes, the lovers are heard crying out their farewells to one another. As in L'Aboyeuse et l'Automate, society has separated the young couple.

It is at this point in the play that Cousin, through the policeman, makes a lyrical and moving statement of Man's fears which transcends the purely political and social implications of the rest of the play. After a poetically contemplative passage, expressing the transience of the human body and soul, the policeman comes forward and addresses the audience directly. He acknowledges the innate and permanent spiritual anguish within Man: "Oui, nous avons peur. Peur d'un regard d'homme. Peur d'une naissance. Peur de la mort. Peur des étoiles." Colour prejudice, Cousin is saying, is merely symptomatic of a universal fear which motivates all men's actions and prevents them from distinguishing between right and wrong, between justice and injustice, between fairmindedness and bigotry. As if expressing a manifestation of this fear within himself, the policeman asks the crowd to disperse, lest their gathering be construed as a silent demonstration.

As a result of the trial of Prez and Millie in Tableau IX, new racial laws are enacted and a certain amount of liberalisation is introduced by the authorities. However, racialist sentiments are within men and therefore "ce ne sont pas les lois qui retireront aux racistes leurs complexes." The effects of the liberalisation process may well prove to be harmful to the whites: "ils vont se sentir abandonnés. Et ceux-là auront bien plus peur." Cousin's view of the future of race relations is indeed pessimistic at this point in the play. Predictably perhaps, legislation is said to have exacerbated these relations, for it acts as a barrier to the natural emotions between black and white: "L'amour, ça ne se commande pas" conclude the musicians in Tableau X, while doubts are expressed in the newspapers about Prez and Millie's own case.

After Prez's release from prison, the idea of forming

the first mixed jazz orchestra to tour the Union is discussed. It is enthusiastically accepted, but when an imaginary conversation between the sheriff of Little Rock and the group's manager is acted out, doubts begin to enter their minds about the wisdom of their action: the sheriff himself holds such racially prejudiced views that the jazz venture would fail before it even got on the road.

Despondency follows, but Millie's imminent arrival is announced and at this news a new proposal is put forward that a fancy-dress party be held. Anxious silence greets Prez's announcement that he will disguise himself as a negro - "entre les lois et la pratique quotidienne, il y a un monde. Celui où nous sommes". There is a sense of impending calamity as Prez's hopes are expressed: "Pour un soir...pour une fois...Avoir une soirée dans la splendeur de notre amour" and the doom-laden blues number 'On ne peut changer de peau' concludes the tableau. The penultimate tableau, the party, begins in a gay mood: Prez, disguised, passes unnoticed among the guests; a black singer sings the blues 'Maman noire', depicting stories of racial murder, followed by a white girl who sings the 'Blues du recul'. This is Millie, and the song tells of the upbringing of a black man and the dangers confronting him. The presence of 'Jim Crow', symbol of white vigilance against the blacks, pervades the song which stresses the message "si vous êtes noir, reculez". There is a small piece of dramatic irony here, as Prez is the only one initially who does not recognise Millie. When the two do recognise each other later, in a pathetic realisation of their situation, they approach in a slow, ritualistic manner, like two animals cautiously meeting for the first time, "tels qu'ils pourraient être s'ils étaient chacun de la race de l'autre".

Ironically, they are still separated as they have independently reversed rôles, thus demonstrating the impossibility of their ever being equal: "tu es noire. Je suis blanc. Rien à faire. Nous sommes conditionnés irréversiblement". Millie reflects their final despair with her "moi, je ne veux plus. Je ne peux plus recommencer."

Their subsequent notion that only by dying together can they achieve unity - a truly classical conception - "si c'est une faute de s'aimer, ce n'en sera pas une plus grande de se tuer" - is rapidly and tragically realised as a car draws up and a mob of racists attacks Prez for consorting with a white girl. The couple are taken away by the mob and, offstage, we hear the sounds of Prez being lynched amidst screams from Millie, oaths from the racists and, in a final period of silence, the strains of the party band.

This final tableau serves as a kind of epilogue to the play - as Millie screams "Je ne suis pas une blanche" and embraces the legs of Prez, hanged from a tree, she appeals to God to kill her: "Où est Dieu? Où est-il? Qu'il me fasse mourir!" - and the lights fade. After the actors have taken their bow, Millie sings her last blues 'Etranges Fruits', a macabre and symbolic lament for the victims of racialism, hanging like weird fruits from trees, fruits which are the bitter crop of trees dedicated to hatred in the Southern States of America.

L'Opéra Noir thus ends on a note of tragic irony: the more the lovers have tried to approach one another, the more society has kept them distant. Black and white are condemned to perpetual separation. It is a pessimistic doctrine which Cousin presents uncompromisingly. His main concern, however, is not an exposition of the political and racial bigotry at work, but a demonstration of the impossibility of fulfilling the natural emotions between a couple in love because of the social pressures impinging on their relationship. It is an extension of the Romeo and Juliet story with the added ingredient of the problem of race.

Press criticism of L'Opéra Noir fell into two main categories: adverse criticism came from those who saw in the writing too little originality and a paucity of intellectual ideas, while the enthusiasts applauded the, for them, successful attempt to combine the arts of drama and music into a coherent

artistic whole.

The hostility of critics towards the play, therefore, centred mainly around the text itself, which was variously described as banal, juvenile, bare, and platitudinous.

Characteristic of such criticism was that of Gilles Sandier:

Cette oeuvre est infantile et primaire, elle a la fausseté de la platitude édifiante, du simplisme manichéen, du didactisme bavard. Son écriture est nulle.<sup>8</sup>

The treatment of the theme of racial prejudice which jeopardised natural relationships and destroys love is equally harshly attacked:

Les auteurs de Broadway (*Porgy and Bess*, *West Side Story*) sont bien plus incisifs, persuasifs, et véhéments que Gabriel Cousin lorsqu'il s'agit de fustiger le racisme et l'obscurantisme.<sup>9</sup>

English-speaking audiences and critics would naturally be more familiar with the American paradigms mentioned here - the negro folk-opera *Porgy and Bess* by George Gershwin was first performed in New York in 1935, and Leonard Bernstein's musical *West Side Story* appeared there in 1957 - and this may partly account for the poor reception of the play by the critics of *The Times* and *The Guardian*:

The words are violent and not always very lucid, yet the dialogue often falls flat and generates no depth of feeling.<sup>10</sup>

...the simple-minded self-righteous tone of the piece... [Gabriel Cousin] gives us an indignant late-extra on the death of Bessie Smith.<sup>11</sup>

This reference to the superiority of Albee's *The Death of Bessie Smith*, which dates from 1959, might be justifiable

8. G.Sandier, *Arts et Lettres*, 22-2-1967.

9. Claude Baignières, *Le Figaro*, 15-2-1967.

10. *The Times*, 22-2-1967 (special correspondent)

11. Peter Lennon, *The Guardian*, 16-2-1967.

if it did not ignore the fact that Cousin's work belongs to a different genre of production and was destined expressly for a popular audience. Nor is it an entirely valid argument to suggest, as Peter Lennon did, that Cousin would have done better to update his source and treat the Algerian war as an example of racial conflict, for the source material itself is almost irrelevant to the central debate - which is on the nature of racialism and its destructive power.

Another interesting comment on the play from an English standpoint is revealed in Ronald Bryden's letter to Irving Lycett, Cousin's English translator:

[L'Opéra Noir is] unsuitable for production by the Royal Shakespeare Company...the main reason is summed up by Cousin himself in his preparatory note to Black Opera, where he says that he has deliberately portrayed blacks as 'good' and whites as 'bad' in order to 'give the play a certain tone'. That tone, it seems to me, is one calculated to appeal to a particular left-wing audience by reflecting their own beliefs back at them, not in the form of argument but as bare assumption and assertion. This audience is a minority one, and this tone limits the play's appeal to it.<sup>12</sup>

This interpretation is interesting from several points of view. Firstly, it says something about the R.S.C.'s policy and shows how it differed, just as Paris Boulevard theatre differed, from the policies newly adopted by Vilar at the T.N.P. or by the directors of the new subsidised theatres in the French provinces. It also underlines the differences in approach to theatre between the major national theatres of both France and Britain in their capitals and the provincial theatres of the two countries. Other countries were interested in producing L'Opéra Noir too: it had already been performed, before its French première, by the National Conservatoire of Hungary in Budapest in 1966, and was later put on at the Odeon Theatre in Montevideo, Uruguay, in 1969.

Secondly, Bryden's assumption about the play's appeal to left-wing audiences is not borne out by experience; indeed, the critic of L'Humanité said of it:

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12. Ronald Bryden, letter to Irving Lycett, 1971 (private correspondence).



Le geste, ici, l'éloquence recherchée, le déplacement du comédien, effacent ce que pourrait avoir de gênant le texte nu. L'Opéra Noir n'a pas de prétention littéraire autre que sa simplicité vériste. Soit. Mais le risque existe d'une telle démarche: celui de la naïveté, du manichéisme où le bien et le mal sont confrontés à l'état premier.<sup>13</sup>

For this critic, then, the simplicity of the writing showed naïveté, yet he omits, like other critics, the fact that this is an opera and not a purely dramatic work. For the same reason, it would have been more plausible that the R.S.C. should reject the work as outside its scope or aims, yet Ronald Bryden fails to condemn it on this basis. It would seem inappropriate to damn the work on the sole evidence of its dialogue. Not only does Cousin insist that the jazz element on stage should be part of the make-up of the play, or 'opera' as it should be called (Cf. The Threepenny Opera of Brecht) , but he also allows considerable liberty to the producer to experiment with the text itself.

On the question of the jazz element in this play, it is perhaps significant that those critics who disliked the production in general, disagreed on the value and the efficacy of the music. One such comment:

Les musiciens noirs sont les seuls de la soirée à convaincre les spectateurs du rapprochement des races et de leurs égalités.<sup>14</sup>

may be contrasted with another:

cette oeuvre...eût été très bien, si ce déchaînement musical, en soi excellent, n'eût écrasé, et jusqu'à le réduire à presque rien, le texte de Gabriel Cousin.<sup>15</sup>

My own conversation in 1974 with one of the employees of the Théâtre Paul Eluard at Stains (where the avant-première took place), elicited the remark that the most memorable part of the evening had been the jazz playing of Mezz Mezzrow's group.

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13. Georges Léon, L'Humanité, 15-2-1967.

14. René Sirvin, L'Aurore, 15-2-1967.

15. Jacques Lemarchand, Le Figaro Littéraire, 23-2-1967.

That feature of the play had clearly not been forgotten over the period of seven years since the performance.

On the second question of the freedom of the producer to experiment with the basic text of *Cousin*, we cannot fail to remark on the duplication of the rôles of the two principal characters which Gabriel Garran chose to adopt as a technique to exaggerate the ambiguity of the Millie/Prez situation and to counterpoint the spoken tragedy with the realism of the blues singing:

Pour ne pas faire oeuvre didactique mais travailler à une réalisation dramatique purement scénique, j'ai pris le parti de faire jouer L'Opéra Noir par des Blancs et, d'autre part, de dédoubler le couple principal. Ce qui permettait, à la fois, de jouer la convention réaliste de la comédie musicale avec une chanteuse noire et un trompettiste blanc et d'exprimer le côté tragique avec le couple de comédiens blancs. De là, une série de miroirs, de transferts, de croisements, de façon à créer une sorte de jeu sur le racisme pour susciter une certaine ambiguïté. Pour que le public blanc puisse se voir aussi dans une situation de discriminé.<sup>16</sup>

The programme notes to the first production reveal that Garran had considered that to use white actors and black musicians would be to falsify the racialist conflict and to oversimplify the problems that *Cousin* wanted to dramatise in the particular situations of Prez and Millie. And yet the author had specifically requested that the music and the dialogue should form a whole. By duplicating the rôles of Prez and Millie, therefore, Garran succeeded both in overcoming the problem of separating black and white on stage - the jazz orchestra was also located on the stage - and in uniting the two genres of music and drama:

Dans cette tentative d'intégrer la parole à la musique, la partie dramatique n'est pas le reflet exact de la partie chantée. Transposer le passage d'un langage à un autre, c'est approfondir le sens de l'oeuvre. Le problème de la discrimination entre noirs et blancs dépasse la convention épidermique.<sup>17</sup>

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16. Nicole Zand, Le Monde, 13-2-1967.

17. Catherine Monnot, Programme notes for the Aubervilliers première of L'Opéra Noir.

Unfortunately for Garran - and for Cousin too - , this duplication of rôles had mixed results and some critics found that it was confusing and detracted from the unity of the production:

[Garran] a compliqué inutilement les choses en choississant Mlle Moretti qui est blanche pour nous prouver que la question de peau n'a pas d'importance.<sup>18</sup>

Le dédoublement inutile de chacun des deux protagonistes ajoute à la confusion.<sup>19</sup>

To be fair to Cousin himself, however, we must see the play as a whole and those critics who have spoken scathingly of the work have, as has been seen, concentrated too frequently on the poverty of the text without taking regard for the work as an opera, consisting of a libretto, a score, and a choreography. It would be equally absurd to subdivide a known opera into its component parts and demolish each one by one. Just criticism of operatic works of art demands an appreciation of their combined elements and their interrelationship and total effect upon the audience. For a clearer and more comprehensive view of such effects, we may turn to other critics.

Ross Chambers, for instance, recognises the pure limitations of the text alone:

Disconcertingly empty and even naïve, until one realises that it is quite literally a libretto, calling for music.<sup>20</sup>

Gabriel Garran had already made a similar reference to the text prior to the performance itself:

Entre le texte écrit et la pièce actuelle il y a une grande différence. J'ai voulu échapper dès le départ à la littérature et mettre en avant l'aspect visuel de l'oeuvre. La pièce est devenue un scénario.<sup>21</sup>

18. Jacqueline Cartier, France-Soir, 15-2-1967.

19. Jean Paget, Combat, 15-4-1967.

20. Ross Chambers, Meanjin, November 1963.

21. Andrée Turquetit, Combat, 11-2-1967.

Enthusiasm about the play came from various sources. Locally, there was undoubtedly an appeal for the production. Garran had remembered that there had been "de très nombreux jeunes ouvriers et lycéens" at the theatre<sup>22</sup> and the critic of the Nouvel Observateur of the Isère department mentions that "chaque représentation est accueillie avec enthousiasme par le public de la banlieue parisienne"<sup>23</sup>. Claude Espérandieu, of Le Dauphiné Libéré, also gave the play a warm reception:

Contre le racisme, Gabriel Cousin a écrit un des plaidoyers les plus convaincants qui puissent être, car plus qu'un plaidoyer, l'Opéra Noir est une oeuvre d'art, riche d'un lyrisme et d'une poésie qui transparaissent à chaque page du livre et nous le rendent plus attachant. Gabriel Cousin apporte quelque chose de nouveau au théâtre.<sup>24</sup>

This was no short-lived local success for Gabriel Cousin, however, as André de Baecque's remarks show:

Nous déplorons ces critiques qui ont condamné sans nuance ce spectacle, qui ont dans un cas précis, entravé son exploitation en tournée. Si ces mêmes critiques étaient revenus à Aubervilliers quinze jours ou un mois après la générale, ils auraient pu constater combien les spectateurs populaires étaient sensibles à la représentation d'une oeuvre dont les beautés et l'ambition sont évidentes.<sup>25</sup>

De Baecque's specific reference to "spectateurs populaires" gives some indication of the value of Cousin's work within the new decentralisation movement. The new subsidised theatres, principally outside Paris, clearly considered such social drama to be an attractive and stimulating influence on the public which they were providing for; the 'Boulevard-minded' critics

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22. Entretien avec Gabriel Garran, Travail Théâtral, 1971.

23. Interview avec Gabriel Cousin, Le Nouvel Observateur-Isère, 15-3-1967.

24. Claude Espérandieu, Le Dauphiné Libéré, novembre 1963.

25. André de Baecque, Tréteaux 67, avril 1967, no.1.

of Paris remained largely out of touch with these audiences, for whom the form - a multi-media approach to drama - , and the content - a topical social question - of L'Opéra Noir was excellent material.

Abroad, too, the play received critical acclaim:

L'évocation de ce drame est d'un réalisme poignant; Gabriel Cousin ne tombe ni dans le poncif politique ni dans le pathos.<sup>26</sup>

More significant still is the testimony of the journal Présence Africaine, written before the world première of the play, and therefore based solely on a reading of the text:

Le mérite essentiel de l'Opéra Noir est celui d'imposer au lecteur la conviction que le drame, dont le frisson profond est si habilement communiqué, est réellement vécu de l'intérieur, qu'il s'agit de sentiments nègres éprouvés par un nègre.<sup>27</sup>

The play has therefore a twofold impact: first, on popular audiences in the French provinces, who accept it as a statement of the racial problems it exposes and who appreciate the scenic, as well as dramatic, treatment it uses; second, on black audiences, whose feelings it has reached by vividly expressing their dilemma and their tragedy. Nowhere is this acclaim more forthright than in the introduction to the published play itself - in the words of John Howard Griffin. Griffin, who came from a wealthy and liberal-minded family in the Southern States of the U.S.A., had become blind during the Second World War and he had remained in that condition for eleven years. During that time, he realised that no blind person can distinguish black from white and concluded therefore that the racial problem was an abuse of the gift of sight. After regaining his own sight, he had himself transformed into a negro in order to be able to experience the fate of negroes. The identical experiment

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26. Marginales, Bruxelles, 1967.

27. Guy de Bosschere, Présence Africaine, mars 1964.

was carried out by Mezz Mezzrow in prison on Riker's Island in 1940 in order to gain the opportunity of playing jazz with his black fellow-inmates. Griffin relived these experiences in reading Cousin's L'Opéra Noir and he concludes from it:

Je fus donc très étonné de voir qu'un Français, Gabriel Cousin, ait pu créer, par l'alchimie de l'art, un Opéra Noir absolument authentique - qu'il ait pu, en quelque sorte, entrer dans la peau d'un Noir américain et découvrir toutes les nuances, même les plus horribles, qui sont généralement inconnues des Blancs bien qu'ils créent les conditions qui les provoquent.....La preuve de la vérité remarquable de cet ouvrage, c'est que n'importe quel Noir américain y verrait l'exposé authentique de l'essence même de son expérience, tandis que la plupart des Blancs américains le trouveraient faux et insultant - ou, au mieux, un récit qui les gênerait, comme une invraisemblable histoire dramatique pourrait le faire. Ils ont tort, naturellement. M. Cousin a raison. 28

If authenticity of detail lends L'Opéra Noir its polemic force, the balance of its component parts within the whole spectacle produces its scenic brilliance.

Pour la construction, j'ai utilisé - comme pour mes autres pièces - le découpage cinématographique en séquences qui, d'ailleurs, va très bien avec la musique de jazz. D'une part, la division en tableau - eux-mêmes constitués d'un enchaînement de multiples séquences, - d'autre part, l'utilisation de nombreux lieux scéniques différents: prison, boîte de nuit, rue, garage, etc...et du déroulement dans le temps sans préoccupation de logique historique. Ces deux influences, cinéma et jazz, ont déterminé ma forme d'écriture. De même que le cinéma par quelques images peut situer des personnages et traverser le temps ou l'espace à l'aide de raccourcis fulgurants, de même pour le jazz, où un 'chorus', une 'citation', un 'blues', un 'riff' donnent un rythme, amènent des répétitions, j'ai utilisé souvent une construction en 'flashes', en raccourcis, en mouvement. 29

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28. Gabriel Cousin, Théâtre I, Gallimard, 1963, p.142.

29. G.Cousin, Présentation de L'Opéra Noir, 19 janvier 1967  
(notes lent to me by Gabriel Cousin)

The accomplishment of a successful amalgamation of all these arts was due in part to the collective efforts of the production team; this novel emphasis on collective creation typified the new approach to dramatic writing and production in the nineteen-sixties, which led to a re-definition of popular theatre itself.

Gabriel Cousin nous permettait d'intégrer la musique à la parole et d'élaborer une nouvelle écriture scénique, plus proche de la notion de 'jeu' et de 'spectacle' que d'un théâtre fondé essentiellement sur le texte.<sup>30</sup>

L'Opéra Noir represents, above all, the changeover from literary theatre to experimental drama which became a permanent ingredient of the repertoires of the new decentralised theatres.

Cousin's literary world is not exempt from a certain intended 'bizarrerie' and extremism, but one is certain that he has created a passionate, honest work with novel and ambitious means. His attempt places his theatre in the age of victorious progressive ideas, of technical revolution, and of great changes in artistic taste.<sup>31</sup>

(g) Vivre en 1968

Gabriel Cousin's "tentative de théâtre mobile par cheminement dans la rue" was France's first experiment in street theatre. It took place on Saturday 27th. July 1968 in the town of Châtillon-sur-Chalaronne (Ain) and was presented by the Centre Culturel des Dombes and Les Stages Jeunesse et Sports. Châtillon is a small town of approximately three thousand inhabitants; it is situated in a peaceful rural setting and the major source of employment is the pharmaceutical industry. It has won awards as a 'village fleuri' and is proud of its association with Saint Vincent de Paul who set up a mission in the town in the seventeenth century and whose memory is evoked each year in the middle of July by some form of religious celebration.

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30. Catherine Monnot, Programme notes for L'Opéra Noir.

31. Preface to Hungarian State edition of L'Opéra Noir, Budapest, 1966. (trans. into French: Judith Sancto)

Coincidentally, Cousin's attempt to "provoquer le public sur les grands problèmes que l'homme affronte dans le monde d'aujourd'hui" which he began in April 1968, eventually took place just one month after the principal European events of that year: the student revolution in Paris, and the Russian invasion of Czechoslovakia, both of which had dominated the news during May and June.

Vivre en 1968, which consists of eleven 'séquences', was performed in the manner of the Stations of the Cross at twelve separate sites throughout the town. The details of this innovatory production, its genesis, and other supplementary notes were published in 1969 in a special number of Art et Education, a quarterly revue of the Association Régionale d'Education Populaire produced under the aegis of the Service Académique de la Jeunesse et des Sports de Lyon. The collective production was by Claude Decaillet (choreography), Claude Dedieu (masks and mime), Bernadette Lange, Jean Masse, Madeleine Sobzack and Michel Véricel. The musical director was Guy de Fatto and the overall direction was by Gérard Maré. The production began at 9 p.m. and lasted for nearly two and a half hours; it attracted some six hundred spectators or a fifth of the population of Châtillon and surrounding villages.

A collective production of Vivre en 1968 was inevitable from the start: the conception of the whole entertainment was itself the fusion of various elements in the mind of Gérard Maré, who had previously collaborated with the musician Guy de Fatto in quasi-religious celebrations called 'Gospelnight' in Châtillon-sur-Chalaronne. Maré's chance encounter with Cousin's Cancer sur la Terre at the International Student Drama Festival at Nancy in 1967 persuaded him to alter the shape of the Châtillon celebration to encompass a more comprehensive entertainment in the open air. He had been equally influenced by the coursework of a group at Vaison (in Vaucluse) studying the creative and educational possibilities of integrating an audience with dramatic action. Their 'Stage de Création Collective et de Recherche Pluridisciplinaire' had led them to find a new formula for dramatic expression - their enthusiasm



in this direction being fuelled no doubt by the 'événements de mai'. In 1968 too, the Bread and Puppet Theater from America had made a great impact on theatre philosophy in Paris and in the provinces and its visit to the Festival de Nancy that year was a further influential factor in the thinking of Gérard Maré and Gabriel Cousin. For his part, Cousin was given a specific task and a limited period in which to accomplish it: from the basis of Cancer sur la Terre, of which the short play La Descente sur Recife remained intact and became the third sequence of the whole performance, he devised a mobile presentation on the broader theme of world problems facing Man today. The action was to include the biography of Saint Vincent de Paul and, processing through the streets by way of the medieval gate to the town, the seventeenth-century covered market-place, the Ursuline convent, and the site of the old castle, it was to finish in the Eglise Saint-André. Cousin had little time to write the text: the scheme of the action had been finalised on 23rd. May; he wrote concentratedly for ten days in June, and rehearsals with the thirty-five actors, dancers and singers lasted a month in June and July. Cousin produced more suggestions than were necessary, in order that a selection might be made by the producer from the various improvisations tried out by the actors based on these proposals.

The action of the play was accompanied throughout by singing and dancing; as the play progressed through the streets, it was heralded by a small orchestra - for this, Cousin suggested a drum, a flute, a trumpet, and an accordion - and by torch-bearers, who provided a link between the actors and the public by giving them guidance on the action of the play or even conversing with them about it.

The Prologue, First and Second Sequences took place by the Porte de Villars at the entrance to the town. The prologue reminded the inhabitants of Châtillon of the violence in the world outside their own peaceful existence, and of the expectations of men in other such countries; the coming of some form of saviour is part of that expectation and was exemplified by

some words taken from the Bible, of Marx, and even from Samuel Beckett's Waiting for Godot. At this point, Saint Vincent de Paul was introduced into the theme, calling upon the people of Châtillon to awaken from their complacency and become aware of the world's evils. Actors dressed in monks' cowls and carrying banners proclaimed the areas of the world where peace and liberty are lacking. The inclusion of Biafra, the Congo, and Egypt in this 'sequence' reminded the onlookers of contemporary problems. In this respect, any future performance of this play may clearly be updated to include references to current regions of political or social unrest. To contrast with this appeal to the consciences of the spectators, Cousin spelled out the tragic paradoxes inherent in so-called civilised Western society: he cited the cases of measures taken by Swedish authorities to combat boredom in society, of the social ostracism felt by Americans who do not possess two cars in their families, and, in France itself, of the dangers of gas in the village of Arance in the Béarn where a factory was in imminent danger of exploding. Overconsumption of food and drink was mimed satirically to emphasise the anomaly of the recent destruction of hundreds of tons of food in Montpellier. Similarly, a contrast was drawn between the humming of modern household machinery and the pressing need to listen to the simple heartbeat of those underprivileged people "qui restent dans la nuit".

The effects of these contrasts were enhanced by having the actors drop to the ground as the death tolls of wars and tortures were announced for each country; as the players advanced along the street, the spectators were thus obliged to walk over their bodies, often to be confronted by the menacing lines of more actors holding banners. The resemblance with a real demonstration was international and Cousin gave this account of their effect:

Dans la séquence de sensibilisation à la violence dans notre monde, une ligne de comédiens masqués portant sur des pancartes le nom des pays où sévit la guerre, barrent la rue devant le public. A l'annonce en voix off, du nombre de morts, le comédien tombe avec sa pancarte. Le public n'osait

plus avancer et l'on a pu entendre: "ils sont morts? On va les emmener?"<sup>1</sup>

The short Second Sequence introduced the theme of La Descente sur Recife by the Danse du Taureau and the Chanson du Boeuf from that play, while the actors moved slowly towards the centre of Les Halles of Châtillon in the middle of the town. There, a grotesque metal figure surrounded by lighted torches hung from the roof, symbolising power in all its forms. Near this, on a raised platform, the Third Sequence - La Descente sur Recife - took place. During the final burial procession of the play, which transported the action of Vivre en 1968 to its next location, some of the spectators were seen to be weeping.

The Fourth Sequence took place in Châtillon in front of the house of Saint Vincent de Paul. Here, the great famines of the world were evoked, accompanied by drumrolls and groaning by the actors, who circulated among the crowd. The sequence ended with a quote from Steinbeck's Grapes of Wrath, expressing the social crime of withholding food resources from those most in need.

As the action moved again to the next location, the Fifth Sequence included a song of the silkworkers of Lyon protesting that they provide the Church and Government with fine robes while they themselves have not even a shirt to cover their backs. Such exploitation is an evil, the play suggests, and affects workers like a plague of locusts; other evils are equated with other animals:

Les scorpions du racisme, l'araignée de la peur,  
la hyène du fascisme, le serpent du pouvoir.<sup>2</sup>

But the voice of protest is being raised: "l'aveugle violence à tête de casque, au masque de haine". Despite the assassination of John and Robert Kennedy and of Martin Luther King who fought such evils as racial inequality and political violence, the time will come when men will learn to co-exist.

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1. Art et Education, Lyon, nos. 19-20, 1969, p.15.

2. ibid. p.65.

The Sixth Sequence was spoken to the rhythm of a baseball match, with the actors delivering their lines as they passed a ball from one to another, interspersed with the cries of their supporters. The theme here is American imperialism over the countries of South America through economic exploitation and domination. As internal revolution grows in the underdeveloped countries, a human explosion occurs, and now the actors, once grouped, hurled themselves outwards and to the ground, resembling the fragments of a bomb. Anti-americanism runs high at this point in the play as an extract from Famine 1975 by the Paddock brothers is spoken by one actress: American concern in its economic dealings is purely selfish - one of self-survival, conserving its privileges and its own economic stability.

The Seventh Sequence portrayed India and its landowning maharajas who use religious fear to subjugate their employees: the people are too timorous to take possession of land that they have a legal right to, for fear of the consequences taught to them by the philosophy of the transmigration of souls. The factual testimony of this state of affairs was given at the Rencontres Internationales de la Faim in Geneva. The same text, and the following playlet - Le Drame de la Mousson - form part of Cancer sur la Terre. In Vivre en 1968, Cousin added to this playlet an accompaniment by the Indian sitar-player, Ravi Shankar, which may simply be mimed in silence or else where dialogue may be improvised, according to the actors' preferences. No dialogue is actually written for this play, but an outline of the movements and gestures to be used provide sufficient explanation of the story.

As the play moved on through the streets, so the action moved from India to South America. The Eighth Sequence recounted the genocide of the original Brazilian Indians in Amazonia: one group of actors represented capitalist society, enjoying an evening in a night club listening to jazz, the other group were Indians living in primitive simplicity and dancing and singing to the flute. A sadistic scene followed, in which the capitalists intimidated the Indians, offered them drink to weaken them, then shot them dead. This scene was in the style of the Bread and Puppet Theater's representation of Vietnam

put on at the Festival de Nancy.

Simulated bomb explosions formed the transition to the next Sequence which demonstrated the potential and actual horrors of atomic warfare; examples were taken from contemporary events: the crash of an American bomber in Spain resulting in radioactive contamination of the region, the explosion of another bomber in Greenland, the disappearance of a nuclear submarine under the Atlantic. Each text was repeated to lend force to the argument that spending on weapons of destruction makes nonsense of national and international budgets which ought to be concentrating their efforts to create a more equal distribution of the world's food resources. This stage of the play was performed as the actors moved through the streets and posters displayed the identical figures to those mentioned in the statistics of the text, thus reinforcing their significance visually to the participants of the action.

The Tenth Sequence took place outside the church; it summarised the imminent tragedies of the world in statistical form: the overpopulation of underdeveloped countries, racial inequality, social and political injustices in many countries, including France. In Brechtian manner, slide projections presented the texts spoken by an unseen actor. The sequence ended with a balletic form of a play showing the power struggles of three different ethnic groups, the whole scene dominated by one actor brandishing a whip. The performance ended with a simulation of total global destruction, and all the actors paused for meditation until, from inside the Church, a voice proclaimed:

Qui veut gagner sa vie la perdra,  
Qui veut perdre sa vie la gagnera.<sup>3</sup>

A negro-spiritual began as the whole cast processed into the church, where the Eleventh and final Sequence took place.

This sequence incorporated the Mahalia Jackson spiritual 'In the Upper Room', a biblical appeal for succour to the needy, a call for the end of public complacency towards the issues presented in the play, and a poem by Gabriel Cousin, entitled

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3. *ibid.* p.85.

'La Folie', which repeats the theme of Man's scientific madness causing his slow destruction. A second version of this poem appeared in his later collection Au Milieu du Fleuve.

The performance of Vivre en 1968 finished at the foot of the altar: during the singing of another negro spiritual, slides were projected on the walls of the nave, and the actors rose from their prone positions of the previous scene to walk steadily and strongly to the altar. This last scene is one of exaltation; it is a plea for strength to accomplish the tasks necessary to combat the evils of the world. It is an optimistic and encouraging ending, expressing hope for the causes outlined in the play itself. The programme of Vivre en 1968 echoed this sentiment:

En exaltant le bonheur de l'homme, en dénonçant ce qui provoque son malheur, pourrons-nous ce soir du 27 juillet, trouver un grand élan d'amitié universelle, signe de paix, de dialogue et de compréhension.<sup>4</sup>

The impossibility of estimating in advance the number of people likely to participate in this large-scale 'happening' was the cause of some considerable apprehension among the producers. It is understandable, therefore, that the presence of perhaps three or four times the number expected led to many unforeseen technical difficulties - in particular, the sound and lighting requirements and the public's ability to see the whole performance without difficulty. Gérard Maré remarks on this point in his foreword to the printed edition of Vivre en 1968:

A Châtillon, cette participation a été extraordinaire dès le départ où pourtant l'importance du public annihilait les efforts d'une sonorisation maigrelette et envahissait l'espace prévue pour le déroulement de l'action dramatique.<sup>5</sup>

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4. Programme for Vivre en 1968.

5. Art et Education, p.4.

Nevertheless, both Maré and Cousin express their entire satisfaction with the result, and the press reports support the view that the public also found the performance exciting and provocative.

Le public fut tantôt émerveillé, épaté, transporté, tantôt frappé, outré.<sup>6</sup>

Nous avons, au cours de cette apothéose, vécu des moments exaltants.<sup>7</sup>

The hopes of Maré and Cousin were clearly exceeded:

La qualité d'attention, la fluidité des déplacements vers les divers lieux de la manifestation, l'atmosphère de silence habitée obtenue aussi bien sur les places publiques que dans l'église Saint André, les remous suscités par le contenu ont dépassé les pronostics les plus optimistes.<sup>8</sup>

L'impact sur la population, certains recevant comme une révélation, d'autres ne supportant pas et même organisant une pétition contre. Tous ont été provoqués au point d'être concernés et non plus consommateurs. Ce spectacle était le leur.<sup>9</sup>

Success can be counted by the number of spectators leaving or joining such an event as Vivre en 1968, since there is no obligation in street theatre to remain as a participant, nor to pursue one's interest in the subject of the piece. The fact that the play appeared to gather momentum during its performance is evident from the increase in the number of onlookers and from their spontaneous reactions to various episodes in the play, both of which are reported by Cousin in his introduction to the published edition. The play's impact was equally strong on outsiders: "C'est parmi vous que j'ai vécu l'événement théâtral de l'année" stated Henry Delmas, returning to Paris after the Avignon Festival, and even detractors admitted that the impression left by this performance was by no means negligible:

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6. Trévoux-Libre, 9-8-1968.

7. Voix de l'Ain, 9-8-1968.

8. Art et Education, p.4.

9. ibid. p.14.

On peut ne pas aimer cette expression moderniste d'un idéal éternel, mais ce n'en était pas moins un très beau spectacle, auquel il était impossible de rester indifférent.<sup>10</sup>

Claude Garbit, in his long and critically favourable report of Vivre en 1968 in Le Dauphiné Libéré, refers to the play as: "un bouleversant spectacle" and "un déchirant réquisitoire contre la misère de l'homme". For him, the performance evoked the memory of Saint Vincent de Paul who had put himself on the side of the common man in his fight against injustice - even setting himself against the hypocrisies of the contemporary church.

Sous la nef centrale, aux expressions de violence, succédèrent les douces espérances de l'humanité. Des negro-spirituals chantèrent l'espoir de ceux qui souffrent sur tous les continents et, après l'orage, après la révolte, cette mélodie d'apaisement et d'espoir n'avait rien de sacrilège dans ce lieu qui veut rassembler tous les hommes de bonne volonté. Bien au contraire, certains assistants de ce spectacle étrange ont découvert une autre dimension à leur église plus chaude et plus généreuse ce soir-là.<sup>11</sup>

This comment reaches the heart of the matter and is valuable and important for two reasons: first, it reveals the potential of the play as a means of spiritual unification, and secondly, it reflects the medieval nature of the event and thus justifies Cousin's manifest attempt to bring theatre into the reach of all, while at the same time encouraging a 'prise de conscience' of the social and moral ills of our time.

It is remarkable that any play of Cousin's should take place inside a church at all, but his Vivre en 1968 testifies to his own desire to accommodate his works to particular audiences. In this case, tradition demanded that the 'Gospelnight' should have a religious content and import, The play may thus be seen as a medium for uniting a religious ethic with a moral conscience through a common resolution to combat social injustice. It is to the credit of both the author and the

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10. Visages de l'Ain, août 1968.

11. Claude Garbit, Le Dauphiné Libéré, 29-7-1968.



Church authorities that Vivre en 1968 facilitated the discovery of this common ground; the performance thus allowed for a religious as well as a social significance.

The form of Vivre en 1968 closely resembles that of a medieval street play, and, as Cousin points out in his Introduction, it bears the characteristics of a Mystery play, which

...bénéficiait des trois bases nécessaires pour être vivant, populaire et représenter un état de fête vécu pas tous:

- un thème commun, expression d'une pensée, d'une morale partagée par le plus grand nombre, donc religieuse,
- un lieu connu, accessible, ouvert, libre (on peut partir, revenir).
- un public uni idéologiquement, malgré ses différences sociales.<sup>12</sup>

Cousin saw in the Châtillon experiment the opportunity to unite these elements once again, and, in satisfying the modern demands for mass public entertainment and the wishes of the actors themselves to perform a collective creation, he produced a modern version of the Mystery play which reflected the rethinking and revival of new forms of creative expression. The development of society in general, and of the more relaxed attitudes towards artistic expression in particular, allowed Cousin to advance the cause of popular theatre with Vivre en 1968, and in this new historical context, he was able to achieve more successfully the goals originally intended by Copeau for a theatre approaching in form and spirit that of a circus or public festivity.

The results achieved in Châtillon were by no means fortuitous; on the contrary, the structure and content of Vivre en 1963 became the agents of a natural and unconstrained response from the spectators:

La volonté de 'provocation' du spectacle semble avoir été récompensée, car les nombreux spectateurs ont constamment et généreusement réagi. C'est que la réalisation même de l'entreprise, conçue comme un psycho-drame ou un 'happening' géant, les y induisaient naturellement.<sup>13</sup>

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12. Art et Education, p.7.

13. Guy de Bosschère, Esprit, février 1969.

Vivre en 1968 had an equally enthusiastic reception when it was performed indoors, on 13th June 1970, at the Maison des Jeunes et de la Culture at Chenove (Côte d'Or). Described as "un spectacle étonnant" by one critic, and as "offrant un panorama vigoureux des si nombreuses injustices" by another, it brought this appreciation from a third source:

Le théâtre de Cousin bat en brèche le snobisme de tant d'oeuvres contemporaines, à prétentions intellectuelles.<sup>14</sup>

That Cousin writes without any intellectual pretensions and thus reaches 'the man in the street' is a valuable comment to make about this play, for these factors undoubtedly contributed to its success. If Cousin were to be compared with, for example, the German documentary dramatists Rolf Hochhuth and Peter Weiss - whose debt he acknowledges elsewhere - or with his contemporary in France, Armand Gatti, these dramatists may be seen to appeal more to the intelligentsia than Cousin, despite the similarity of form and content of their plays. The comparison is one of degree or depth, however, not of kind: the researched documentation carried out by these three authors for their plays is considerably more detailed than that of Cousin; their dramatic style is more complex than his, but their consequent attraction is limited to a minority audience. By contrast, Cousin retains a simplicity, though not a superficiality, of form and content; his documentation is selective and generally chosen for its statistical or aphoristic value; yet the combination of these two aspects of his work assures him a broader range of the social spectrum for his audiences and, in the case of Vivre en 1968, contributed to the almost unconditional popular success of the work.

(h) La Descente sur Recife

The text of La Descente sur Recife published in 1971 was the product of some drama research work carried out by the Théâtre Universitaire de Rouen on Gabriel Cousin's Le Cycle

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14. Bourgogne Dimanche, juin 1970.

du Crabe, a montage dramatique of about thirty minutes' duration forming part of his Cancer sur la Terre, written and published in 1965.

Le Théâtre Universitaire de Rouen, qui en est à sa deuxième année d'existence, ne s'était initialement proposé, à partir du court texte de Gabriel Cousin, qu'un travail de recherche de langage dramatique, et non la réalisation d'un spectacle achevé. Pour la plupart des membres du groupe, il s'agissait d'une première expérience sérieuse de théâtre, et l'accent était nécessairement mis sur l'acquisition de moyens techniques sans lesquels toutes recherches tournaient court.<sup>1</sup>

Despite the improvisations carried out even at this stage, the basic structure of the original Cousin text remained, and some of the early objections to the play's ending were overruled:

Il resterait à préciser l'idéologie d'un spectacle aussi pessimiste dans ses conclusions: le Théâtre Universitaire de Rouen a été fortement tenté d'apporter dans un montage poétique parallèle, le correctif révolution à ce cycle désespérant de la misère et de la famine. C'était sans doute se donner trop facilement bonne conscience et le groupe a préféré en rester aux constats: ces hommes ne se révoltèrent pas parce qu'ils n'en sont plus capables.<sup>2</sup>

The simple directness of this early version of Le Cycle du Crabe could be summarised thus:

[Cousin] y évoque surtout la fuite des habitants du Sertao, chassés de leur pays par la sécheresse et qui, en quête d'une 'terre promise', découvrent le 'Paradis des Crabes'.<sup>3</sup>

This short version of the play Le Cycle du Crabe is not so much an abbreviation of the story, but merely one aspect of it presented in an emotional fashion. It leaves the spectator to imagine for himself the reasons for the existence of the shanty-towns portrayed in the piece, and the solutions which may be applied to the situation in order to alleviate the hardship they cause.

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1. Armand Dreyfug, programme for production of La Descente sur Recife, Théâtre Universitaire de Rouen, December 1968.

2. *ibid.*

3. *ibid.*

Cependant, s'il s'agit bien d'un "théâtre engagé" par la proposition de prise de conscience du thème, le développement dans cette forme courte ne permet pas de poser les problèmes de l'Amérique Latine. Les personnages sont isolés de tout contexte socio-politique et on ne les voit que s'enliser dans la boue sans aucune perspective ni réaction, contrairement à la version intégrale... C'est le cycle éternel de la vie et de la mort, mais ici tellement raccourci qu'il en devient tragiquement exemplaire.<sup>4</sup>

La Descente sur Recife consists of a Prologue and four scenes; unlike Le Cycle du Crabe, it takes place on one set only, namely, among the shacks of the shanty-town outside Recife on the Pacific coast of north-eastern Brazil. The prologue depicts the flight of refugees from the droughts of the sertão and their journey towards Recife. The rest of the play concerns the experiences of a typical couple, Zeluis and Maria, - who have no child in this short version - as they try to eke out a living in the swamps of the delta outside the town. As in the longer version, they learn from a friendly couple how to survive by catching crabs, their unique source of food; they reminisce nostalgically about their previous existence in the sertão, and they witness the horrifying burial procedure of the dead as they are laid to rest in the very swamps in which they fish and where the crabs come to devour the corpses. They have no occasion to express their hopes, no strength to protest at their treatment - indeed, there are no authority figures in this play - and no leader to encourage them or teach them how to revolt. This play therefore concentrates its action on the pure expression of human misery; the absence of a solution to their problems or of signs of an uprising among the peasants give this version more of an emotional appeal than a political one.

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4. Gabriel Cousin, L'Avant-Scène, no. 469-470, avril 1971, p.84.

However, there is a similar reliance in this condensed version on supplementary audio-visual material to sustain that appeal, and both the brevity of the play and its potential as a vehicle of emotional expression make it an ideal piece for experimental work by young or inexperienced companies to produce:

Nous voulons, à travers un effort de recherche de nouveaux moyens d'expression, nous mettre le plus souvent possible dans la situation de créateurs et non pas seulement faire oeuvre d'imitation... Apprentissage de techniques nouvelles d'expression, création collective, approche du monde d'aujourd'hui: ce triple propos a conduit le Théâtre Universitaire de Rouen à monter [La Descente sur Recife].

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The play formed the central part of Cousin's street theatre creation Vivre en 1968 in July 1968, then after a short tour in Normandy in December 1968 and early 1969, the Rouen university group presented La Descente sur Recife at the Festival International du Théâtre in Nancy in April 1969. Further performances followed by university and other groups in 1969 and 1970, and a major production took place at the Comédie Française on 8th. March 1971 in a series of plays by new authors under the general direction of Pierre Dux. It has since been performed in many countries outside France.

There have probably been as many different interpretations of La Descente sur Recife as performances: the original text, lasting perhaps only a quarter of an hour, has been expanded to a greater or lesser extent by producers; at the Festival de Nancy, it was described as "une création avec plus de 15 personnages, dans un mouvement choral, corporel et vocal, chorégraphie, transe, cris, incantations, chant etc. - durée 1 heure 20". Some companies have presented the play and then followed it by a discussion with the audience; others have played it without décor and thus stressed the universality of the theme; in Teheran, a Persian narrator among the actors explained the action of the play as it was being performed in French.

The Rouen University touring group was highly successful both in its performance of the play and in the presentation of Cousin's basic message:

Ils ont bâti un univers de gestes et de cris...  
brossé une fresque inoubliable, lancé une  
épopée à couper le souffle.<sup>6</sup>

Cousin's play clearly spoke more vehemently for the cause of famine than any number of political speeches or learned books on the subject. In recommending the production, critics spoke of an audience "ému par ce cortège de souffrances, ces visages torturés" and "écrasé, étouffé par le sujet, certes, mais aussi par le jeu scénique de ces acteurs incomparables".

The subsequent production at the Festival de Nancy by the same group attracted the first serious criticism of their handling of Cousin's text; it was suggested that the development of the original text by the addition of vocal, visual, and mimed material - which doubled the playing time of the play - detracted from the simplicity and directness of the work:

On pourrait dire ici que la pauvreté des  
moyens a incité les comédiens de Rouen à  
une illustration corporelle excessive qui  
nuît, je le crains, à la rudesse du constat  
qu'est la pièce sobrement narrative et  
bouleversante par là même, de Gabriel Cousin.<sup>7</sup>

However, this opinion was not shared by other critics who found the treatment of the text effective and moving:

La sobriété de l'émotion transmise efface la  
gêne qu'on aurait pu éprouver à voir mimer  
ce qui s'imite le moins: la faim.<sup>8</sup>

La mise en scène et l'interprétation servent  
parfaitement la sombre beauté du texte: tout  
en haillons, à dominante ocre et blanche, les  
yeux exorbités dévorant le visage, ces ombres  
semblent sorties tout droit d'un tableau de  
Goya.<sup>9</sup>

6. Le Havre, 10 décembre 1968.

7. J.J.Lerrant, Le Progrès, avril 1969.

8. B.Poirot-Delpech, Le Monde, 22 avril 1969.

9. L'Est Républicain, avril 1969.

These comments reflect the subjective nature of the impact of the play on audiences, particularly with respect to their didactic content or emotional appeal. For some, enthusiasts of a Brechtian-style 'epic theatre' generating political antagonisms or, at the least, social awareness, Cousin's work follows in a tradition of moral indignation and a dramatic condemnation of certain attitudes by society; for others, inspired more by the poetry of the sentiments expressed, and captivated by the visual and aural appeal of particular stage techniques, his plays contain the basic attraction of a simple theme demonstrated in a primitive or even pathetic manner befitting its simplicity. Balance is of prime importance in constructing social drama using these methods: the text must not be diminished by the visual or aural effects used to complement it, nor must the acting overbalance the poetic content of the play and overshadow its impact.

Cousin's critics have frequently expressed their dissatisfaction with this potential imbalance of forces: in La Descente sur Recife, in which the didactic element is minimal and the appeal is derived from the poetry of the text itself helped by an overwhelming visual effect of poverty and human degradation, extraneous and superfluous additions - such as mime, dance, or ritualistic movements - might easily upset the play's rhythmic balance. La Descente sur Recife may appear at first to be an ideal play for inciting audience involvement: it is open to technical experimentation, it implores the audience to respond emotionally to the effects of famine, it is not a play requiring intellectual detachment of thought or opinion. Yet this could be a dangerous misconception of its value, because it really requires to objectivise famine, precisely in order to differentiate between the conditions of existence for the inhabitants of the Third World and those of the audience, presumably the wealthier sections of world society. Only by alienating the spectators from the action on stage - true-to-life in its own context - can genuine feelings of social or moral guilt be reinforced.

In this respect, the play is not at all Brechtian as it does not make a direct appeal to the audience, nor do the actors appear to act their rôles - on the contrary, they enter into their characters.

Indeed, La Descente sur Recife provides the best example of the influence of Artaud on Cousin. Artaud's call for a special language of the theatre, "le langage immédiat et physique", and his desire to shock through the use of violence or eroticism expressed in the form of a 'spectacle total' find an outlet in this play. "Là où ça sent la merde, ça sent l'être" explains in a direct fashion the plight of the refugees of La Descente sur Recife and Cousin's portrayal of their wretched existence. Artaud's equation of the force of theatre with the forces of ancient plagues is matched by Cousin's insistence on the "nouveaux mythes" being the true subjects of his theatre - and in La Descente sur Recife, famine is the plague under review. As with ancient myths and as with the plague, says Artaud, theatre is a source of revelation and purification - "il dénoue des conflits, il dégage des forces, il déclenche des possibilités." Cousin is seeking to achieve this too, as the quotation from a programme of this play suggests:

En même temps que le théâtre nous fait respirer à un autre rythme, il nous aide à redevenir un être plus libre, plus disponible, plus sensible et plus en alerte sur notre propre vie, plus critique envers la société et le monde dans lequel nous vivons, provoquant ainsi une prise de conscience.<sup>10</sup>

The subject-matter of La Descente sur Recife, the degradation of Man by appalling living conditions which are unalleviated by an unconcerned society, until Man himself begins to resemble the crabs infesting the area, is probably sufficient to provoke moral indignation: the very resemblance between Man and crab is abhorrent. Yet any sense of incipient revolt among those affected by these conditions is absent in this play; in Le Cycle du Crabe, however, what can distinguish Man from crab - the power to change the situation in which he finds himself -

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10. Programme for production by T.U.R. at La Maison de la Culture du Havre, 20 juin, 1969.



is not only hinted at, but is the hidden force behind the action. If there are such forces behind the characters in La Descente sur Recife, they take the form of the power of memory to evoke better times, or the strength of the imagination to distinguish between the luxurious living conditions of the rich compared with the degenerate poverty of the poor. The most poignant moments of the play occur during scenes of reminiscence: Maria and Zeluis recalling the lush vegetation and opulent mansions of the sertão, for example, or La Femme describing the traffic-filled streets and smart stone pavements of Recife, "le paradis des riches". Such contrasts provide the dramatic and emotional climaxes of this piece.

The question of the balance of the play is important here too: the inhabitants of the shanty-town are not to be seen suffering a humiliation or social defeat. Their fortitude stems from their ability to enjoy traditional singing and dancing, and this lifts them above tragedy. Yet at the same time, their inner passion for living sustained by song and dance must not be seen to compensate totally for their plight: the play's delicate balance rests on the portrayal of their condition, while avoiding the suggestion of unremitting tragedy. The director of a production of La Descente sur Recife performed in 1970 touched on this problem:

Il s'agit d'une pièce sur les pauvres, entre autres thèmes, les pauvres qui vivent et souffrent, et voient les gens riches: ils souffrent, mais ils ne sont pas tristes; les gens pauvres ne sont pas tristes: c'est leur situation qui est dramatique; ils n'ont pas le temps de faire de la sensiblerie. Ils ont souvent une très grande sensibilité, mais elle ne transparait pas par des mines tragiques. Ils chantent et ils dansent leur misère et leur espoir de la voir finir; dans un sens, leur danse est aussi un combat contre la misère. 11

If the play was reasonably favourably received in the provinces and attracted some interest and attention from the

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11. Michel Dibilio, Le Diodon (mensuel de la Maison pour Tous), Fontaine, (Isère), 15-4-1970.

public, the very opposite was the case at the Comédie Française in 1971. The critics almost unanimously rejected it as monotonous, turgid, and melodramatic. It was thought to be poor material for drama: "tristement inutile du point de vue du théâtre", "cette piécette n'a rien à voir avec le théâtre", "je soupçonne la misère et la faim de n'avoir rien à faire avec la littérature" were typical comments. Others disliked Cousin's phraseology which they found inappropriate to the subject which, according to them, called for a more marked sense of indignation through a simplicity and boldness of language:

Des phrases du style 'les barbelés de la soif' griffent mes lèvres et ne sont pas de celles qui vont droit au coeur. Je ne doute pas de la sincérité de Gabriel Cousin; je doute de la vertu de sa poésie.<sup>12</sup>

This suggestion that the play is not sufficiently incisive to arouse a sense of social or political animosity, nor even disturbing enough to excite our moral consciences, reveals an intellectual superciliousness on the part of Paris critics. However, this discrepancy between the subject-matter of the play and means used to express it may have been attributable to inelegant production techniques. One critic accounted for the play's lack of impact by blaming the Comédie Française for attempting to create a moralistic piece from La Descente:

Il y a une inadéquation totale entre le cadre et le sujet. Et trop souvent un style 'Comédie Française' dans tout ce que cela peut signifier de solennel et de pompeux vient étouffer une pièce qu'on aurait mieux reçue dans un style plus simple. C'est le cas de La Descente sur Recife: l'oeuvre de Cousin est un cri, un cri poussé par un peuple qui meurt de faim, nous devons être arrachés à notre confort intellectuel pour le recevoir. Or, dans la mise en scène de Jacques Destoop, c'est surtout l'académisme qui nous a frappés, comme une volonté de rendre conformiste et édifiante une pièce où transparait la révolte et la misère d'un monde.<sup>13</sup>

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12. Pierre Marcabru, France-Soir, 10-3-1971.

13. Colette Cosnier, Europe (juillet 1971), p.220.

Simplicity of language and style was interpreted by one critic as mere mawkish sentiment:

Empêtré dans sa vision lyrique, le dramaturge nous sert un long soliloque, là où l'on espérait les tambours retentissants des ventres creux, qu'ils soient du Brésil ou d'ailleurs. Le résultat? Pris au piège des mots, le spectateur oublie qu'il s'agit d'hommes affamés et s'en va, sa bonne conscience aussi remplie que sa bedaine de consommateur, jurant tout au plus qu'il ne mangera pas de crabes de longtemps, puisque ceux-ci se repaissent de charogne!<sup>14</sup>

This dissatisfaction with the lyricism of La Descente sur Recife smacks of a subconscious resentment by the capital's dramatic critics who are unable to concede that social drama is authentic unless it derives from an original source in both matter and expression. Cousin, according to some critics, has thus unwittingly alienated himself from the problems of South America by virtue of his own ethnic heritage and the consequent modes of expression it has engendered in him.

Cette tragédie de la faim inexorable souffre d'être décrite du dehors à l'aide de bons sentiments. Seules ses victimes peuvent en parler de façon vraiment présente et révoltante, comme naguère à Nancy une simple troupe universitaire de São-Paolo.<sup>15</sup>

This view would seem to make nonsense of the attempts by any politically committed dramatist to educate his own compatriots in the problems of other societies. In addition, however, it draws attention to the degree of intercultural dissociation which confronts an author such as Gabriel Cousin, and which can create an undesired division between the writer and his subject. It is remarkable how Cousin, previously acclaimed for his empathy with the causes of the American Negro in L'Opéra Noir and of the Japanese in Le Drame du Fukuryu-Marû, aroused such antipathy among critics with his La Descente sur Recife. The nature of the quarrel here goes deeper, however, for it strikes at the heart of his writing - at the poetic expression that he chooses to employ.

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14. La Croix, 21-3-1971.

15. B.Poirot-Delpech, Le Monde, 18-3-1971.

What may justifiably be said of Cousin's writing in this play is that it is known to be based on actual events and genuine folk expressions and that this alone relates it to a specific community and its hardships. Cousin may be criticised for his particular exploitation of the theme of hunger in La Descente sur Recife, but the diversity of its form - song, dance, dialogue, chant - and the consequent latitude of interpretation allowed by the author to producers, must endow the play with a resilience and dramatic potential unique in his repertoire.

(i) Le Cycle du Crabe

Gabriel Cousin's longest and most complex play to date underwent a long period of gestation from its conception in 1962 to its stage birth in 1975. During that time, it was written and re-written in several forms, played partly or wholly by various troupes in many different circumstances, and survived the financial and political vagaries of the French theatre scene since the events of 1968. Of its conception, Cousin has written:

C'est en 1962 qu'alerté par une séquence de '5 Colonnes à la Une' j'appris l'existence de ce bidonville particulier, que Josué de Castro a dénommé sociologiquement le 'Cycle du Crabe'.  
 Quelque temps après Paris-Match en publiait un reportage.<sup>1</sup>

Cousin was completing his Le Voyage de derrière la Montagne at this time and he asked Josué de Castro to write the preface for it. This request was carried out in October 1964. By that time, Cousin, immersed in the documentation for yet another play on the theme of hunger, collated the material he had read, made certain additions of his own, and had it published in 1965 in Grenoble as the 'montage-spectacle' Cancer sur la Terre. The playlet which formed a constituent part of this document later became known as La Descente sur Recife, the thirty-minute piece which was also incorporated into the street-theatre presentation Vivre en 1968.

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1. Gabriel Cousin, Le Cycle du Crabe, Gallimard, 1969, p.7.

Cousin began writing the extended version of this playlet in 1965, and although he did not complete it until April 1968, most of the writing had been finished the previous year. Together with the playscript, Cousin produced a considerable amount of documentation of the themes of famine, the rôle of the Church in Latin America, South American politics in general, and the revolution in Brazil in particular. In 1968, he added an Introduction and Notes on the composition of the play, and a guide to its eventual production and performance. The complete manuscript was shown to Jacques Lemarchand who had it published by Gallimard in 1969, under the title Le Cycle du Crabe.

Before its publication, Le Cycle du Crabe had been the subject of a public playreading by three actors of L'Action Culturelle at the Maison de la Culture in Mâcon on 19th. November 1968. It was recorded and broadcast on France-Culture the same year. Cousin had spent some time preparing a performance of the play with Jean-Marie Serreau in February 1969, but the latter's illness and eventual death in 1973 caused these plans to be abandoned. Another opportunity presented itself when Jean Durozier contacted Cousin in October 1973 with a view to a production of the play by his Théâtre Populaire Occitan. Durozier suggested certain modifications to the text without destroying the sense of poetry inherent in the wretched existence of the Latin-American poor, nor altering the presentation of the problem of the Brazilian North-East. The Théâtre Populaire Occitan, a professional company of less than a dozen actors, supplemented for this play with eight black actors recruited in Paris, was responsible for the première of Le Cycle du Crabe at the Maison de Gascogne in Auch (Gers) on April 24th. 1975. The same company subsequently took the play on tour in the South of France, including in their itinerary a performance at the Maison de la Culture in Grenoble, Cousin's home town, on June 28th. 1975.

Both the composition and the production of the play were collective creations. Josué de Castro's work had centred

exclusively around the dreadful human problem of famine which he had known as a child in the North-Eastern region of Brazil: he had written Géographie de la Faim! La Faim au Brésil (Editions Ouvrières, 1949), Géopolitique de la Faim (Editions Ouvrières, 1952), Nord-Est du Brésil (Le Seuil, 1965), and had made a documentary film called Terre Sèche. The principal source of information which de Castro allowed Cousin to work from was an unpublished manuscript with the title Des Hommes et des Crabes. Cousin gives this account of the help he received from de Castro:

Josué de Castro, après avoir écrit la préface pour Le Voyage de derrière la Montagne, me proposa un thème: il s'agissait du 'Cycle du Crabe'. Josué de Castro venait de provoquer le phénomène de la création. Je le remercie chaleureusement pour sa confiance et son amitié. Nous avons alors commencé à travailler ensemble, et j'ai bénéficié d'une importante documentation (photos, dessins, musique, notes et explications de sa bouche même), et particulièrement de son remarquable roman-document Des Hommes et des Crabes dans lequel il a rassemblé les faits qui ont marqué son enfance, proche de ce bidonville.<sup>2</sup>

De Castro's work was the epic narrative of a starving tribe who found themselves successively victims of drought, exploitation, river-flooding, and an abortive revolution. This story, recounted by a sociologist, recalls exactly the circumstances and the nature of the story of the Ik, the Ugandan tribe studied by the British anthropologist Turnbull and subsequently the subject of a drama by Peter Brook in Paris entitled Les Iks, which later transferred to London under the title of The Ik. The narrative style of both The Ik and Le Cycle du Crabe is interestingly similar: both have their source in prose accounts by anthropologists, and both relate in chronicle form the fortunes of a small peasant community harassed by their government. De Castro's work, which he called a 'roman-document', became in Cousin's hands a piece of 'roman-théâtre'.

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2. *ibid.*, p.8.

J'ai appelé cette pièce 'roman-théâtre' parce qu'elle se présente comme le roman de certains personnages. Je souhaite qu'on la lise comme un roman et que, créée au théâtre - dans une forme et un rythme cinématographique - on la regarde et l'entende comme une chronique dramatique, témoignage de mon temps.<sup>3</sup>

The amount of material available on the subject of famine and from Josué de Castro in particular, was so voluminous that Cousin's first draft of the play consisted of forty-seven tableaux. It was for this reason that he undertook to produce the short version, namely La Descente sur Recife, based on the first part of the play only. This would facilitate a production by groups interested in working from a basic text and being allowed to elaborate on their style of acting, the numbers in the cast, or stage effects.

The shorter version naturally omits much of the detail of the proposed Le Cycle du Crabe; it also avoids the revolutionary slant in the story and so is less didactic. Of the political and social aspects of the longer version, Cousin has stated:

Il m'est apparu difficile de ne parler que de la vie marécageuse de ces hommes, sans 'ouvrir' sur les multiples incidences sociales, sans évoquer les problèmes politiques et économiques, sans mettre en scène l'espoir, le rêve, la révolte, l'amour de cette population. J'ai pour cela utilisé le leitmotiv - tant sur le plan des scènes que sur celui du langage - dans la fuite devant la sécheresse, comme dans l'enlèvement dans le marais, telle la vie insupportable de ce bidonville.<sup>4</sup>

The totality of these elements - what Cousin has called the 'fresque volumineuse' - is a unique feature of this play and differentiates it from his previous work. His principal task was clearly to integrate the various themes of the play to form a credible and composite whole, against the realistic background of life in Recife as it was experienced by the refugees from the sertão, "le polygone de la sécheresse et de la faim". Cousin envisaged a playing time of three to

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3. *ibid.*, p.10.

4. *ibid.*, p.8.

three and a half hours, depending on the production, and despite the enormity of the task before him, he evidently derived great enthusiasm and excitement from the writing:

[Josué de Castro et moi] eûmes de longs entretiens où il me parlait du Brésil et tout particulièrement du Nord-Est. Nous avons tenu ensemble à ce qu'il suive mon travail d'écriture. Sur le plan formel et du langage, nous voulions l'un et l'autre échapper au piège du folklore et de l'exotisme. Son avis a été parmi mes joies d'auteur, quand il me confirma que le ton, les images et les situations étaient vraies et justes.<sup>5</sup>

How much Cousin enjoyed the collaboration with Josué de Castro and how deeply he felt about the whole political question of the underdeveloped Third World at the time of writing Le Cycle du Crabe, may be seen from his reply to a question put by André Laude: "Vous écrivez actuellement une pièce sur la faim. Pourquoi ce thème si rarement exploité au théâtre jusqu'à ce jour en Europe?":

Ce thème des pays sous-développés et de la faim dans le monde est (hélas) une de mes angoisses actuelles. Je pense qu'il convenait de tenter de la présenter au grand public par l'éclairage du théâtre (puisque je ne suis pas dans le cinéma, mais cela me tenterait si j'en avais la possibilité).

Le problème du tiers monde dominera notre époque de plus en plus dans les vingt années à venir. C'est vraiment le problème de notre temps, d'autant plus que le fossé, comme vous le savez, hélas! se creuse de plus en plus entre ces pays et ceux industrialisés, les nôtres.

C'est seulement là que vivent les vrais prolétaires aujourd'hui. La traditionnelle lutte de classe est déjà passée sur un autre plan: celui de la lutte entre les nantis, qu'ils soient capitalistes ou communistes, et les pays de misère. C'est le grand fait politique nouveau.

Notre temps est une époque tragique, pleine de richesse, hélas! pour le dramaturge.<sup>6</sup>

This interview reveals two important features of Cousin's writing: the strength of his personal feelings on the subject

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5. Gabriel Cousin, programme for Le Cycle du Crabe, performed by the Théâtre Populaire Occitan at Auch (Gers), April 1975.

6. André Laude, Questions à Gabriel Cousin, Lettres Françaises, 22 décembre 1966.



he is engaged upon at any particular time, and the political and social awareness he wishes to convey to others in a readily acceptable - and often emotional - way in order to awaken people's consciences. This latter prise de conscience places Cousin in a line with certain other contemporary French playwrights - it is both his source of strength as a creative writer, and it indicates the degree of commitment he possesses vis-à-vis his position as an artist in society.

Jean Durozier's production of Le Cycle du Crabe was also the result of cooperation with Cousin. After some initial differences of opinion on the proposals Durozier had made - Cousin was sceptical of the ability of the young company to undertake the project, and was anxious that they should be well-trained and directed - the two men agreed to begin by making a critical reading of the text.

D'abord nous avons procédé à un 'dégraissage' de la pièce. Il fallait supprimer des personnages secondaires, resserrer l'action, raccourcir des scènes. Nous avons convenu des séquences à revoir. J'ai coupé environ 45 minutes. Ce qui a aidé beaucoup, c'est que si Jean Durozier avait une 'vision' de la pièce, en même temps il tenait compte très fidèlement de mes indications scéniques, que nous discussions.<sup>7</sup>

At this stage of the research, Cousin's wife Hélène also participated in re-reading the play with Cousin to discover if the amendments had altered the shape and feeling of the play. The reductions-in the playing time to two hours and forty minutes, and in the cast to twenty-two - were agreed upon. This arrangement required the suppression of the minor rôles of peasants, villagers, policemen, guards and guerrillas and, in the production by the Théâtre Populaire Occitan, six actors each had to perform more than one rôle. The rehearsals lasted for five weeks.

The set of the play was constructed almost exactly according to Cousin's own scale model of the stage - a procedure he adopts before beginning to write - with a modification in the number of sets used. Cousin's production notes indicate the possibility of using five separate stage areas, whereas

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7. Entretien entre Jean-Jacques Lerrant et Gabriel Cousin à propos de la création du Cycle du Crabe, Le Progrès, mai 1975 (unpublished notes in my possession).

Durozier limited this number to three. Following Cousin's indications, linking staircases and gangways were constructed between the stage areas - the set was thus comparable with the set created for Ariane Mnouchkine's 1789 and 1793. The drawback to such an arrangement is that a company cannot adapt its set to play in a conventional theatre. Few props were used except where absolutely necessary and the resulting austerity placed the emphasis for conveying meaning and atmosphere more importantly on the actors' own gestures and movements. A unity of visual effect was created by toning down the colours of costumes and scenery - principally white and beige - against a more colourful green for the swamps and ochre for the sertão. The shirt of Cosme, the village sage, was contrastingly vivid à l'américaine, but his unawareness of this symbolised his and our alienation from his own image of himself.

Cousin's participation in the production of his play - Durozier invited him to be present at the first rehearsals - was a further source of pleasure to him:

Je laisse toujours libre le metteur en scène concernant la présence. Certains se sentent gênés. D'autres au contraire souhaitent que je sois là. Jean Durozier, lui, m'a demandé de participer directement au travail. Je suis venu les huit premiers jours et les cinq derniers, afin de garder l'oeil neuf, critique. Dans le premier temps, j'ai fait le dramaturge. Expliquant la pièce, le texte, éclairant les personnages, conseillant et sécurisant les comédiens. Il règne, au début du travail, une incertitude et même de la peur. Les sécuriser permet ensuite un meilleur travail. Sur ce plan aussi, Hélène m'a aidé, éclairant de son côté, répercutant notre vision pour la forme comme pour le fond. C'est passionnant.<sup>8</sup>

To dwell on these detailed aspects of the production of Le Cycle du Crabe is to understand the workings of Cousin's plays themselves. Attention to the overall feeling and mood of his plays is more important than the consideration of minutiae such as realistic props, authenticity of the music, or appropriateness of costume. Above all, it is the language which

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8. *ibid.*

conveys Cousin's message and beauty lies in the poetry of the words and the contrast between dialogue and song, or between naturalism and parody.

Pour cette pièce, il s'agit de...faire passer sur scène les deux bases principales de la construction de la pièce écrite: le leitmotiv et les ruptures. Le leitmotiv: c'est la notion de nourriture, de travail; qu'est-ce qu'on va devenir? Qu'est-ce qu'on va faire? Les ruptures sont les passages entre la vie tragique, la mort, l'extrême misère et la vie vécue dans l'instant, les rêves, les hallucinations, les souvenirs. Comme un poème.<sup>9</sup>

The factual accuracy of the setting of the play is not in any doubt - even the mood has been captured by Cousin through his assessment of the people's misery and anguish, despite the fact that this is second-hand knowledge to him. Yet this insight into the preoccupations and fears of the villagers may also be judged by events themselves, and perhaps the most telling acknowledgment of the play's persuasive authenticity occurred in 1973, as Cousin said in an interview with Jean-Jacques Lerrant:

J'ai écrit cette séquence en 1966. Or, à ma stupéfaction douloureuse, les journaux faisaient paraître le 25 septembre 1973 un récit où l'armée au Chili descend dans les bidonvilles, rassemble le peuple à la mitrailleuse et lui tient à peu près la langage que j'avais écrit sept années plus tôt, et fait les promesses démagogiques telles des maisons, des écoles, à manger, et les menaces si on ne se tient pas tranquille, si on ne dénonce pas les autres; si on ne travaille pas...pour rien. La réalité rejoignait la fiction, hélas.<sup>10</sup>

More recently, in the nineteen-seventies, there has been an attempt in Brazil to overcome the poverty and unemployment situation by exploiting the rubber resources of Amazonia:

A cause du caoutchouc, un demi-million de Nordestins ont fui les sécheresses du Sertão et donné à la jungle quelques-uns des hommes qui lui manquaient.<sup>11</sup>

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9. *ibid.*

10. *ibid.*

11. L'Amazonie en train de naître, Le Monde, 9-3-1976.

According to a programme on Brazil on BBC television in December 1973, the construction of vast highways across Amazonia, the 'Transamazonica' and the 'Perímetro Norte', has led to economic development and the social integration of the Portuguese and Indian communities. The peasants are offered land near the Amazon to develop crops, yet, as Cousin demonstrated, this sort of aid is sometimes abortive. Crops are not always satisfactory, the Indian population are slowly being annihilated, guerrilla bands in some areas are demanding recognition by the government, and poverty is still rife on the outskirts of towns:

Aujourd'hui, à Belem, des femmes font la queue devant des docks qui vendent, non du poisson, mais des têtes de poisson. Pour faire la soupe? 'Non', répondent les ménagères, 'le pot-au-feu'. Parfois les têtes sont mangées crues, à même le trottoir, sous les murs d'azulejos d'une ville qui s'était enivrée de ses richesses.<sup>12</sup>

Cousin's Le Cycle du Crabe is not only of the moment; its content and its message for the West reflects a prise de conscience which politicians are at last recognising as of crucial importance to their own survival, given the dependance of the West on the mineral and agricultural wealth of Latin America. The particular problems of Brazil have been published in an English translation of a book by the ex-Mayor of Recife, Miguel Arraes, called Brazil, the People and the Power.<sup>13</sup>

Le Cycle du Crabe consists of twenty tableaux and four Inter-tableaux, the whole divided into three parts. The first part of the play deals with the arrival of Ze-luis, his wife Maria, and their young son João in the shanty town of Têtu on the outskirts of Recife. They, like many other

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12. *ibid.*

13. Miguel Arraes, Brazil: The People and the Power, Penguin, 1972.

families, are fleeing the droughts of the North-East region, the sertão, and Ze-luis's hopes to find work and food for his family. They soon discover that there is little work, and that the sole source of food is the crabs which abound in the muddy swamps in which they are obliged to live and build their home from odd pieces of wood, oil drums, and sheets of corrugated iron. They survive, thanks to help given by a friendly couple, Antonio and Rosa, but are shocked to learn that the village dead are buried in the mud itself where the crabs come to feed off their bodies, thus completing the 'crab cycle'. The bedridden village sage, Cosme, introduces them to the other villagers whose sole pleasures consist of making music and love. Ze-luis and Maria reflect nostalgically on their previous life in the sertão, as dominated by drought as the life in Têtu is by the misery of the mud. Their second son died before their departure. Joao and his new friend Zefinha visit Cosme who relates his life story and tells them about the exploitation of the poor. He promises to teach them to read. Using parody, Cousin exposes the hypocrisy of the Church by showing the local priest savouring the delicacy of a turkey humbly and innocently offered up by an emaciated wreck of a man seeking the help of Saint Sebastian. While other villagers are fishing, they hear of an accident at the local tile factory which has led to some deaths; however, this is not a cause for grief, rather it is seen as an opportunity to find work, by replacing those killed with other unemployed men, desperate for a job.

The second part of the play takes place four years later. Another couple, Jose and Maria 2, arrive from the sertão. The governing authorities bemoan the political situation and fear the guerrillas reported to be in the area. They want to eliminate the shanty-towns; the Governor makes false promises to the villagers of work and housing in order to remove them, while the General prefers to see a more drastic solution and burn down Têtu. A modern, militant churchman, Joazeiro, a guerrilla, joins with Cosme in inciting the villagers to revolutionary action during a fiesta arranged for this purpose.

As the death of an activist is reported, Cosme calls for the people to rise against their oppressors. During the fiesta, the attention of the police is diverted by the lure of women and drink while some of the men leave to build new shacks in the town to attract more poor to their cause.

In the short third part, Cosme is shot by assassins. This inspires Antonio and Joao to join the revolt in answer to Cosme's earlier call to arms. But this spontaneous uprising fails, and Joao does not return. In a lifeless village, Zefinha responds to the policeman's offer of luxurious living in return for a life of prostitution: in this way she can play her part in subverting authority by corrupting the morals of the police. The militant priest shows his traditionalist colleague the need for a change of Church policy towards the poor, and the rest of the community return to a life of suffering, comforting themselves with their memories of a better yesterday in the sertão.

Cousin stresses that:

Les héros principaux ne sont pas des hommes,  
mais bien leurs conditions de vie, leur situation  
sociale. Tout doit concourir à dégager cette  
notion.<sup>14</sup>

To this end, the opening scene of the play depicts the misery of the refugees from the drought-ridden sertão, who not only crave the sight of water but wish to be "ensevelis dans la mer". Similarly, many of their other aspirations reflect the physical desire for satisfaction associated with the craving for food: and thus find expression in their vocabulary: the town is 'bonne soupe' or 'pain blanc' for them, and work is 'filet de boeuf'. To the villagers of Têtu, similar analogies are made: the pretty young Zefinha is a delicacy such as 'une crevette fraîche' and an enjoyable evening with friends has the taste of 'jus d'orange' to those limited solely to crab soup as their diet. This poetic comparison, a linguistic fact in the dialect of the North-East of Brazil, suits Cousin's aims perfectly, as it underlines the basic simplicity of the peasants. Their generosity towards new immigrants, despite the hardship that exists and despite the new demands on food

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14. Gabriel Cousin, Le Cycle du Crabe, p.185.

resources that an increased population represents, stands in contrast to the selfish rejection of outsiders displayed by the community in Cousin's previous play on the subject of famine, Le Voyage de derrière la Montagne. Life is precarious, but it is also shown to be immutably so in this play, where the simple folk lack the knowledge and, through their malnutrition, the energy to change their situation. To them, the ocean is an unknown quantity, and houses which stand higher than trees are a bewildering phenomenon. They face life with realistic equanimity: "écoute, mon gars, c'est pas la peine de te leurrer. Du travail, ici, il y en a tout juste pour ceux de la ville." The ostracism of the Têtu villagers is not due to any form of racialism - on the contrary, people of all colours mix freely, whether of Indian or Portuguese stock.

Cousin's exposition of the indigenous problems of the area cover all these aspects of life in a comprehensive, yet poetic, way. This expository section of the play lasts for three tableaux and introduces the characters of Tiburcio, the cynically-minded tool of the police-state, and le père Aristide, the sensual hedonist with hopelessly conservative views of the Church's rôle in his society. These figures are objects of parody for Cousin whose intention is to denounce both the political and ecclesiastical failures to improve the lot of the peasants. Both exploit their positions for personal gain: Tiburcio becomes a 'commissaire de police' by encouraging informers among the villagers, while le père Aristide "n'a en tête que de se préparer des repas fins". Here, Cousin may be criticised for making the representatives of authority too unreal: he treats them with universal scorn, and in this way detracts from their credibility as living human beings. The gap is thus widened between the vividly drawn and suffering peasants and the puppet-like figures in authority over them. Such exaggeration plays havoc with the mood of the play and converts it from a piece of social realism into an ambiguous satire. However, if the authoritarian characters peopling the play are unrealistic, their methods

are not; our experience of immigration policies conducted by recent European governments leads us to identify with the hypocrisies and inconsistencies of the régime in power, typified by the desire to welcome tourists to Recife in preference to more refugees who are merely 'racaille' and 'une bande de feignants' embarrassing to the townspeople, by the intention to clean up the shanty-town ghettos by setting fire to the shacks, or by the folly of compromise with the peasants because "c'est la bonté qui cause des désordres! C'est elle qui permet les révoltes". But this myopic approach receives its just rewards - the peasants' revolt is spontaneous and not contrived or incited by guerrillas; as such, it fails, but the inference is that in time the naturalness of the revolution will sustain it to a successful conclusion.

Not all the peasants will support revolutionary moves at first; Ze-luis opts out early on: "On raconte tant d'histoires sur eux! Ils essaient de faire quelque chose.. Mais si j'avais pu avoir un bout de terre à moi, un jour... je n'aurais pas aimé le partager." But Antonio and João are not so resigned to their fate and, although they die at the end of the play, they have served to instruct the community in the next phase of the revolution which will require further preparation - under the protective cover of the maquis - before it is put into operation. Cousin is careful to stop short of this second phase, however, suggesting that the socialist revolution is not the outcome of terror, or even of persuasion by guerrilla groups operating clandestinely; rather is it the result of a process of attrition in living standards, and the prospect of a bleak future for the peasants, recalled in the words of Cosme and Joazeiro, as well as in the reports of the activities of Mathieu le Rouge and others. It is out of respect for Cosme's teachings: "sortir un bras", "faire signe au soleil", and in anger at the violence of his death, that the peasants are moved to take action. These dying words of Cosme's are echoed three times, by Felipe, Joao, and Zefinha. His position in



their society is very similar to that of Onono in Le Drame du Fukuryu-Maru: both men are physically debilitated, they have attracted respect for their semi-mysterious past, and they stand as the consciences of the community in which they live.

Both Cosme and Onono compensate for the lack of sensual pleasures in their present life by enjoying and encouraging eroticism. Cosme takes pleasure from La Luisa's dancing and vicariously enjoys the fiesta by viewing it in his mirrors. But it is also to him that Joao and Zefinha turn for advice on their proposed marriage: his learning alongside their ignorance turns him into a counsellor and philosopher. He destroys the illusion of the good life that Ze-luis and Maria entertain about the sertão:

Sais-tu comment ils le nomment ton sertão, les autres? Les gens distingués, qui s'intéressent à nous? Qui s'intéressent à notre faim?...le polygone de la sécheresse...Rien n'est juste sur cette terre... (p.47)

It is Cosme's premonitions of the coming revolution, which will materialise into reality; he alone understands the damage done by the Portuguese in upsetting the balance of nature by burning the Amazonian forests and allowing the rains to wash away the valuable fertile land, and his experience of the capitalist monopolies will serve to warn others of the dangers of business and financial pressures on the government and their effect on the ordinary peasants:

Les monopoles sont comme des dragons.. [comme] d'énormes crabes qui s'agrippent à la peau des hommes et se nourrissent, comme ceux du marais, de la vie et de la mort. (p.69)

Such contrasts as this, between the wealthy capitalist nations of the West and the extreme poverty suffered by the inhabitants of Têtu, are not portrayed directly on stage in Le Cycle du Crabe, but are merely hinted at by Cosme. The enormous discrepancy in living standards between two such worlds would be difficult to grasp for the peasants whose comparisons are limited to their own experience of life. Yet this experience is sufficient for Ze-luis and Maria to

indulge in the joys of reminiscence and in an appreciation of the existence of other sorts of life than their own. Indeed, the power of recall, and the happiness and sadness it brings to this couple, provide some of the most moving moments in this play. Cousin devotes three scenes to a 'flashback' of life in the sertão, and although Ze-luis appears to have some regrets about leaving, he admits that he was exploited, that his hallucination had shown him murdering his colonel boss, and that his family had no chances of improving their living standards. But the dream of a better life there persists for him and for Maria, even though their most vivid memories are those of the colonel's own property, his large white house amidst the lush green vegetation:

Il y avait un grand bassin d'eau claire  
devant la maison. Et un verger, avec des  
bananes, des ananas, des oranges. Tout  
était entouré de jolies barrières. Tout  
était brillant, propre et frais au soleil. (p.51)

Perhaps their continuing enthusiasm for their former life is due to the fact that their son Joachim was still alive, or that they could still believe in God, that is before His 'oeil sanglant' drove them away on a spiritual journey along "un chemin conduisant directement à l'autre monde", and before their disappointment at finding no better a life seemed an indication of God's betrayal of them. Maria reproaches her husband for his nostalgia, but she also yearns to return to the sertão; their sense of dépaysement is acute.

The first part of the play completes the picture of Têtu village life, the misery and vicissitudes of existence, the regrets and jealousies of the peasants; there is very little questioning of their situation beyond a rhetorical appeal by Maria - "Peut-on vivre comme ça? Comment vont vivre nos enfants?" - and by a half-hearted gesture of defiance by Rosa who suggests that one day they should march in protest to the Governor's house. The peasants' recourse to song in order to express their suffering parallels a technique used by Brecht: the sentiments on the subject of exploitation in the 'Chant des Cueilleurs de Cacao' recall the coolies' 'Gesang der

Reiskahnschlepper' in Brecht's Die Massnahme; the samba is danced spontaneously expressly to drive away the contemplation of their wretched existence. Cousin's integration of song, dance and dialogue in this play closely resembled that fusion of art and life which typifies the theatre of Lorca, but whereas Cousin is rhapsodic, Lorca is elegiac and he has none of Cousin's burlesque treatment of a theme. Nevertheless, there is an identification with the rhythms of the Brazilian people in Le Cycle du Crabe which bears a close resemblance to the impulses of the Spanish found in Lorca's drama. Without condescension, the two dramatists create a theatre which embodies the character, hopes, beliefs, and the dreams of a people. Their poetic drama is no hybrid genus: it is the natural form through which they present the multifarious emotional states of being of peasant peoples.

Part II takes place some four years later; it consists of six tableaux and four 'inter-tableaux'. The latter serve to illustrate actions simultaneous to those in the main tableaux but which happen outside the village of Têtu. The effect of the additional inter-tableaux is to accelerate the pace of the action and intensify the drama of the approaching revolution by a building up of forces: they depict the departure from the sertão of a second couple and their arrival in Têtu, and the activities of guerrilla bands both in the maquis and among the workers and villagers, inciting them to fight for more than mere survival. Although Cousin adheres to the facts of the popular uprising in Brazil of the late nineteen-fifties and the early nineteen-sixties, he chooses to parody the rôles of the Church and government and, in situating the play in the shanty-town itself, relies on reporting outside movements rather than illustrating them in detail. From Joazeiro, the modern Church militant, the spectator learns about the Church of the Poor and the new evangelical movement, and hears of the creation of the Peasants' Leagues, but little is shown of their formation and effect. The guerrilla movements are portrayed superficially in the very short scenes of inter-tableaux 3 and 4. The speech of the Governor to the inhabitants of Têtu is treated as a

parody in the manner of Brecht: Cousin even suggests that, in order to accentuate the parody, the Governor could merely use gestures and mute mouth movements while his recorded voice is heard from offstage. This emphasis on parodying the authorities underscores Cousin's wish to attack the hypocritical paternalism of the government and, at the same time, to concentrate on the continuing poverty and seemingly immutable fate of the shanty-town peasants. Using the same methods, Cousin denounces the Church: le père Aristide is no more than a figure of fun for, despite the accusation that he practises forms of magic, that he holds racist views even concerning crabs - preferring Aryan crabs to others! - , and that his so-called religious practices are pagan and perverted, he is too extreme and too remote from the people to be able to exert any influence over them. The hypocrisy of the governing authorities is revealed in their ready use of the Church to carry weight in the arguments they put forward to the people:

Le Gouverneur: Venez avec nous, Père Aristide. Vous leur parlerez aussi!  
 Le Général : Avec votre présence, ils nous croiront...  
 Eh! Eh! l'Eglise, ça sert encore. (p.114)

At the same time, they condemn such doubletalk from the communists:

D'après nos indications, les guérilleros envoient des messagers auprès des personnalités religieuses, sous couvert d'expliquer leur affaire. Mais ce n'est que de la propagande! Ces messagers se présentent comme étant des prêtres. Ce n'est encore une fois qu'une tromperie de ces communistes! Ils n'hésitent pas à prendre des déguisements moraux et sociaux...Méfiez-vous, Monsieur le Curé... La charité chrétienne peut s'égarer aux arguments et aux visages multilpes du démon... (p.107)

The repressive power of the authorities is made evident in Tableau XIII where the effete père Aristide tries helplessly to intervene in the name of justice and humanity. The Governor's intention to eradicate the blot on the Recife landscape is pronounced with ridicule - stylistically resembling the speeches of the burlesque Président-Directeur-Général in L'Aboyeuse et l'Automate:

On ne peut tolérer - maintenant que notre pays doit s'ouvrir au tourisme international - que ce lieu subsiste! C'est un scandale pour l'hygiène, la civilisation et l'esthétique! (p.112)

Cousin is in agreement with the ideas of contemporary political sociology in correlating the political and social contradictions of Brazil with the dominating forces of foreign powers. The Governor's references to tourism have some basis in current political thinking:

C'est justement cette misère-là que l'étranger regarde. Donc, pas d'incident pour rien! Pas d'ennuis pour de la misère...On nous regarde de tous les côtés. Et quand je dis les étrangers, il y en a de deux sortes. Ceux du Nord qui nous apportent l'argent et nous poussent à gouverner plus dur et plus fort! Et ceux d'Europe qui sont toujours dans les brumes des principes de 1789...(p.111)

In the didactic Tableau XIV, Joazeiro, who has clearly emerged as the popular leader, is Cousin's political mouthpiece. It is he who addresses to the Church a call-to-arms:

La seule dignité qui reste à l'homme, dans certains cas, est de prendre les armes. Est-ce que l'Eglise doit se séparer de ceux qui luttent pour leur dignité? Nous devons, au contraire aider à réaliser la promotion des hommes, fils de Dieu. (p.124)

It is in this way that Joazeiro justifies his joining the maquis groups; he is also expressing word for word the view of the Archbishop of Recife which Cousin quotes in the texts he publishes with the text of play:

Je suis contre la violence, mais je comprends la violence. Je respecte les hommes qui ont choisi la violence. Nous devons être conscients de nos erreurs, et les erreurs de l'Eglise sont énormes. Longtemps, l'Eglise a été une force aliénée et aliénante. C'est la vérité. La religion ne doit pas être l'opium du peuple, mais elle doit contribuer à la libération des hommes, dès maintenant. (15)

Equally alienating have been the non-violent struggle of the people of Recife - a hopeless idealism -, and the confusion of means with ends, as shown by Cosme: "L'Eglise pour l'Eglise oubliant Dieu. Le Parti pour le Parti oubliant la Révolution. La Révolution pour la Révolution oubliant l'homme". Che

Guevara's philosophy avoids these mistakes and will require what Cousin likes to call "une nouvelle manière de penser". This is the real goal - it formed the philosophy of Le Voyage de derrière la Montagne too, and it reflects the difference between revolt and revolution, to which Cousin draws attention in the programme of the performance of Le Cycle du Crabe at Auch:

Révolte et Révolution: la première, pulsionnelle, est toujours écrasée ou se meurt avant d'avoir réellement agi (ainsi en France en mai 1968). La seconde, difficile, lente à organiser et à décider, parce que l'élan pulsionnel est passé. (16)

Such is the effect of Joazeiro's teaching and the respect that he commands among the peasants, that Cosme admires him just as he admired actors. Joazeiro's understanding of the people's needs and his sincerity in pleading their cause is shown in depth in this Tableau. As a priest, he begins his crusade for greater human dignity and justice by demanding the right of decent burial for all. His initiative among the workers in the Galilee plantation was rewarded by resistance to the plantation owners' refusal of burial rights: "les paysans se mirent à résister et c'est en s'occupant des problèmes de la mort qu'ils ouvrirent les yeux à la vie..."

If Joazeiro is the philosophical and political apologist of the revolution, then Cosme is its local populariser. Cousin has thus elaborated the influences bearing on the peasants on two levels and provided Le Cycle du Crabe not only with a broadly based and internationally flavoured revolutionary background, but also a more parochial yet an emotionally and dramatically more convincing foreground. Cosme's at once persuasive tone on an individual level: "Ressemblez-vous à des hommes?" - and his metaphorical interpretation of the peasants' existence, strike home to the newcomers to Têtu:

Ici, c'est la fin du fleuve. Il coule vers la mer à marée basse. La mer remonte, à marée haute. Ce bras qui se termine ici, c'est le long bras de misère de notre pays.

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16. Gabriel Cousin, programme for Le Cycle du Crabe, performed by the Théâtre Populaire Occitan at Auch (Gers), April 1975.

Ce fleuve c'est la vie, la souffrance de nous tous. C'est le chemin de ceux qui ont traversé les cendres du sertão, la mer de verdure des plantations de cannes, pour arriver à cette mer de boue. Voilà! (p.136)

His description of life in the swamps is the most moving and the most poetic passage of the play. In it are identified the common misery of man and crab, both creatures doomed to live in a sick environment. The despondency of Cosme at this point of the play represents its emotional nadir:

Quand les hommes sortiront-ils de l'enfance  
pour vivre dans la justice et la liberté?  
Ce soir, le doute entre dans mon coeur comme  
une nausée. Une tristesse comme un poison. (p.140)

A few moments later he utters the dejected aside: "Qui va lever le bras et faire signe au soleil?" which subsequently becomes the rallying-cry of the young revolutionaries.

This translation into action by the admiring companions of Cosme helps to fulfil his own aspirations; his brutal assassination shortly after will thus not have been in vain, nor his exhortations futile. This new resolution among the peasants is celebrated in typical fashion in the singing and dancing of the 'Fête de la pleine lune' which brings the second part of the play to a close.

The third part, consisting of four relatively short tableaux, portrays a rapid series of events, the peasants' revolt, and their final political and emotional defeat. The enthusiasm for joining the revolt stems directly from the ceremony of Cosme's burial, thus echoing the earlier sentiments of Joazeiro that the peasants will open their eyes to life when they begin to contemplate the problems of death. As João is provoked into joining the movement, so Zefinha also revolts against her new predicament: the absence and death of João and the consequent impossibility of love that she is now faced with. This is the central theme of Cousin's work and it is shown in the stage direction at the point where João and Zefinha are expressing their most intense desire for one another:

De se respirer et se caresser, alerte João.  
 Il prend soudain conscience de leur état. Il  
 se recule, la regarde comme pour la première  
 fois, sous le bruit de la bataille qui continue  
 au loin. (p.164)

Their cries of "Je veux vivre" are contradictory, however; suddenly João sees in love only a self-deception, blinding Man to the true nature of his existence: "nos yeux nous éblouissent et nous masquent cette vie dans la fange ... Je ne veux plus!" Zefinha's despair is transmuted into a strong desire to play her own, grotesque part in the revolt: "Je peux corrompre et moisir", and João's last words "Je vais combattre les crabes de la terre!" are paralleled by hers: "Je vais faire pourrir les crabes de la ville!" Because she cannot achieve creative love, she will fight to promote its opposite, destructive love, in the form of corruption. It is a sad and pessimistic view of Man's condition as seen by Cousin.

The political defeat of the peasants is equally pessimistic; but the folly of a spontaneous revolt underlines the political inexpediency of such a move and demonstrates the need for more careful preparation and training for revolution as a long-term objective. While the peasants feel humiliated and betrayed, the Guérillero outlines their errors and points the way to a maturer and more comprehensive approach: "Pour faire mûrir cette conscience révolutionnaire, il faut des exemples! Les petits groupes qui ont pris le maquis et frappent à l'improviste montrent que cela est possible." But Cousin omits any reference to continuing action on the part of the villagers; the play closes with a vision of despair and defeat: the corrupt Tiburcio has been promoted to inspector of police, João's body is found already submerged in the mud of the swamps, Joazeiro and the guerrilla leave to continue the struggle in the maquis, Rosa gives birth to another child doomed to suffering, and the ineffectual Ze-luis tries to find solace in further reminiscences of the sertão.

The revolt has divided people instead of uniting them: Felipe is angry at some of his fellow-villagers for not following their leaders - he accuses them of lacking a



conscience; Rosa and Zefinha are left to survive by their own devices; le père Aristide is reminded of the inadequacy of the Church's official attitude towards social problems, yet stubbornly resists any divergence from the Rome directives. The revolt described in the play mirrored some of the actual abortive revolts of the poor sections of the Brazilian community since the Brazilian coup d'état of 1964. Ironically, at the very time of the publication of Le Cycle du Crabe, fresh workers' uprisings were taking place in Brazil in an attempt to secure employment and better housing conditions which had disappeared under the military régime. Cousin's play can therefore be seen as the portrayal of the continuing saga of the struggle of the poverty-stricken population of Brazil. Like that of other South American countries, it is a struggle against the forces of imperialism and capitalism. Cousin naturally justifies the play in the light of these events, stating in the Auch programme:

Au moment où nous marchons sur la lune, où nous gémissons sur nos problèmes de diététiques, de circulation et de consommation, il convient de savoir qu'il y a des hommes-crabes en survie. (17)

In the same programme, Cousin answers those who find his vision of the future pessimistic:

Si cette vision me paraît bien être ce qu'est la période actuelle, sans une lueur d'espoir à court terme, cet espoir ne me semble pas exclu à long terme. Je tiens en effet à laisser le lecteur et le spectateur libres de décider de leur choix quant aux perspectives d'action ou aux conclusions idéologiques, et ne leur proposer aucune solution. Ce n'est pas le rôle de l'art. Certains souhaiteraient voir présenter leur rêve révolutionnaire et non la réalité historique, ce qui, leur tenant lieu d'action, les soulagerait mais ne serait qu'une fuite, un masque et à l'opposé d'une attitude réaliste consciente et critique. Ainsi on ne confondra pas révolte et révolution: l'action sporadique de la première ne permettant pas de 'changer de vie'. A chacun de faire germer, de faire mûrir les conditions de la seconde. (18)

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17. *ibid.*

18. *ibid.*

This viewpoint may be challenged intellectually, for it suggests that the author of Le Cycle du Crabe has presented the reader or spectator with a totally objective assessment of the situation in Brazil, from which he may deduce a plan of action or, at the least, a moral stance towards the social and political problems the play presents. However, this is clearly not the case. The play visibly focusses on the peasant population and their sufferings; it is highly critical, through its satirical approach, of the ruling authorities; it is overtly didactic in parts. The author appears not so much to be portraying poverty in general - the direct references to a geographical situation, President Vargas, and the Minas Gerais place it specifically in Brazil - but to be pleading the cause of the refugees from the sertão and inviting audiences to support the guerrilla movement for political reform. Likewise, Cousin is presenting a definite viewpoint with regard to the position of women in society, to guerrilla warfare and its objectives, to the need for the Church to become a liberating and progressive force for left-wing movements, and to the distinction between revolt and revolution. In his 'Notes de Jeu', he writes:

J'ai utilisé des éléments didactiques historiques qui m'ont semblé nécessaires puisqu'il s'agit d'une pièce montrant la vie de notre temps. Il me semble que le didactisme n'est pas en contradiction avec la poésie, que ce soit dans le texte ou dans les situations. Il y a là peut-être une 'grammaire' nouvelle à trouver et à doser dans le ton et le jeu des comédiens. (19)

But if the didacticism of the play is incomplete and the ending therefore unsatisfactory for many spectators, the poetry and creative possibilities are certainly not lacking. One of Cousin's aims is to demonstrate the joy of living that the villagers of Têtu find in their dancing and singing; there is ample scope for both in any production of Le Cycle du Crabe. As with his earlier plays, Cousin has provided producers with extensive notes on the acting, production and

scenic possibilities; similarly, he has allowed dramatic groups considerable latitude in selecting a style and form for the play: he suggests that the notables may be treated as pure caricatures and appear as puppets; texts of speeches by Monseigneur Helder Camara, Camilo Torres or Che may be added to the rôles of Joazeiro or the Guérillero as 'professions of faith'; and that the scenes of crab-fishing and the funeral ceremony of Cosme be ritualised to a greater or lesser degree. Cousin even offers to cut the play or make modifications to the text in collaboration with producers. To facilitate this, he has already exercised his own judgment on where the cuts should occur and he offers these alternatives to prospective producers.

The play's première was conceived by Cousin and the producer Jean Durozier as a piece of popular theatre intended to reach as many people as possible:

Cette création est une tentative de Théâtre Populaire dans le sens de Jacques Copeau: toucher les hommes à partir d'un problème contemporain les concernant tous. Car-nous le savons - le théâtre s'affirmera de mieux en mieux (en face l'expression typique de notre temps technologique : l'audio-visuel) par sa prise charnelle, par sa force sensible, en apportant un autre éclairage, un complément, aux informations des mass-média et aux analyses socio-économico-politiques rationnelles. 20

This appraisal of the rôle of the theatre serves admirably as a starting point for the criticism of Cousin's work in general and of Le Cycle du Crabe in particular, because of the greater complexity and dramatic potential of this play. The themes treated in the play are themselves divisible into various aspects: the theme of love, for example, concerns both the love of Man for his native land, producing intense feelings of nostalgia during later life, and the private love between individuals, such as that between João and Zefinha, which cannot be realised because of the divisive

social conditions which prevail; the theme of conflict between the old and the new takes the form of differences of opinion between João and his parents who, for their part, are totally resigned to their fate, and of differences between the orthodoxy of the traditional Church and the tenets of new militant priests; finally, the theme of the cycle of life and death as seen in the predicament of the peasants in the marshy delta outside Recife, of the birth of children condemned to a life of misery and endemic famine while their fathers die for the cause of revolution, and, most tragically, the theme of the death of love exemplified by Zefinha's abandonment to a life of moral degradation.

The intricacy of form and content in Le Cycle du Crabe might seem to deter producers and theatre managements from presenting the play at all. Cousin chooses to ignore the technical and economic problems facing administrators, and contents himself with the knowledge that his theatre provides excellent material for experimentation and understanding of the theatre by young, even inexperienced, companies. Of the contradictions inherent in the creation of such complex works, he said in his discussion with Jean-Lerrant:

C'est une vision. Une vision dans le sens où je vois les hommes, la vie, le monde d'aujourd'hui. Or, notre civilisation industrielle actuelle de sur-information par les mass-média donne une vision de masse et d'agitation et non de problèmes personnels à débattre par quelques-uns, tel Racine. Ils existent, mais à ce jour ils ne m'intéressent ni ne me notivent suffisamment pour me pousser à écrire. C'est une contradiction, mais je ne peux guère en tenir compte quand j'écris. Sinon je serais châtré. L'acte d'écrire - forme et fond indissociables pour moi - est beaucoup plus fort que les raisons économiques au théâtre. Comment faire? Attendre d'avoir un théâtre, des moyens suffisants? C'est aléatoire. Et de plus, le pouvoir des moyens n'implique pas forcément la qualité. Et puis, une jeune troupe est souvent plus captivante qu'une compagnie bien installée, qui craint, qui a quelque chose à perdre. 21

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21. Entretien entre Jean-Jacques Lerrant et Gabriel Cousin,  
op.cit.

A favourable preview of the play appeared in La Dépêche du Midi ten days before the première which attracted some two hundred spectators in a rather uninviting theatre in Auch. Despite the financial difficulties that had been encountered and which were detailed in the programme, Durozier's company did justice to Cousin's work and clearly caught the mood of the piece with considerable success.

Avec une spontanéité admirable, des qualités scéniques certaines, et ce naturel 'bon enfant' qui ne les abandonne jamais, ces acteurs noirs par leur tempérament primesautier ont donné d'instinct et de façon libre au Cycle du Crabe le caractère d'une fresque. A cette pièce, un tantinet gauchisante, ils ont apporté avec leurs camarades du Théâtre Populaire Occitan son véritable souffle et atteint à une réelle grandeur.<sup>22</sup>

The limitations of the theatre caused some production problems and had the working conditions been better, Durozier would perhaps have avoided such criticisms as these:

Le décor était un peu envahissant et le déroulement de l'action peut-être trop surchargé d'effets d'éclairages.<sup>23</sup>

On peut regretter que la fresque n'évite pas toujours l'écueil de la dispersion. Le talent n'est pas en cause: Le Cycle du Crabe exige du temps, de l'espace et des moyens.<sup>24</sup>

However, the overall effect of this production lasting for almost three hours coincided closely with the aims of Cousin:

Tout contribuait à plonger les spectateurs dans cet univers marécageux qui laisse un mauvais goût dans la bouche.<sup>25</sup>

22. Henri Dufor, La Dépêche du Midi, 26-4-1975.

23. *ibid.*

24. Bernard Raffelli, Le Monde, 9-5-1975.

25. Alain Ribet, Sud-Ouest, 26-4-1975.

The same critic called the play "difficile, mais belle" and admires its sentiments. The company, he said, "ont joué, remarquablement, ce véritable drame humain". An equally good impression made itself felt on the critic of La Dépêche du Midi already quoted:

On reste sur une bonne impression, chacun ayant compris sans doute que cette pièce n'était en définitive qu'un grand poème scénique et qu'ainsi envisagée elle prenait aussitôt une force nouvelle qu'elle a gardé jusqu'au bout.

On tour, the same impression was given:

Le sujet traité et l'originalité de la mise en scène ont tenu le spectateur en haleine d'un bout à l'autre de la représentation.<sup>26</sup>

The same critic expressed enthusiasm for the acting and for the content of the play: "Les acteurs ne jouent pas la pièce, ils la vivent; ils portent un témoignage sur un fait social. Souhaitons que leur cri soit entendu d'un très large public." In Grenoble, the play was scheduled to have its first outdoor performance, in the Place d'Agier. Unfortunately, a deluge of rain caused it to be transferred indoors to the Maison de la Culture; the inevitable resulting compression of the play regrettably reduced its impact. Nevertheless, the critic of Le Progrès saw it as a mordant allegory of our time; he was not the only critic to associate the social problems raised in the play with those of contemporary France.

Le Brésil de Gabriel Cousin, c'est aussi la France d'aujourd'hui et les immenses marionnettes qui représentent le général, le commissaire ou le gouverneur sont aussi des caricatures de nos institutions.<sup>27</sup>

Others have made the analogy, described by Cosme in Tableau VIII, between the devouring crabs and the capitalist monopolies relate to similar exploitation existing in France and affecting all those who live out a monotonous life in factories, offices,

26. Jean D., Echo du Sud-Ouest, 7-5-1975.

27. C. Bayard, Le Progrès-Dimanche, 29-6-1975.

towns or in their 'H.L.M.' The priest who distinguishes between a superior kind of crab with blue eyes - "les crabes aryens" - and that black, muddy variety, reinforces with his racialist views the disparity and inequality of that society.

The continuing problem of famine in the Third World, perpetuated rather than attenuated by the living standards of the rest of the world, suggest that Le Cycle du Crabe will survive as a topical play for many years to come. The comments which the play drew after its first performances on tour were a measure of its dramatic and intellectual power. The poetic and scenic appeal of the text was appreciated by many critics, and this success counts as a firm indication of Cousin's value and effectiveness as a writer in the field of drama evoking a 'prise de conscience' among audiences.

CHAPTER VII : COUSIN'S THEORY AND PRACTICE OF THE THEATRE

The crystallisation of Cousin's dramatic theory occurred as a result of his own early literary attempts, of outside encouragement, and of a developing personal Weltanschauung during the nineteen-fifties. It was expressed in an interview in February 1962, four months after the success of his first major play, L'Aboyeuse et L'Automate, at the Théâtre Quotidien de Marseille:

Montrer et contribuer à détruire les aliénations dues aux nouveaux mythes, aux nouveaux dieux (l'information et la publicité, la technico-mécanisation, le dogmatisme dans les idéologies, les peurs collectives qui font accepter le fascisme ou la guerre pour préserver la liberté ou la paix) me semble un des premiers rôles du poète, du dramaturge. <sup>1</sup>

The transition from pure poet to poetic dramatist was thus complete, both intellectually and aesthetically: if the nineteen-fifties marked the poetic period of Cousin's life, during which he formulated his views on society and its insufficiencies, then the nineteen-sixties - the productive period comprising his major dramatic output up to and including the production of La Descente sur Recife in 1971 - consolidated and strengthened his convictions. This productive decade of Cousin's life may fairly be named his 'première période', for, as he himself later states, there began 'une nouvelle période' in the nineteen-seventies.

In recognising the sense of alienation felt by ordinary people in society, Cousin is contributing to the philosophy of the 'absurd' - a notion defined and expressed by many social dramatists of the period both in France and elsewhere. However, Cousin's "nouveaux mythes" and "nouveaux dieux" are not the existentialist fears of Camus's "univers soudain privé d'illusions et de lumières [où] l'homme se sent un étranger".

They are a more tangible and recognisable set of collective fears; they manifest themselves in the same

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1. Gabriel Cousin, Interview in Chorus, revue d'avant-garde, nos 2-3, Paris, juin 1962



divorce between Man and his life or the actor and his setting of which Camus talks, but they are not the result of any intellectualised, existential psychosis.

Or ces nouveaux mythes, ces nouveaux dieux, représentent une nouvelle forme tragique de l'humanité. A l'inverse d'autrefois, ce ne sont plus des dieux créateurs, supra-terrestres, sur lesquels l'homme ne peut plus rien, est impuissant, ce sont des dieux sociaux - donc issus des hommes - et sur lesquels, avec l'évolution de la pensée, on peut maintenant quelque chose. 2

The closest that Cousin comes to the Theatre of the Absurd - expressing, as Martin Esslin puts it, "this sense of metaphysical anguish at the absurdity of the human condition" - is in L'Aboyeuse et l'Automate. Yet there is no correlation in this play between the philosophy of the human condition and the form in which it is expressed, a prerequisite of true Absurd Theatre according to Esslin. The unity of Cousin's play lies in its pathos - the characters demonstrate their impotence to alter their condition by mouthing an equally impotent dialogue.

The basis of Cousin's philosophy lies in Man's ability to change his environment through political action or technological progress - which themselves are catalysts of a more general social transformation both possible and necessary to render life more agreeable, equitable, and humane. Influential in the construction of such a philosophy were the ideas of Einstein and Brecht: the former's message to Italian scientists in 1950 included the exhortation: "Une nouvelle façon de penser est essentielle si l'humanité doit survivre", while Brecht's phrase "Puisse toute chose habituelle vous inquiéter" is often quoted by Cousin as a seminal influence on his own approach to theatre. The quotation from Einstein prefaces Cousin's play Le Drame du Fukuryu-Marû, that of Brecht, his l'Aboyeuse et l'Automate.

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Cousin's dramaturgy can therefore be seen as a synthesis of his reading and experience of theatre and of politics in the nineteen-fifties, particularly noticeable being the influence of Brecht and also his own association with the P.C.F. Contrary to expectation, however, Cousin refrains from expressing a purely political viewpoint or attempting to create a purely political theatre: he would consider such action to be not only plagiaristic, but also historically incongruous, even hypocritical, for Brecht's theatre was itself the result of political experience and persuasion allied to the sentiments of a previous generation and a different country.

Si mon travail ne porte pas directement la marque d'un engagement politique comme celui de Brecht, j'y vois principalement trois raisons:

- la première, c'est que je suis Français et lui Allemand, et sans doute aimons-nous moins que d'autres être guidés. Nous préférons avoir l'impression que nous avons notre libre choix.
- la seconde, c'est que Brecht a écrit en partie son oeuvre dans le contexte et sous la menace, idéologique et physique, directe du nazisme.
- la troisième, c'est que ma génération est peut-être plus touchée par le scepticisme que la sienne. Il y a maintenant les bombes de X mégatonnes chez les deux grands. Il y a eu le XXème Congrès. Il y a ces tentatives de rapprochement entre l'est et l'ouest, entre les marxistes et les chrétiens. 3

This shift in Cousin's theatre away from the political and towards the social, reflects the changed and changing nature of contemporary society: issues have become more complex since the Second World War, there is no longer a clear separation of good and evil, of right and wrong, and, more importantly, perhaps, politics no longer have the power to solve human problems as effectively and decisively as people would have wished and expected previously. For Cousin, the theatre should mirror this new complexity and

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3. Gabriel Cousin, Interview télévisé avec des séquences de textes (in series: Leçon de mise en scène), Belgian television, 1963

imprecision of human affairs:

Je pense que le théâtre n'a pas à se substituer aux organisations politiques ou aux mouvements idéologiques. Par contre, pour moi, il peut être un moyen - toujours agréable - de mieux comprendre les idées, la vie ou les hommes, les grands faits sociaux ou les grands événements. Le théâtre doit être le révélateur de la vie. Il ne doit pas avoir pour but d'embrigader, mais - après avoir alerté, informé, après avoir sensibilisé le public aux grands problèmes de notre temps - de contribuer à les démystifier. 4

Cousin is here consciously separating his aims as a dramatist from the material he uses; if his sources are political, his prise de conscience is not, for, according to him, social forces are more universally applicable than political ones, and are therefore the real stuff of drama:

Un théâtre débouchant directement sur l'action ou une prise de conscience politique coupe forcément les hommes en plusieurs camps, au lieu de les rassembler sur un thème social qu'ils subissent tous et pour lequel ils devraient prendre conscience collectivement. 5

The concept of collectivity and Man's consciousness of it within his social structure are basic themes in Cousin's work: through our collective conscience, he says, we can appreciate the problems facing Man and define our action towards solving those problems. Cousin's self-imposed aim is to bring about an awareness of this collective conscience and thus point to the needs of various communities.

In revealing social problems on a global scale, Cousin is both helping his spectators to understand the underlying unity behind them, and stripping them of their mystique. As he says, he hopes to demystify them and, in this respect, his aims are sound and laudable. Yet at the same time, a distinction must be made between the content and the form of his works, for it is into the latter

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4.     ibid.

5.     ibid.

that Cousin injects a good deal of ritual and visual, if not spiritual, mysticism. It was also Jean Vilar's stated intention to demystify the theatre - by stripping it of its social snobbery and elitist cachet - yet in the plays he produced, he frequently relied on the element of ritual to convey feeling. The Chorus in Vilar's production of Eliot's Murder in the Cathedral in 1945, for example, made a deep impression on Cousin who subsequently incorporated a chorus part in some of his own plays to guide the spectators along specific lines of thought and so formulate a collective social conscience.

There would appear to be an inherent contradiction in the desire for deritualisation of themes on the part of Cousin and the simultaneous use of ritual to convey those themes. The contradistinction of content and form is therefore vital: Cousin is suggesting that the most effective form of portraying universal, as opposed to parochial, issues, is to lend them a collective energy - through the use of choruses, the employment of various art forms within one play and dealing with a single theme, or by giving characters the force of symbols or types and thus universalise them.

Le théâtre est l'art de l'homme. Pas de l'homme seul, mais de l'homme en société, donc l'art d'une réalité sociale, souvent multiple et trouble. Je pense que le théâtre est un moyen de rassemblement de tous les hommes composant non seulement notre société, mais le monde entier <sup>6</sup>.

It is in this respect too, that Cousin can be seen to prefer theatre to poetry - theatre allows his fertile imagination to express itself in many art forms within the scope of one play; it lends itself to a more vivid form of presentation and hence to a wide public; finally, it allows a more immediate and collective response to its themes.

Dégager les héros de notre temps, exprimer notre vie actuelle, organiser des sujets issus des événements

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6. *ibid.*

historiques de notre époque, montrer que la misère, l'injustice et la guerre ne sont pas inévitables, représenter la lutte entre l'ancien et le nouveau dans la vie sociale comme dans la morale, sont mes préoccupations je dirai angoissantes, et que le théâtre me permet d'aborder.<sup>7</sup>

In turning to the theatre to express these themes, Cousin was not abandoning poetry altogether:

Dans ma manière d'aborder le théâtre, d'écrire une pièce, il n'y a pas de séparation avec la poésie. Je pense qu'elle y a une place très importante et constante, soit par les mots, soit par la situation, soit par le jeu corporel. Je la vois en permanence et je tente toujours de l'y mettre.<sup>8</sup>

Cousin here broadens the definition of poetry to accommodate many art forms which, in the theatre, produce an overall poetic effect, enhanced by ritual or collective movement, perhaps, and differing from realistic plays both in content and form. Cousin's brand of poetic drama places him firmly in the line leading from Claudel and Cocteau. It is no coincidence that, like Cousin, these writers wrote about universal themes in order to evoke a collective response from a wide audience. Whereas poetry is an individually created expression inviting individual emotional response, theatre - and any kind of 'total theatre' especially - is a collective creation for a collective response: it is the sum total of the creative acts of the designer, musician, lighting technician, actor and author.

Pour moi, rien n'est plus exaltant, rien n'est plus beau, rien ne me rend plus heureux qu'une tâche où chacun apporte, où chacun peut se sentir bien et à sa place, où l'on n'est pas seul, où son travail s'enrichit de l'apport de tous, où il y a une équipe.<sup>9</sup>

Cousin's ready willingness to cooperate with other artists in the field of dramatic production is as rare as it is

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7. Cousin, Chorus, op.cit.

8. *ibid.*

9. *ibid.*

enlightened: Vilar and Planchon would have welcomed the existence of many such authors as open-minded as Cousin in this respect.

An example of this collective creative process appears in the notes published by the Théâtre Universitaire de Rouen at the time of the production of Cousin's La Descente sur Recife in 1969. Here, Cousin and Armand Dreyfus, the animateur of the group, were working exclusively with amateurs and, in some cases, complete novices in the theatre. The text of the play was initially used merely as a basis for dramatic study and practice in which each participant brought to the text his own ideas on its execution. A diagnosis and enactment of the themes, characters, group movement and the general rhythm of the play were made first, leading inevitably to a definition of the relationship between the production and the audience themselves. Certain of the scenes were re-formulated or even initiated as a direct result of some of the improvisation done by this group. The work progressed in three stages:

Chacun inventait librement ce qui lui semblait être la réalité de son personnage (avant l'exode des hauts plateaux) ouvrier agricole, artisan, mère de famille etc... et tentait de donner corps à son imagination par un travail d'improvisation des comportements habituels du personnage, matérialisation de son rythme de vie, par l'invention d'une sorte de langage automatique qui lui fut propre.<sup>10</sup>

This stage of the work is characteristic of the type of exercise and study performed in any school of drama.

Un effort important de 'gommage' avait lieu ensuite pour faire prendre conscience à l'acteur des clichés, des redites, des manques d'invention profonde qui étaient apparus au cours de ces improvisations. Les insuffisances techniques apparaissaient dès lors avec netteté: manque de concentration, de disponibilité physique et mentale, de souffle, de force, etc... Suivaient divers exercices. <sup>11</sup>

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10. Armand Dreyfus, Notes sur "La Descente sur Recife", programme of production by Théâtre Universitaire de Rouen, 1969

11. *ibid.*

This stage marks both a purification and clarification of the movements originally studied on an individual basis, and demands a more intelligent and concentrated mental approach to the work. It is, on a group scale, the process of distillation that a writer makes during the composition of a piece of writing.

Une mise en mouvement nouvelle de ce que chacun avait imaginé est ensuite proposée par le metteur en scène, en fonction de nécessités encore mal perçues par les acteurs: mouvements des groupes, rythme, style de jeu, en préservant cependant aussi longtemps que possible le caractère de recherche de cette 'mise en ordre' 12

Here, the whole process is united by a single person whose function is that of a conductor of an orchestra: to bring unity to the group and an understanding of the total effect of the production upon an audience. At this point, a production of the work could ensue, and a written version - but not necessarily a definitive text - could be produced.

It is clear from this procedure that the original author ought to be present at the rehearsals in order to lend support to the producer or to act in an advisory capacity to any members of the group including the producer. It is also evident that a definitive text cannot be produced under such circumstances, for, as an end-product, a text can only serve the group who caused its manufacture. In the case of Cousin's plays, it is only La Descente sur Recife which has undergone such treatment - although many modifications were made in collaboration with the producer of the longer version Le Cycle du Crabe in 1975.

Ironically, perhaps, it was not until four years after this work with the University of Rouen that Cousin was in a position to set up his own organisation, C.R.E.F.A.T.S., which orientated its activities around such methods of drama training for amateurs and students. The work at Rouen therefore served as an apprenticeship to Cousin

himself, who used these experiences to formulate his own teaching methods later with his new organisation in Grenoble.

The act of written creation for Cousin is the culmination of many months, even years, of painstaking documentation of facts, lengthy consideration of a theme, and a careful manipulation of dialogue. Unlike poetry, it is not inspired by a whim of conscience or emotion but rather it represents the product of considerable labour. In Cousin's case, the time required for writing has had to be found in his spare time from his full-time professional career as a teacher; but he feels no regret at this - on the contrary, Cousin is inclined to pity the professional writer who is obliged to produce work in order to exist and fulfil some sort of social rôle. The very obligation seems to him to deny the pleasure of creation.

L'acte créateur est un élan, une passion, une exigence psychique de l'esprit et de l'âme, comme l'oxygène est un impératif physiologique.<sup>13</sup>

Neither his training, nor his social background prepared Cousin to become a writer - the initial enthusiasm was that of a pure amateur. Later, the enthusiasm took hold of him, yet the work demanded of him for writing a play remained just as elaborate:

Ce que je peux dire, c'est que c'est avant tout une longue patience, un travail secret, souterrain, permanent, dans le cerveau et que c'est une question d'organisation. Il y a des règles à trouver soi-même, propres à chacun, selon ses sensations, son esprit, ses goûts, ses thèmes, sa vie sociale, son caractère, sa puissance vitale. Il m'a fallu les trouver, notamment pour le travail dramatique qui exige - comme le roman - un effort bien plus long, bien plus lucide que pour le poème.<sup>14</sup>

Some of the concentration and polishing necessary in the preparation of a theme and in its writing down derived, in

13. Gabriel Cousin, Interview in Sillage (revue du cercle universitaire international de Grenoble), novembre 1963

14. *ibid.*



Cousin's case, from his training as an engineering fitter. The correlation between the two types of work has been recognised by Cousin himself:

Lorsque je bâtis et rédige une pièce, les possibilités scéniques sont comme les outils dont je pouvais me servir lorsque j'étais ajusteur. Je dois ajuster ce que j'ai à dire à une forme scénique déterminée par le lieu scénique. 15

Similarly, the visual conception of a piece is made easier for him by his previous training in athletics: a participant can judge the effect of an activity far more sensitively than a mere spectator; a spectator who witnesses an event in person is more keenly affected than a spectator who is at a distance from that event.

Entre regarder passivement un match de foot ou d'athlétisme à la T.V. et être présent sur un stade, au milieu de la foule, il y a une différence capitale. Pour l'un, une certaine fiction où il n'est que spectateur devant des images: il reste à l'écart, à l'extérieur de ce qui vient à lui. Pour l'autre, une réalité où il est partie prenante, contribuant par sa passion et sa participation à créer l'ambiance, la qualité, le rythme même du jeu. Il est dedans, à l'intérieur: c'est lui qui va vers le spectacle. C'est encore plus important pour le théâtre. Il y a de l'électricité dans le rassemblement d'une foule, d'une salle. Et puis cette joie intérieure, cette fête d'y aller, d'y être. 16

Here, Cousin's views accord with those of Copeau in his later period when he turned to a commedia dell'arte style purely to entertain his audiences, or with those of Vilar who also saw theatre as 'une fête théâtrale'. However, like Copeau and Vilar, Cousin would never agree that theatre should only be a recreation, a means of passing, or even killing, time. Recreation should imply exactly what it says it is: a re-creation of the human spirit, a chance to become a freer being. This notion is close to

15. Gabriel Cousin, Interview in Clarté (Journal des Etudiants Communistes), 1963

16. *ibid.*

the philosophy of drama of Jean-Louis Barrault. If the theatre had the power to instil such a new spirit in its audiences, it would be fulfilling a novel and, according to Cousin, a necessary function.

Par ses deux aspects complémentaires - récréation et récréation - une pièce nourrira, recréera les êtres ayant faim et soif de réflexion, de culture, et pourra répondre à leur interrogation. 17

In order to fulfil this recreational-cum-recreative function, a play should be attractive visually as well as intellectually; the combination and interaction of various artistic elements on stage should contribute towards this end, and hence, Cousin thinks, the use of such elements is essential. Drawing on his experience as an athlete and as a member of the group Les Compagnons de la Saint-Jean, Cousin formulated a theory of dramatic production corresponding to personal taste and knowledge; it integrated the experienced spectacle of a sports stadium with the acquired understanding of social change.

Cousin explained his conception of popular theatre in 1964 in an article entitled Pour un théâtre populaire contemporain. The article was never published in its original form, although extracts from it were used to form another article: Sur quelques problèmes de création d'un auteur en régime capitaliste, which appeared in the magazine Affrontement later the same year. The opening sentence of the original article:

Le théâtre populaire contemporain n'existe pas encore. Il se cherche. On le cherche. 18

indicates that Cousin felt himself to be only an evolving part of a general movement in the theatre which had received a strong impetus from Vilar but which had not yet attained

17. Gabriel Cousin, Interview in Theater der Zeit, Heft 2, Berlin, 1967 (translation)
18. Gabriel Cousin, Pour un théâtre populaire contemporain (unpublished article in my possession), 1964, p.1

its goal. Experiments in popular theatre since the time of Firmin Gémier have shown how to organise the public and how to create an ambiance conducive to an appreciation of theatre by mass audiences, but, as Cousin repeatedly pointed out in these articles, the appropriate repertoire of plays for such audiences still did not exist. This view contrasts interestingly with that of Vilar, who was perhaps more pessimistic about the potential success of popular theatre in view of the structure of society itself:

Il s'agit donc de faire une société, après quoi nous ferons peut-être du bon théâtre. 19

Vilar's pronounced views on the restructuring of society which, according to him, would lead automatically to a reappraisal of the position of the arts in society, seem now to be revealing only part of the picture.

Dans une société mieux équilibrée, plus justement organisée, je suis persuadé que le grand public ferait siennes les formes d'art nouvelles agressives. 20

Thirty years after this statement, society is probably more just, yet the problems of the theatre remain: to Cousin, who would undoubtedly reject Vilar's proposal to "amener le public populaire au répertoire classique", this question of the appropriateness and availability of plays for the new repertoire was felt first as a spectator during the Occupation and Liberation years while undergoing his theatrical 'apprenticeship'. Cousin was not born to the theatre: he can therefore appreciate the cultural needs of people to whom the theatre is an elitist institution or cultural anathema.

It is misguided to suppose that the present theatre-going public represents the whole of France in cross-

19. Jean Vilar, De la Tradition Théâtrale, Gallimard, 1955, p.105

20. *ibid.*, p.64

section any more than the true popular audience may be said to consist of cinema-goers or sports spectators. It is equally fallacious to imagine that the average person has no conception of what the theatre is about, or what an appreciation of it entails - as cinema-goers, people are naturally critical to some degree; as sports lovers, they appreciate the talents and movements of their champions. Cousin rejects the intellectual public for its apparent pretentiousness; he champions the masses because he sees theatre as a means of enlightening and stimulating the average person into an awareness of current problems. The theatre director who, he considers, has most contributed to the acting style and presentation of popular theatre, is Jean Dasté. Dasté's approach to theatre - in taking it to the most culturally deprived by performing in town squares in Saint-Etienne - represents the epitome of what popular theatre should be and should do.

In propounding that the subject-matter of theatre should correspond to the preoccupation of contemporary society, Cousin is following Copeau's precept:

Il faut que le théâtre trouve...son sens social et universel qui correspond à la vie du temps, à celle de la cité et celle du monde, qui répond à ses préoccupations, pose, éclaire ses problèmes, cristallise ses idées et ses passions.<sup>21</sup>

This excludes both elitist theatre and Boulevard theatre; it includes the theatre of Brecht and O'Casey and the new wave of French popular dramatists such as Halet, Gatti, and Cousin himself. Regrettably, press criticism of these authors' works does not necessarily correspond to the opinions of popular audiences, with the result that many works labelled failures may have been appreciated by audiences outside the traditional theatres of Paris. Yet ironically, it is Paris which frequently determines their survival or

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21. Quoted by Cousin in Pour un théâtre populaire contemporain, p. 3

disappearance. This paradox provides an even stronger reason for experimentation in the provinces, both in the Centres Dramatiques themselves, and elsewhere with the touring companies which created the works. It might well be argued, for example, that Cousin's vision of popular theatre as "une fête, un lieu et un spectacle commun" would mean that a play could receive as many different criticisms as the number of places it is performed in - in the case of his L'Aboyeuse et L'Automate, this was certainly true.

Le théâtre doit être pour l'homme sa propre révélation. Il doit y voir sa propre condition. Condition sociale peut-être, mais surtout et avant tout, condition humaine. Il doit se reconnaître en voyant et entendant le spectacle. ~~Ce doit être le miroir de la société dans le spectacle.~~ Ce doit être le miroir de la société dans laquelle nous vivons, avec tout ce qu'elle implique de liens, de rapports, bons ou mauvais, avec l'homme, et des hommes entre eux. 22

Here, Cousin takes sides with Sartre in rejecting Vilar's notion of popular theatre which includes the performance of the Classics: like Sartre, whose argument was that "à un public populaire, il faut d'abord présenter des pièces pour lui: qui ont été écrites pour lui ou qui parlent de lui"<sup>23</sup> Cousin believes that popular theatre, in its genuine form, is working-class theatre or proletarian theatre.

Sartre justifiably expected popular theatre to be written about the people, and for their consumption. Cousin, equally justifiably, feels that to write about the greater mass of the population in terms which show an understanding of the problems and preoccupations of such people requires an author to be part of that section of society. Since the majority of professional writers in France tend to come from an elite, bourgeois section of the community, they cannot properly write what Sartre would call proletarian literature.

22. *ibid.*, p.8

23. Quoted in Jean Vilar, Le Théâtre Service public, Gallimard, 1975, p.190

This may account for the lack of genuinely popular dramatists in the mid-nineteen-sixties whose absence was regretted by many critics and producers alike. In addition, the financial position of writers was, and still is, so precarious that few of them could exist on writing alone. Working-class writers are obliged to use up practically all of their spare time if they wish to achieve success; this situation is sufficient to reduce their number considerably.

It may be said, in fact, that Cousin fulfils the requirements of Sartre's popular theatre - that is, he is a playwright, a member of the working-class himself, who writes for his fellow workers in a language which they readily understand and which reflects their own social situation.

Révélation et miroir ne veulent pas dire: vulgarité, réalisme, schématisme ou naturalisme. Mais, au contraire: complexité, transposition (poétique, satirique ou historique), poésie et dialectique. C'est pour cela qu'il faut - quels que soient les développements, les subtilités, les thèmes profonds ou secondaires - qu'une pièce, pour être populaire, ait une trame principale simple et humaine. En général, une histoire d'amour. 24

Love is a characteristic of the human condition common to every man - its complexities and subtleties may be represented on stage by numerous methods, affecting our senses, our consciences, or our psychological fears: hence the need for a multiplicity of stage techniques to portray these facets.

The poet or dramatist must be part of society in addition to being a presenter or critic of society - this dual rôle requires both a subjective reaction to social situations and an objective assessment of their meaning and effect upon us. A dramatist who succeeds in filling this

mentally agile rôle is in a position to write theatre which is both human in content and universal in scale. Such was the theatre of Aeschylus, Sophocles, Shakespeare and, more recently, of Brecht and O'Casey.

Of all the major themes presenting themselves as source material to a dramatist wishing to reflect Man's human and social condition, such as the nuclear threat, the pollution of our planet, the misuse of drugs, overpopulation, or the division between the overdeveloped and underdeveloped nations of the world, it is this last theme which appears to Cousin to be the most characteristic of our age. It may be summed up as the struggle between the Ancient and the Modern World, "l'ancien et le nouveau", and seen from a moral as well as from a political standpoint. It is precisely because we are now in a position to shape our own destiny - unlike the ancient civilisations, relying on a divinity or expecting uncontrollable forces to determine their futures - that we are faced with the necessity of accepting these political and moral responsibilities which threaten to alter society irretrievably.

Les héros de notre temps, ce ne sont plus seulement les Princes, mais surtout la foule collective, anonyme, qui travaille, qui peine, qui agit et n'a que très peu de temps et de force pour le rêve. C'est la masse des hommes qui construit le monde à travers les guerres, les révolutions, le fanatisme, la bêtise et la misère.<sup>25</sup>

To Cousin, it is the population at large who are today's heroes, for they are helping to construct a new society - a socialist society to replace the, according to Cousin, now outmoded capitalist societies of previous generations and centuries. Likewise, today's 'gods' are the constraints affecting the emerging societies of the world, the pressures determining Man's courses of action while

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25. *ibid.*, p.12

trying to bring about the new changes. We are living through an age of contradictions; despite the tragedy of recent errors in the fields of science or politics, there can be a new optimism for the majority of peoples. For the dramatist, it is an era full of wealth. Cousin claims that he taps this wealth in his theatre in which the heroes are the crowd, and the choruses the protagonists.

As content determines form in creative writing, so it follows that the form of contemporary popular theatre must also coincide with the changing, and changed, content of the works. The style must reflect the new expression of Man's uncertainties and fears. In its rhythm and its language, the Theatre of the Absurd has matched the incongruities and incoherence of Man's condition. Cousin's style is adapted to a world conditioned by audio-visual expression, the rapid pace of life itself, and by the power and influence of the means of communication and information. The ability to find and perfect a form or style of writing to correspond to the modern world, depends on six factors, namely: the structure and language of the play, the nature of the theatre, the acting potential, the technical capacity, and the degree of collaboration with the artists concerned.

Cousin enthusiastically accepts the Brechtian principle of the division of a play into tableaux or sequences, at the same time replacing the traditional psychological development by a linear chronological sequence of events, which illustrates the normal passage of time in a historical perspective. In addition, Cousin stresses the prime importance of gesture, body movement, silences and inner thoughts by the actors; this contrasts with the traditional dependence upon continuous speech as in Classical plays.

Aussi le langage variera, prendra des formes, des rythmes particuliers selon les thèmes, les personnages, les lieux de l'action. 26



Cousin's logical equation of particular linguistic forms to suit particular situations also separates him from the Classical writers whose linguistic forms are determined more by a code of rules than by circumstances, just as their structures are governed by the rules of the three unities. Convention has thus given way to realism of dialogue. At the same time, Cousin retains a lyricism in his language which approximates to poetry on occasion: his choruses, for example, frequently evoke in a highly poetic manner the collective fears and anguish of a group of people.

Cousin's ideal stage would be highly adaptable, unlike those he was obliged to work on for his first two major plays, l'Aboyeuse et l'Automate and Le Drame du Fukuryu-Maru.

- Les possibilités du plateau.. doivent permettre:
- des plans et des lieux scéniques multiples;
  - des possibilités d'entrées et de sorties sur les six faces du cube de la scène
  - la possibilité de pénétration d'éléments scéniques dans la salle, tels que passerelles, podium etc.,
  - la possibilité d'intégration de projections cinématographiques.. 27

The influence of the stage principles of Erwin Piscator are visible here; unfortunately, for Cousin and others, France did not have the facilities of the Volksbühne and Piscatorbühne of the nineteen-twenties; not until the construction of some of the Maisons de la Culture could France boast of such theatrical possibilities.

Development in theatre architecture follows that of theatre production: it cannot precede it. Popular theatre, in particular, has reached the stage because of the imaginative enterprise of drama directors or the spontaneous improvisation and adaptation of theatres to suit the needs of individual plays. Just as, according to Piscator, the subject-matter of a play determines its form, so does the

form determine the construction of the set, and, by logical extension, of the theatre itself. Inevitably, therefore, the street itself has sometimes become the place of performance - it not only provides an instant audience, but it holds the possibilities of flexibility, in contrast to the inevitable rigidity of indoor theatres. Open-air theatres provide a compromise between the two extremes and have thereby attracted popular audiences too, while the latest architect-designed theatres have necessarily had to incorporate an element of adaptability in both seating and staging arrangements, in order to accommodate a variety of productions. The more participatory the play, the greater the need for proximity and intimacy between actor and spectator. The illusion created by the proscenium-arch theatre is no longer necessary because in popular theatre mostly, and in Cousin's theatre certainly, illusion has given way to a critical reaction on the part of the spectator.

Je n'oublie pas, ni ne sous-estime la puissance et l'importance d'une sorte de magie de l'action et du lieu théâtral, mais maintenant cela ne peut plus nous être donné en tant qu'illusion mais en tant que signification. Je souhaite que les rapports entre spectacle et spectateurs soient modifiés dans le sens d'adhérer, de ne plus être séparés des comédiens ni du spectacle, d'être partie prenante. 28

Cousin has not been in the vanguard of those who have caused the change in theatre architectural style - his plays have been available to audiences in traditional theatres because it is possible to perform them in such restricted conditions. With the advent of more adventurous architecture in the Maisons de la Culture, Cousin has felt able structurally to diversify his plays, in order to suit the changed circumstances. Nevertheless, advance in one field should not be made at the expense, nor in ignorance of, the other:

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28. Cousin, Clarté, op.cit.

Ce qui est primordial, à mon avis, pour qu'il n'y ait pas d'erreurs fonctionnelles, qui condamneraient à l'inutilité des nouveaux 'lieux culturels', c'est un travail d'équipe entre architectes, metteurs en scène et auteurs. 29

Until such a time as new theatres were constructed which allowed new techniques to be put into effect, Cousin followed the example of Vilar's T.N.P.:

Au sujet des possibilités techniques du plateau (qui ne nécessitent pas forcément d'appareillages compliqués), je pense que les difficultés du lieu et le dénuement technique obligent à chercher des solutions ascétiques et conduisent parfois à plus de rigueur. Personnellement, ce que j'ai cherché à faire c'est ce que j'appellerais le style T.N.P. Le pièce sur des treteaux (un plateau nu) comme le réclamait Jacques Copeau est une forme qui existera longtemps encore. Mais on ne devrait pas être limité à cette seule possibilité. 30

Not only is the salle à l'italienne artistically unsatisfactory, but it unnecessarily retains the class divisions of society - as Vilar often pointed out - and the concept of popular theatre cannot co-exist with such architecture.

The same year that Cousin wrote the above article, 1964, the Théâtre de la Région Parisienne (T.R.P.) was founded, a new type of association whose aims were to promote different approaches to theatre:

Elle reçoit une subvention annuelle de 5 millions du Conseil Général de la Seine et se propose d'aider les troupes existantes dans la périphérie, d'encourager la construction de nouvelles salles et de favoriser la formation de troupes nouvelles. 31

This was encouraging, as were the efforts at further decentralising the theatre throughout the nineteen-sixties. Yet in 1970, Cousin, in company with many other young or

29. *ibid.*

30. Gabriel Cousin, Sur quelques problèmes de création d'un auteur en régime capitaliste, Affrontement, octobre 1964, p.13

31. André de Baecque, Les Maisons de la Culture, Seghers, 1967, p.154

new writers, still found the conditions inadequate for the encouragement and performance of new works:

Il s'agit bien de la situation du théâtre en France, actuellement paralysé, châtré par la peur. Peur financière. Peur de perdre sa place ou l'outil si péniblement acquis. Peur de ne pas savoir aborder, maîtriser la mise en scène. Peur et fuite devant le manuscrit. 32

Many factors hindered the production of plays in the Centres Dramatiques by the new generation of dramatists of whom Cousin is typical. First, the financial resources of the Centres did not allow them to give patronage to writers, as has been the policy, for example, of the English Stage Company in England. Secondly, the intentionally low prices of admission to the Centres could not alone permit a writer to live from his receipts. Thirdly, plays are invariably put into repertory - a system which prevents a highly successful play from continuing to be performed for more than a given period. The result of such measures is that writers such as Cousin are obliged to remain part-time dramatists while supporting themselves and their families by another, possibly full-time, occupation. This is, paradoxically, a situation which Cousin would approve of, as it brings the writer into contact with society in an everyday world; yet it is not ideal, for it makes too many demands on the writer's time and energy, thus diminishing his full creative talents.

The financial problems of producing a play extend even to the dramatist himself: unless he can help to finance a production, his work is unlikely to be accepted by a management. Risks are also taken by authors who deal with purely political themes - any sign of extremism may lead to a discretionary verdict of 'not recommended'. Although Cousin's own plays may not belong to this category, they

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32. Gabriel Cousin, Pour une véritable politique de création, Lettres Françaises, 7 janvier 1970

nevertheless present many production and financial problems due to their demands for large casts and complicated sets. The sanction for acceptance or refusal of a new work rests with the producer - his is the delicate and risky task of attempting new work on which both he and the author in question must find common agreement in order for the production to succeed.

Cousin experienced such difficulties at the time of the publication of his L'Opéra Noir in 1963. At that time, no French theatre could have put on the play as it demanded a minimum of twenty-two actors, both white and coloured, and an orchestra of - preferably black - jazz musicians. Consequently, it was four years before its première took place under the auspices of the T.R.P. The intervening period was one of apprehension and uncertainty for Cousin.

Alors il y a tout un temps mort, une force d'inertie à vaincre. Je suis hélas un auteur difficile à monter: mes pièces coûtent cher. Il faut beaucoup de comédiens, de la musique, souvent du mime ou de la danse, des comédiens qui sachent se mouvoir, parler, chanter. 33

The theatre directors, for their part, were afraid of financial disaster if they attempted to put on avant-garde drama by relatively unknown authors.

Gatti, Halet, Cousin seraient certainement ravis si le théâtre de la Madeleine, les Ambassadeurs, la Comédie des Champs-Élysées acceptaient de monter leurs manuscrits. Cela, entre autres avantages, leur permettrait d'améliorer leurs droits d'auteurs. Car s'il n'y a pas assez de dramaturges en France, ce n'est pas faute de vocations ni de talents. 34

Theatre is thus seen as a marketable product with a market value attached to it. Politically, it must not offend nor upset the essentially bourgeois audiences who come to see it, yet, ironically, if it has scandal value it will succeed

33. Cousin, Sillage, op.cit.

34. Décentralisation - Gatti, Cousin, Halet, Tendances, no. 40, p.207

of its own accord. Given these conditions, there can be seen to exist a good deal of hypocrisy and indirect or latent censorship in the theatre, and Cousin naturally reacts against such practices. In attacking the state of the theatre in France, he attacks the political status quo which produces it and, by extension, condemns the trivialities and buffooneries of much of the Boulevard theatre. With sarcastic irony, he lists the apparent features of the successful stage piece:

- Il faut qu'elle soit basée, soit:
- sur le rire facile,
  - sur le divertissement digestif,
  - sur le brillant, ou plutôt le clinquant, du faux bel esprit: les mots d'auteur,
  - sur l'érotisme gratuit, qui n'est le plus souvent d'ailleurs que de la grivoiserie, mais pouvant aller jusqu'à l'obscénité,
  - sur la publicité tapageuse du nom d'une vedette, dont les moeurs du cinéma ont fait connaître la vie privée.
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To please all the necessary authorities, the managements, and the audience themselves, a play would merely be according to a constructed formula, its success as guaranteed as its triviality, but a work divested of all creativity and novelty.

For the actors, there are the problems of learning and mastering a variety of stage techniques to comply with the demands of the new authors. Likewise, the demands of homogeneity within a troupe without specific stars and therefore without publicity-value are greater than in a traditional play with its hierarchy of casting. Finally, there are the demands of improvisation of a multiplicity of rôles for each actor to meet - requiring greater concentration and energy during performance than in 'straight' theatre. Cousin was, incidentally, disappointed and frustrated by the lack of proper drama training facilities for actors in the mid-nineteen-sixties - at the time of his own major productions. This frequently resulted

in poor productions of works by the new generation of dramatists, of which he was one, whose plays demanded a good deal more talent from actors than did the works of the traditional repertoire. The only drama school in France which trained students in the arts of dance, mime, singing, or acrobatics, for example, was that of Jacques Lecoq in Paris, and this school received no financial assistance from the Ministère de l'Action Culturelle of the day.

Cousin regrets deeply and personally such deficiencies in the theatre in contemporary France, and lays the blame largely on lack of government finance to rescue the situation. However, there are also political differences between Cousin and the State - inevitable in a society geared to the profit motive in its activities - although it is difficult to conclude that Cousin has been hampered in the creation of his works to a greater extent than many other more politically-motivated dramatists. Indeed, he is fortunately open-minded enough to allow considerable adaptation and extemporisation in his plays - this contributes to their potential and speedy performance. He sees advantages in many different interpretations of a play - resulting in an enrichment of producers' ideas and actors' experiences. He would like a close and regular association with one theatre - collaboration between writer and producer or company tends to enhance the work of both. The creative artist benefits from all experience, and collaboration with different groups in different countries would contribute towards extending that experience. Cousin's work is international in flavour and in intention; the kind of co-operation between countries and artists that Peter Brook achieves, for example, is invaluable for all concerned.

Cousin's principal contribution to the study of the state of theatre in contemporary France was his article in Affrontement, written and published in 1964. By 1970, when the effects of theatrical decentralisation had been felt

in the Centres Dramatiques and the Maisons de la Culture - still in the process of expansion in France - new authors such as Cousin ought to have become more optimistic about their chances of production. However, in that year, Cousin had an article published which still revealed considerable disillusionment with the state of affairs in the French theatre.

En 1969, les jeunes animateurs et metteurs en scène ne peuvent plus monter de pièces. Les comédiens n'ont toujours pas les moyens rationnels et publics de passer par une école et de se former au métier. Le théâtre universitaire continue à ne pas exister. Les jeunes troupes de qualité qui, dans certaines régions, ont tenté de se créer, n'ont pu vivre. Les nouveaux auteurs ne sont pas lus, ne sont pas aidés, ne sont pas joués.

La fameuse décentralisation, si elle a vu le nombre de troupes croître, n'est cependant toujours pas réalisée vraiment. Ni avec les auteurs. Ni avec la fréquentation des ouvriers ou ruraux, qui reste dérisoire. Ni avec les éléments régionaux ou locaux de théâtre amateur de qualité qui existent mais sont tenus à l'écart. Ni avec la critique parisienne usée, saturée, épuisée, ayant complètement - pour beaucoup - perdu la possibilité d'un regard neuf. 36

Such criticism touches not only on specific problems confronting authors and companies alike - such as outdated theatres, training courses, and direct subsidy - but it attacks the whole approach to the arts by the French State. In the same article, Cousin argues for a policy of generous State aid, without restrictions attached, and for financial help from local authorities. With such help, encouraging repercussions would be felt by architects, sociologists, and educationists, as well as by people more directly concerned with the theatre. In May 1968, a permanent committee of directors of Théâtres Populaires and Maisons de la Culture had been established in Villeurbanne to propose ways of improving the relationship between cultural activities and the population at large, and to discuss general aspects



of culture in France. In order to improve the training of future actors and to diffuse the arts in general more effectively, the Villeurbanne committee proposed the establishment of centres where the arts would be taught by artists, thus giving a practical training to students and avoiding the more theoretical training currently applied in the universities, Conservatoires, and Ecoles des Beaux-Arts.

Le centre de formation sera donc avant tout un lieu de rencontre et un atelier de création. L'enseignement à proprement parler, technique et théorique, aura lieu en même temps que le travail pratique. En résumé, les trois termes création, formation et Action Culturelle nous paraissent devoir être liés dans tous les domaines artistiques et littéraires. Ainsi, aucun centre de formation ne semblera satisfaisant s'il n'est pas associé à un foyer de création artistique lui-même plongé dans une action culturelle. 37

Cousin's own contribution to the reformation of teaching techniques in the training of actors, which met the requirements of the Villeurbanne document calling for a new relationship between teacher and student, was the inauguration of his Centre de Recherche d'Entraînement et de Formation pour l'Animation Théâtrale et Socio-Educative (C.R.E.F.A.T.S.). The stated objective of this organisation, founded in Grenoble in 1972 - but for which teachers had been trained since 1965 - indicates the degree to which Cousin has succeeded in amalgamating his experience as a teacher and as a member of the Compagnons de la Saint-Jean, with his love of the theatre and his desire to promote the arts in his own region.

Fournir des moyens à tous ceux qui ont une 'profession de contact', qu'il s'agisse de l'acteur devant son public, du professeur devant ses élèves, du médecin devant ses malades, la gamme s'étendant aux plus diverses branches et fonctions. Une méthode basée sur le corporel, qui établit la nécessité d'un franchissement entre le comportement qui se résoud à paraître et celui qui consiste à être. 38

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37. Grenier de Toulouse, revue du Centre Dramatique National, octobre, 1968, p.4

38. Document of C.R.E.F.A.T.S., Grenoble (in my possession)

Students come to this course from all walks of life and the Centre forms part of the Faculté de Lettres of the University of Grenoble, preparing students for a course in practical expression and communication. At the opening of the Centre's workshops in April 1973, the Rector of the University, M. Maurice Niveau, said of Cousin and C.R.E.F.A.T.S.

Vous êtes une provocation à la culture, vous êtes : personnellement, M. Cousin, l'exemple de celui qui a surmonté tous les défis dans une société où les plus pauvres doivent supporter les contradictions de la richesse des autres. On peut être à la fois poète et homme d'action. 39

Cousin's interpretation of the function of his organisation is as an antidote to contemporary society: the sort of society he depicts in L'Aboyeuse et l'Automate cannot be cured by supine relaxation or psychiatric methods - hence the satire of such methods in that play; the only true palliative is an active form of sublimation of the senses through body expression.

Tous, plus ou moins, nous vivons dans la peur ou la crainte, sous trois poids: la pression de la société industrielle qui nous confine dans l'isolement; celle de la société de compétition qui additionne les couches de blocage et multiplie les gens véritablement bétonnés; avec une sorte d'invitation à parader au lieu d'être. Nous vivons dans une période de rupture, dans une société à la recherche d'une nouvelle morale pas encore définie. 40

As a physical education specialist and as a teacher, Cousin here identifies himself with similar teachers of dance and movement in this century; Laban, for example, advocated dance as a means of relaxation for all people. He demonstrated its recreative, recuperative, and educative values. Already before the First World War he had established his first 'Movement Choir' and lay dance group, in order to stimulate active creative activities rather than passive audience participation.

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39. Report by Christian Gali, Le Progrès-Dimanche, 29 avril 1973
40. Gabriel Cousin, Le Progrès-Dimanche, 29 avril 1973

He realised that with the advance of automation in the present century, moving, and the desire to do so is increasingly neglected, while demands on our nervous energy are constantly growing. Movement education through the discipline of participating in a Movement Choir offers a potent means for counteracting this discrepancy. 41

The existence of C.R.E.F.A.T.S. vindicates Cousin's personal enthusiasm and courage: as a practical demonstration of his previously stated theories of the theatre and its rôle in society, it fulfils his personal ambitions and those of the Villeurbanne committee, and it justifies his professed ideals for the improvement of the contemporary French theatrical scene.

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41. Brochure of Laban Art of Movement Centre, Addlestone, Surrey.

CHAPTER VIII : THE THEMES OF THE SOCIAL DRAMATISTS

Some of the major themes of Cousin's plays - racism, alienation in contemporary society, the nuclear threat - had already featured in the works of other writers since the Second World War. Their treatment naturally differed according to the style of the dramatists, and it is perhaps in the form of the plays that their differences and their effectiveness are most apparent. In the treatment of the theme of racism, for example, Sartre's La Putain Respectueuse relies on the tragedy of one condensed incident to portray the brutality of racial hatred throughout the Southern States of America; Genet's Les Nègres uses a court setting to put White supremacy on trial and portrays a funeral in a vivid and grotesque manner in order to convey the essence of racial oppression; Adamov's La Politique des Restes also has a court setting, and denounces racial prejudice by showing a travesty of justice.

None of these examples contains the warmth, spontaneity, or pathos of Cousin's l'Opéra Noir, but they all show the ultimate result of racialist attitudes - in a lynching, a mock funeral, or in a satirised tribunal scene. Sartre touches upon the same attitudes of society towards the colour problem that Cousin demonstrates: the equation of colour and the Devil through prostitution, the dissimulation of truth and justice towards black people, the intense polarisation of views leading to the general persecution of minorities. The weight of White public opinion is so massive as to distort not only truth and justice but also personal feelings; Sartre's Lizzie is swayed by the arguments of the senator because she feels she is betraying America if she does not perjure herself in order to inculcate a black man. This could not have happened in Cousin's play, for Cousin wants to stress the essential need to preserve the truth by remaining faithful to one's own feelings. Love can achieve this for Man, and ought to be used as a weapon to overcome

prejudice; in l'Opéra Noir, the tactic fails, but nevertheless, the characters have no guilty consciences about their actions, as Lizzie has about hers.

In Les Nègres, there is no room for conscience: the irony of the situation is heavily sarcastic, even sadistic, as white 'characteristics' are mocked as 'bonté, intelligence, vertu, charité' while the blacks stand for 'une exquise sauvagerie'. The impossibility of love in a racist situation is taken one stage further than in Cousin's play, as love is turned to hatred by social attitudes:

Je ne pus supporter la condamnation du monde. Et je me suis mis à vous haïr quand tout en vous m'eût fait entrevoir l'amour, et que l'amour m'eût rendu insupportable le mépris des hommes, et ce mépris insupportable mon amour pour vous. Exactement, je vous hais. 1

This probably reflects Genet's own nature - his sense of social retaliation - as much as Cousin reveals his in his plays. Genet's play on the illusions of love and hate are enhanced by the use of masks and pathetic exhortations such as 'faites-vous d'abord décolorer' - both of which elements occur in Cousin's drama. Shame and guilt are likewise exploited by both authors.

The degree of menace in these plays on racism is equal - lynching occurs in Sartre and Cousin, intimidation in Genet and Adamov. Johnnie Brown feels as persecuted by black people as he does by the detritus of consumer society - both of which appear to be proliferating rapidly. His final acquittal of murder after pleading his case by raving about social intimidation bears a close resemblance to the ending of Brecht's Die Ausnahme und die Regel. Adamov's plea for the elimination of racial prejudice and social injustice through a demonstration of the iniquities of the legal system in this final scene, matches Cousin's call for a more humane

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1. Jean Genet, Les Nègres, L'Arbalète, 1958, p.53

society where love cannot be deterred by social convention or personal animosity.

The alienation of Man from his natural self as a result of the use of modern technology in his everyday life, or through the work he performs in order to sustain the production lines of industrialised society, has become the subject-matter both of plays and films for half a century. Chaplin's Modern Times and René Clair's A nous la liberté touched humorously on a theme which was, below the surface, far more tragic than its humour at first suggested. Jacques Tati continued the witty observation of human nature being distorted by the mechanical age in his film Mon Oncle, but it has been left to the postwar dramatists to express the neuroses and obsessions attached to this aspect of contemporary society. Man has become trapped by his own technology and cannot fight its encroaching limitation on his existence. While it is still possible for Giraudoux's Aurélie in La Folle de Chaillot to contemplate exterminating the 'mecs' who threaten to control the financial and business worlds so tightly that they will be able to dictate to governments, none of the characters in Ionesco's Rhinocéros has the power to overcome the mysterious fascist oppressor - a veiled reference to Nazism. There are echoes in both plays of the dehumanisation of Man, his metamorphosis into an animal state of being.

Les hommes sont tout simplement en train de se changer en animaux avides. Il n'ont plus la force de dissimuler... Ils se changeraient en bêtes peu à peu qu'il n'en serait pas autrement. 2

Although Ionesco's play may be seen as an indictment of all rigid ideologies, Cousin's L'Aboyeuse et l'Automate, like the Chaplin film, deals principally with the threat of automation to human affairs. As in his other plays, one aspect of modern society threatens the pursuit of love

between two individuals, and when Cousin satirises the effects of automation or the techniques of psychiatry, he is pointing to the alienating force of work upon Man and the consequent gulf which separates him from his fellows in modern society. The very existence of this gulf preventing human contact is the essence of his tragedy.

Psychoanalysis is satirised also in Georges Michel's Les Jouets, in which the same joke about psychiatrists is told three times by different people. Like Cousin's play, Michel's Les Jouets deals with the tragedy of transitory relationships in modern society - a situation created by an excess of advertising techniques and the consequent reduction of human personality to that of a child. Unlike Cousin, Michel portrays the sterility of such an existence in an entirely uniform way and his characters are mere marionettes. Love cannot exist, because it has never existed, and the only visible sign of enthusiasm on the part of the main couple is their futile fanaticism for toys or the worthless gifts from publicity campaigns. The immorality of such campaigns is exposed, as it is in L'Aboyeuse et l'Automate, and denounced as an exploitation of the basest human desires for competitiveness with one's neighbours, or by the suggestion of inadequacy in a materialistic world.

The two plays evolve a form appropriate to express such a disintegration of personality and humanity: the characters cannot prevent themselves from mouthing platitudes or the empty phraseology of advertisers. Even to third parties, the central couple in each play seems unable to escape this linguistic impotence and is in danger of becoming totally alienated from the outside, real world. This process is more complete in Michel's play, set in an H.L.M., where, presumably, the other tenants are trapped in a similar way of life; however, in L'Aboyeuse et l'Automate, the tragedy is greater because it is seen to be descending upon the couple slowly and irremediably, and we

as spectators are conscious of the debilitating effect of certain types of work and pressures on a couple unable to put up a defence against those pressures. The outcome of the process begun in L'Aboyeuse et l'Automate can, in a sense, be followed through in Les Jouets.

The destructive force of machinery is also seen in Adamov's Le Ping-Pong, in which two men, Arthur and Victor, are alienated from society and from natural human emotions through their obsession with a pinball machine. Man's mind is machine-dominated and he is insidiously trapped by the spurious attraction of trivia.

Like Lui and Elle in Les Jouets, Arthur and Victor worship false objectives and the deterioration which ensues affects both their minds and their morality. As Adamov himself remarked, the machine is symbolic of Man's futile search for money and prestige, and as such, is the instrument of his changing mental and moral approach to life. In a negative way, the machine can enhance the reputation of some and bring a false sense of prestige, yet this is only an ephemeral state of being. As Michel suggests in Les Jouets, such processes must be constantly renewed as they cannot exist as ends in themselves, only as means to an end. Adamov's thesis is not that machines belittle Man - as Cousin's play illustrates - but that they corrupt his morality, a much more serious allegation. Marx denounced consumer society in similar terms in his Economic and Political Manuscripts: "Production does not only produce Man as a commodity, the human commodity, Man in the form of commodity; in conformity with this situation, it produces him as a mentally and physically dehumanised being". The power of a machine to dominate personality is expressed by Annette to Roger in Le Ping-Pong:

Mais si les appareils vous tapent sur le système, mon cher Roger, qu'êtes-vous allé faire au Consortium? Vous auriez pu trouver mille autres occasions de déployer vos talents, et de vous faire une place dans la société.<sup>3</sup>

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3. Arthur Adamov, Le Ping-Pong, Gallimard 1955, p.132



This would suggest, however, that Man is powerless to withstand or control such domination, that he is bent on advancement through prestige, and that machines of the modern age help him to achieve this goal. If this is true, then it is Man himself who is weak and he lies open to other, more harmful, influences. Adamov shows the resultant corruption and intimidation within the Consortium, and so denigrates big business in general. As in Cousin's play, the dictatorship of business attitudes destroys human contact and integrity and Annette has occasion later in the action to draw Roger's attention to the frustrations and feelings of inadequacy caused by the pursuit of success in this field.

Mais, mon pauvre ami, c'est sinistre, tout simplement!  
Et déplacé! Si encore vous étiez jamais intéressé  
à ce malheureux appareil... Mais non, vous le  
méprisiez, et pas seulement lui, tous ceux qui  
l'aimaient, qui s'en occupaient...<sup>4</sup>

Yet the source of the threat to Man is different in the minds of the two authors; for Adamov, it lies in Man himself: "les personnages secrètent leur propre poison, préparent leur propre malheur", whereas Cousin clearly is attacking society as a whole and denouncing its insinuating and corruptive influence on Man who is too frail to resist the pressures of modern living.

Guy Foissy's En regardant tomber les murs, first performed in 1966, also deplores these pressures: it portrays two men desperately attempting to assert their individuality over the encroaching functionalism of urban architecture, typified by H.L.M. developments; however, their violent intervention only brings destruction on themselves.

The dropping of the first atomic bomb on Hiroshima in 1945 not only brought the Second World War to a frightening conclusion and heralded the Atomic Age but also intensified

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4. *ibid.* p.170

the political and moral debate on Man's future, and questioned his ability to survive the new means of destruction at his disposal. This intensification of political awareness and moral disquietude is echoed, not surprisingly, in literature of the period, and the violence of the Atomic Age is carried into both the form and content of that literature. An enormous gulf in the thinking and attitudes towards war in general separates Giraudoux's La Guerre de Troie n'aura pas lieu with its philosophy of Man's destiny, from the highly aggressive anti-war tracts of a mere quarter of a century later, such as Gatti's V comme Vietnam and Benedetto's Napalm. These plays vividly demonstrate the change in theatre form that has occurred in that period, and their visual appeal, coupled with their political polemic, are artistically as disturbing as their actual military counterpart.

The Hiroshima and Nagasaki experiences brought to French theatre a fund of plays of a very different nature, among them Cousin's Le Drame du Fukuryu-Maru (1963), Vilar's Le Dossier Oppenheimer (1964) based on a 'montage scénique' of the German dramatist Heinar Kipphardt, and Gatti's La Cigogne (1971).

Cousin's work is the only one of these three plays to depict the sufferings of the people of Japan at the time of the explosion. As in his L'Aboyeuse et l'Automate Cousin does not show us a state of mind or being in isolation; he prefers to reveal the disturbing metamorphosis of mind and body as the result of a devastating experience. In this way, he allows the disintegration of people's lives to become the substance of the tragedy on stage and, using the theatre techniques available to him, increases that disintegration by visual and aural bombardment. The sheer physical pain of the nuclear experience as expressed by Cousin puts this play in the mould of Artaud. Gatti's play exhibits the effects of the bomb on the population of Nagasaki, but the author develops, to a greater extent than Cousin, the subsequent need for a new vision of life and an optimistic

philosophy to overcome the desperate resignation felt by the inhabitants of the city. The origami storks are no longer sufficient to ward off evil spirits or cure the sick:

Laissez les cigognes en papier dormir. Elles n'ont plus rien à promettre. 5

Gatti's play, while condemning American technology and aggression which have made guinea-pigs of the people of Nagasaki, is an attempt to persuade people of the futility of stagnant anguish. "Chacun vit dans sa façon de penser" says Ayasaki, and the judge Mashimoto admits

que l'homme que vous voyez devant vous n'en est plus qu'un reflet qui s'obstine à croire qu'il est encore le juge qu'il ne sera jamais plus. 6

La Cigogne belongs to the literature of remorse and has close affinities in this respect with Sartre's Les Mouches - Enemon is the new Oreste - and, although Cousin is also trying to awaken people from their post-nuclear physical and mental sterility, Gatti's call to freedom is more of an intellectual approach than Cousin's. Gatti explores the psychology of abandoned beings more thoroughly, and creates greater complexity by reanimating the objects affected by the nuclear blast, thereby lending their owners a dual personality, and thus making them fulfil a double rôle.

Vilar's play, Le Dossier Oppenheimer, demonstrates a 'cas de conscience' and, by presenting a scientist faced with the dilemma of moral responsibility and military and political reality, the play is analogous with Brecht's Das Leben des Galilei. Vilar has allowed the proceedings of the enquiry by the Personnel Security Board of the American Atomic Energy Commission in April 1954 to provide their own drama: it is a story of political and personal intrigue - a historical document of the era of McCarthyism - and excellent material for stage adaption. Vilar uses the material to

5. Armand Gatti, La Cigogne, Seuil, 1971, p.27

6. *ibid.*, p. 83

show the doubts and fears of those at the opposite end of the social spectrum to the poor fishermen of Cousin's le Drame du Fukuryu-Maru. As a piece of writing about individual conscience, Vilar's work bears a resemblance to the plays of the English playwright Robert Bolt.

Like Vilar, Benedetto uses real characters from contemporary history in his Napalm, a play about political subversion, torture, and hypocritical doubletalk. Unlike Vilar's play, Napalm cannot use authentically documented material, for it is intended to be a personal attack on individual and national attitudes towards war. The form of this play partly resembles that of Cousin's: the tableaux construction, the theatrical techniques, and the free verse style are all similar to those employed in Cousin's theatre, while tableau 23 of Napalm could equally well have been written for Le Drame du Fukuryu-Maru. Its evocation of the hopelessness of love in the aftermath of war and the tragic circumstances surrounding a couple doomed to mere memories of their former passion for one another, is in close sympathy with the feelings expressed by Cousin in his play.

Les morts sont en marche avec les vivants  
 Il y a de plus en plus de morts  
 De morts partout  
 L'amour parle à la radio libre  
 Pour les séparés  
 Les coupés  
 Les disjoints  
 Tendus l'un vers l'autre  
 Dans la nuit de l'absence  
 Et quand la lampe s'est éteinte  
 J'ai pris ton ombre entre mes bras  
 J'ai mis mon ombre entre tes bras  
 Entre tes bras  
 Mon ombre  
 Entre mes bras  
 Ton ombre 7

Cousin is one of the very few modern French dramatists to make use of Eastern legends for his theatre - in this respect, he follows Brecht more closely than other French writers.

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7. André Benedetto, Napalm, Oswald, 1972, p.95

Brecht's source of inspiration for his Der Jasager and Der Neinsager - the two plays which most closely resemble in spirit Cousin's Le Voyage de derrière la Montagne - was a translation by Arthur Waley of the original Japanese legends. It was at about the same time, in the early 1920's that Paul Claudel was experiencing a more direct influence of Eastern theatre during his consulship in Japan, where he was struck by the dramatic potential in Kabuki theatre. As in Kabuki theatre, Cousin's texts are really only draft texts which take on a more substantial shape in the hands of a producer and with the added imagination of actors.

The additional theme in both of Cousin's plays with Japanese antecedents, that of the general problem or, as Cousin succinctly calls it "l'ancien et le nouveau", was suggested to him by an essay of Einstein's which he read while researching for the play Le Drame du Fukuryu-Maru. As dramatic themes, the 'generation gap' and society's general indifference to its elderly citizens, are relatively ubiquitous. There is no shortage of elderly couples in Ionesco's plays, while Michel's La Promenade du Dimanche concerns itself with a double generation problem manifested in the battles of a recalcitrant son both with his parents and his grand-parents. Unlike Cousin's Le Voyage de derrière la Montagne, however, Michel's play is about the lack of concern for important social issues, and the wilful avoidance of human contact within families. Superficiality is the only reality; even in death, feeling is totally absent, and suicide and murder, the natural outcomes of spiritual indifference, pass unnoticed. To express his anger at such situations, Michel uses farce but the end of the play brings more sensitivity to the human predicament and the 'visages consternés' of the parents show a realisation of the truth of their son's death. Cousin, on the other hand, magnifies the anguish felt between generations by posing the moral problem of how to ease the old through death, while ensuring the proper continuation of

family traditions and an adherence to a set of preordained social and spiritual rules.

Moral decision-making is also the problem facing the characters in Simone de Beauvoir's Les Bouches Inutiles, first performed in 1945, in which self-sacrifice is necessary to alleviate the acute famine afflicting a besieged community. This play stresses the easy tyranny possible in such a situation, and shows how simply a theoretical ideal may be invoked to suit a tyrant's purpose. The removal of the unproductive members of society - the old, the sick, the women and children - would indeed ensure the survival of the remaining inhabitants of medieval Vaucelles; fortunately, one man refuses to recognise the necessity for such a measure and, in exposing the tyrants, presents the people with an existentialist choice, that of substantiating life by purposeful personal action or suffering death by peaceful compromise with the will of the community council: "notre lot, c'est ce risque et cette angoisse".

Cousin's younger generation also question community attitudes and claim the right and the duty to pursue individual integrity. In doing this, they are not only respecting the individual's freedom to choose his own destiny, but they are also proposing the questioning of all communally-held values and suggesting a constant vigil on the most deeply-rooted social attitudes.

Cousin's successful experiment with street theatre in 1968, his Vivre en 1968, was also an attempt to question social and spiritual values. In presenting the problem of hunger on a world-wide scale, it invited the criticism of personal and community-held values on that subject by providing comparisons and statistics with other countries. The style of Vivre en 1968 was strictly informative, and despite its images of poverty, oppression, and natural disaster, it did not in any way approach the style or technique of a 'happening' which generally assumes the nature of a confrontation with audiences, or demands their

participation. Cousin's play functioned more as a piece of documentary information, intending to provoke thought and spiritual response from a presumably otherwise indifferent or ignorant public. In content and form, Vivre en 1968 is more closely allied to that of the modern German dramatists Peter Weiss and Rolf Hochhuth than to the works of other French contemporaries. Cousin acknowledges his affinity with the theory of documentary theatre propounded by Weiss<sup>8</sup> which stresses the authenticity of the basis of documentary theatre, as opposed to the reliance on imagination or inventiveness by the author. The dramatist's task is to select and correlate the information at his disposal and to create a structured form out of it. A critical and subtle arrangement of the documentary evidence - generally on a social or political theme - will determine the theatrical value of the finished product. By a reorganisation of the information available to the public, a more effective and dramatic means of communication can be achieved than is possible through other news media. Close research into certain news topics will reveal a falsification of reality by the intentional omission of some of the facts - it is the dramatist's rôle to uncover such camouflage and reveal the underlying truth. Street demonstrations carry a dramatic potential in themselves and their latent explosive themes can be exploited by the dramatist in the theatre - although a stage setting diminishes the effectiveness of the material. There is no substitute for the animosity and spontaneity caused by a street demonstration, but the theatre can re-create some of these effects by remaining in the street; it will, however, never be able to re-create the conditions fully, as documentary theatre is self-evidently an artistic rather than an emotional product. Documentary theatre is likely to be socially or politically

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8. Peter Weiss, notes on documentary theatre published in Theater Heute, Berlin, 1968, No.3

motivated; it may assume the form of a tribunal; it will probably be partisan in its approach.

Cousin's Vivre en 1968 conforms to most of these precepts and the general analysis of documentary theatre inherent in them. His Le Cycle du Crabe also goes some way towards presenting us with the documentary evidence on which the play is based and in this respect at least, it is analogous with the type of theatre which Weiss and Hochhuth have instigated in Germany in recent years. What is perhaps more important is the difference between this type of theatre in Cousin's general development as a dramatist, and his other plays based on a single 'fait divers'. The greater use of documentary material for more recent plays has shown Cousin to be a dramatist with a deep 'prise de conscience' and may in the future point to a clearer distinction between the earlier works such as L'Aboyeuse et l'Automate and L'Opéra Noir based on single themes, and the later pieces since Le Cycle du Crabe, completed in 1968, which contain an elaborate wealth of detail and a correspondingly complex construction.

As Dorothy Knowles has pointed out<sup>9</sup>, the French social dramatists of the nineteen-sixties are united in their rejection of the Theatre of the Absurd: Gatti's dictum that the Absurdists concerned themselves with the absence of Man on earth while social dramatists dealt with his creative presence in society, is a valid starting-point for any definition of the new movement. The fact that, despite their common exemplars in Brecht, Weiss, or Hochhuth, the French dramatists of the period - Benedetto, Gatti, Adamov, Planchon, Cousin, Halet, Foissy, and Michel, for instance - created many different forms of theatre to express a general social or political point of view, testifies to their ingenuity and originality in this field.

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9. Dorothy Knowles, Le théâtre: lieu d'une prise-de-conscience-du-monde-contemporain, in Zagadnienia Rodzajów Literackich (Les problèmes des genres littéraires), XVIII/I, Prague, 1975



CHAPTER IX : GABRIEL COUSIN'S PLACE IN THE SOCIAL DRAMA MOVEMENT

It would be truistic to say that the Second World War caused considerable social upheaval in the major industrialised countries of Western Europe, yet in France in particular, the traumas of a society stunned by the 1940 defeat and the Occupation years, disillusioned by the politics of appeasement, and desperate to construct new foundations for itself after the Liberation, led directly to a Fourth Republic dominated by constitutional chaos and years of political uncertainty and experimentation.

The military conflict and human misery of recent times did not appear to have resolved any of the social problems, however, and the new political battles to be fought were set against a background of a society profoundly influenced by technological advance both in the large unnoticed spheres of scientific activity and in the more commonly experienced fields of mass communications.

La civilisation industrielle a commencé à changer autour de nous le monde et les modes de vie des hommes. Elle modifie leurs rapports, entre eux et avec les objets qui les entourent. La littérature, les arts ont connu de profondes mutations. La science, mais aussi le cinéma et la télévision (bien davantage que les transports) ont fondamentalement transformé notre relation avec l'espace et avec le temps. <sup>1</sup>

Television, the new new medium of mass communication, came to dominate people's lives: its ability to reach all sections of society at the same time made it a vehicle for the instant dissemination of a - probably unchallengable - point of view; the sheer size of a television audience is sufficient to warrant the medium being called propagandist; indeed, the advent of the television age has led to a radical shift of emphasis among the people, the government, and the mass-media themselves. This shift has been noted

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1. André Veinstein, Le Théâtre expérimental, (Collection Dionysos), La Renaissance du Livre, 1968, p.54.

by Jack Lang, creator and director of the Nancy Theatre Festival:

Le gouvernement dispose d'instruments de propagande puissants (notamment la télévision) à côté desquels le théâtre qui touche un public limité constitue une force d'opposition dérisoire. En Union Soviétique, ce n'est plus le théâtre que l'on politise, mais la télévision. 2

As the technological age has progressed, so people's leisure time has increased and their demands for entertainment diversified. Again it is the theatre which has suffered, as Keith Dewhurst recently pointed out with regret and cynicism:

People don't need theatre - they've got sport, bingo, pop, T.V., and radio. 3

In a world inured to the impact and immediacy of factual information through the mass media, theatre must compete on equal terms if it is to succeed in dramatising that information and to elicit an active response to its moral, social, or political content. To appeal to the audience's social conscience, it cannot rely on fantasy or distortion: it must be a theatre of fact and of truth.

La télévision en rendant présente la réalité immédiate a rapproché définitivement l'imaginaire de l'événement. Il n'est plus possible maintenant d'éloigner le héros, de le distancer comme l'a tenté Brecht. C'est au niveau du fait que se joue le spectacle. Nul ne peut y échapper. 4

Theatre must be an attempt to fuel the imagination and to encourage an active response to social issues - if it can do this, it will not atrophy to the extent that television has atrophied, and consequently dulled the imagination. In addition, theatre must remain immediate, thereby competing

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2. Jack Lang, L'Etat et le Théâtre, Pichon et Durand-Auzias, 1968, p.26
  3. Keith Dewhurst, British Theatre in the past 20 Years, BBC TV 15-12-1973
  4. Jean Duvignaud, Spectacle et Société, Denoël/Gauthier, 1970, p.159

with the historical immediacy of its rival, television. Jean Duvignaud, applauding the appeal of the German Volksbühnen and likening Vilar's success with the T.N.P. to theirs, called for more 'happenings' to provoke public activity to counter the inevitable passivity created by the cinema, television and other entertainment media;

Le 'happening' n'est qu'une des manifestations possibles de la revolte contre une culture hautement institutionnalisée et organisée...  
 Le 'happening' recourt donc à l'action directe. Il faut entraîner contre son gré le spectateur, le rendre participant au moins une fois dans sa vie d'un acte répréhensible qui lui fasse sentir la force de la subversion. Et cela 'ici et maintenant', dans le creux ou l'abîme d'un présent qui se heurte à la calme durée reconfortante qu'implique la société de consommation où chacun est à sa place, 'libre' et heureux consommateur. 5

This view accords entirely with that of Cousin, and Cousin's theatre clearly demonstrates both his own personal social conscience on certain issues, and a desire to encourage others to share that conscience by the provocative verbal assault of his characters.

The type of theatre best suited to compete with television's reportage techniques - telejournalism, as it is sometimes called - is documentary theatre, that is to say a theatre using the facts of history which are manipulated by the expert dramatist so as to arouse emotional or intellectual indignation in the onlooker. In so doing, it is not being vindictive or partisan as street theatre may be accused of being, since street theatre is closer to reality because it re-enacts historical events or demonstrates a viewpoint in the same context and manner in which those events were first portrayed. Instead, documentary theatre is a reasoned appraisal of events taken in more than one context or from more than one standpoint, and it stresses an injustice or an inequitable action which history needs to correct. In this

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5.     ibid., p.160

case, the dramatist is an informer, an investigator into historical truth, and as such, he acts as society's guide to its own conscience; his integrity is an essential commodity in a world of ignorance and indifference.

Erwin Piscator recognised the value of the new documentary dramatists who emerged in German theatre in the nineteen-sixties:

Rolf Hochhuth erscheint mir nicht nur als ein guter Stücke-Schreiber und Dichter: et ist ein Bekenner! Die Entdeckung aber eines solchen Bekenners ist wohlthuend und tröstlich in einer Welt des Schweigens, eines Schweigens, das leer ist, inhaltlos, nutzlos 6

Gabriel Cousin had also reacted to this need for a change of style and approach to contemporary problems by the modern dramatist, and the theme and form of Le Drame du Fukuryu-Maru was to interest Piscator sufficiently for the latter to begin a production of the play, initially through his assistant Viola Recklies in Berlin, in January 1964. However, Piscator wanted to make certain changes in Cousin's text, in order to emphasise the class-struggle aspect of the play, but unfortunately he died before an agreement could be reached with Cousin. Piscator's wife, Maria Ley-Piscator, the director of the Actors' Workshop of New York, also knew of Cousin's work and used scenes from L'Aboyeuse et l'Automate for dramatic study by her students. By and large, however, documentary drama of the type developed by Rolf Hochhuth, Peter Weiss, and Heinar Kipphardt in Germany, has, as Bernard Dort has stated, hardly appeared in France:

La 'tranche de vie' - fût-ce sous la forme du document prélevé parmi ces reflets que ne cessent de nous imposer les mass-média - reste, depuis que le naturalisme est passé au boulevard, proscrite de la scène française. 7

One man who understood the needs of the new generation of theatre-goers and whose own company succeeded in rivalling

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6. Erwin Piscator, Preface to Rolf Hochhuth's Der Stellvertreter (The Representative) Rowohlt, 1963
  7. Bernard Dort, Théâtre Réel, Seuil, 1971, p.217

the claims of cinema and television was Jean Vilar, director of the Théâtre National Populaire from 1951 to 1963.

Entre les masses et la culture, des relais sont nécessaires. C'est à la recherche de ces 'relais' que depuis la Libération je suis parti.<sup>8</sup>

By the end of the second decade after the war, it was in fact Jean Vilar who stood out as having contributed the most to this movement for popular theatre. His conception of the theatre as a public service, accessible to all, is by now well-known:

Nous pensons qu'il faut entendre par Théâtre Populaire un Théâtre ouvert à tous, sans aucune restriction. Il s'agit, avant tout, de présenter de belles et grandes oeuvres<sup>9</sup>

The T.N.P. under Jean Vilar's directorship succeeded in popularising the theatre by eliminating many of the class-conscious attitudes towards it created by conditions in the theatres themselves: the rigid distinction of financial hierarchy by an architectural division of the auditorium into tiers, the formality of theatre 'ethics' with regard to programme-selling, 'ouvreuses', and even the use of the curtain to denote the divisions of a play into its separate acts; Vilar also managed to bring a whole new and younger generation into the theatre by attractive facilities at the Palais Chaillot in Paris and the Palais des Papes in Avignon. He was unique, too, in adapting to contemporary audiences his methods for encouraging popular theatre and did not rely for his ideas on the many previous attempts at creating popular theatre before the war.

L'aspect révolutionnaire [de l'entreprise de Vilar], venait de ce que, tout d'un coup, l'éclairage allait être mis sur un troisième participant de la cérémonie

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8. Jean Vilar, Mémoire in Théâtre Populaire, no. 40, 1960
  9. Jean Vilar, De la Tradition Théâtrale, Gallimard 'Idées', 1955, p.177

théâtrale duquel Antoine et Copeau n'avaient pas pensé qu'il pouvait modifier le rôle traditionnel. La révolte d'Antoine s'était attaquée à l'auteur; la révolution de Copeau avait voulu atteindre tous ceux qui, de l'interprète au décorateur ou à l'éclairagiste, concourent à la réalisation du spectacle sur la scène. Aucun d'eux n'avait franchi la rampe. Vilar, le premier, entend réformer, renouveler, brusquer dans ses traditions et conquérir le public. 10

Vilar's success in giving the theatre a sense of festivity by uniting actors and audiences, and by creating entertaining evenings and not simply theatrical performances, was the chief contribution to the postwar movement of popularising theatre-going.

To achieve this end, Vilar did not use contemporary writing - the Theatre of the Absurd would have been both inappropriate and incomprehensible for T.N.P. audiences of the day - and even his attempts to introduce new authors such as Gatti, Vian, Pinget, Beckett, and Obaldia into his repertoire at the Salle Récamier sadly met with failure. For his newly-acquired, mass audiences, there were special needs to be fulfilled. Guy Leclerc sums up these needs in the theatre this way:

Pour faire revenir le théâtre au peuple et le peuple au théâtre, il ne s'agit pas de créer un théâtre pour le peuple seul mais de créer un théâtre 'universel' qui mêle les classes sociales au lieu de les diviser. D'où l'idée maîtresse de la 'communion', communion entre le spectacle et les spectateurs, communion entre les spectateurs eux-même. 11

Two ways in which this sense of community could be achieved were by changing the language of drama in order to make it totally comprehensible to audiences, and by providing a repertoire of plays whose content reflected the preoccupations

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10. P. A. Touchard, Jean Vilar et le mouvement théâtral contemporain, in Le Monde, 2 mars 1963
11. Guy Leclerc, Le T.N.P. de Jean Vilar, Union Générale d'Éditions, 1971, p.52

and aspirations of contemporary society. The new social dramatists who emerged in the nineteen-sixties satisfied these demands, thereby contributing largely to the popularisation of the theatre in the postwar period.

Gabriel Cousin, imbued with the spirit of the Resistance as one of its former members, and anxious, like his colleagues in the P.C.F., to see a more egalitarian France emerge after the war, was a natural contributor to this movement to popularise the theatre in these postwar years. Indeed, his participation at the end of the war in the activities of the group called Les Compagnons de la Saint-Jean made him a natural participant in the popularisation process. His views on the definition and potential strength of popular theatre coincide, not unnaturally, with those of Jacques Copeau whose theories he had become acquainted with at the courses organised by Travail et Culture during the war, and those of Jean Vilar, his near-contemporary, whose productions at the T.N.P. had aroused his attention in the early nineteen-fifties.

Le théâtre populaire, c'est une fête, c'est un lieu, c'est un thème.

Une fête où l'on entendra un langage différent de celui de la vie quotidienne, où l'on verra des formes, des mouvements, des couleurs, où il y aura des voix, du chant, de la musique, où notre rythme cardiaque sera modifié par la révélation de l'angoisse ou de l'espérance humaine.

Un lieu de rassemblement, où jeunes et vieux, riches et pauvres, chrétiens et marxistes seront réunis autour de la représentation d'un problème typique de notre temps. Un thème, un sujet commun à tous, exprimant notre époque dans une vision neuve, critique, de notre vie et que le quotidien nous empêche de voir, par une démystification, une désaliénation de notre civilisation, par l'action des héros nouveaux de notre temps, par la vision des grands événements d'aujourd'hui, tel le péril atomique. 12

The first two points reiterate the philosophy of Vilar towards the theatre; the third is Cousin's own interpretation of its

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12. Gabriel Cousin, programme for production of Le Drame du Fukuryu-Maru by the Théâtre Universitaire de Caen, mars 1966

requirements. The insistence on the treatment of contemporary themes for contemporary audiences reflects Cousin's appreciation of Brecht's injunction to reconsider all that is taken for granted in our everyday lives, to rethink every new situation. In erecting new 'gods' and in creating new 'myths' in our society, we are contributing to the mythology of our age - no different in its conception from other ages - yet such new statements of our beliefs, our attitudes, constitute a sort of latter-day religion which, according to Cousin, must itself be questioned. He therefore commits himself to discovering and interpreting these new 'gods' and, by doing so, performs a double function for his audiences: he reveals the universality behind a social problem and offers an explanation of its existence.

Gabriel Cousin sees the present state of society as a collapsed marriage: a divorce has taken place since the Second World War, alienating the mass of the population of the world from their political leaders, from scientific progress, even from morality itself. Scientific advancement in particular has confused Man's ideas on morality, materialism has taken the place of education, the machine has deprived Man of his former artistic being.

Or pour que le bonheur puisse s'installer, non pas à l'échelle des gadgets ménagers ou du confort seulement matériel, mais aussi à l'échelle des exigences morales, il faut qu'un nouvel art de vivre et qu'un calme mental nous soient redonnés. 13

Art is the child of the former marriage which has suffered the most from this divorce. Intellectualised artistic forms, satisfying to a small minority of people, are too remote from the majority to benefit their lives or influence their morality; only by a return to popular forms can art perform this function - just as medieval craftsmen made the artefacts of everyday usage, so must popular theatre play its part in



reuniting Man and his society, thought and action, mind and matter.

Il me semble qu'un des obstacles à cette vie moins inhumaine, plus sereine, est la rupture entre notre civilisation technique et la vie culturelle... Je pense qu'il est urgent - au moment où la science d'avant-garde est de plus en plus coupée de l'ensemble du peuple, peut-être comme jamais dans l'histoire de l'humanité elle ne l'a été, à cause des secrets militaires qu'elle implique, à cause aussi du 'no-man's-land' de sécurité qu'elle doit s'imposer, à cause enfin de l'impossibilité de comprendre réellement pour l'homme moyen l'ampleur de ces découvertes et la complexité de leur mécanisme - je pense qu'il est urgent que sous une forme artistique et d'essai de théâtre populaire, cette science et ces savants, cet art et ces poètes, soient rapprochés du peuple. 14

A theatre, and a popular theatre especially, thus represents something more than an intellectual or artistic haven, more than a place of entertainment. It is an integral part of society at large and forms one aspect of the mass-media by being a means of communication and information - in short, it is the matchmaker of modern society, annulling the divorce, and repairing the rift in the original marriage between Man and his own creations.

C'est sans doute la mission du théâtre, d'un théâtre populaire d'aujourd'hui d'exprimer notre époque, de révéler ce qui est en marche, de montrer ce qui opprime les hommes.

Ce sera peut-être le rôle de l'art et de la poésie contemporaine, le destin des artistes et des poètes de demain (aujourd'hui cela est déjà commencé - c'est pour-quoi je peux l'exprimer) de servir de lien avec la science. De faire l'avocat pour réengager le dialogue, puis la vie commune entre les mathématiques et la poésie, entre l'art et les techniques. 15

In the theatre, such a policy demands a repertoire which is constantly questioning current attitudes in society, which may even disturb our Western European complacency, and which leads inevitably to a theatre of confrontation and discussion.

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14. *ibid.*, p.27

15. *ibid.*, p.28

This, to Cousin, is the new sense of communion which people need - it is characterised by a seeking after an explanation, a confession of one's own ignorance, and a personal desire to understand the complexities of life and society.

As an innovator, Cousin is truly iconoclastic: in terms of the form of his theatre, he breaks free from the limitations of purely documentary theatre, while the content of his plays re-focus our attention on items transmitted by the media.

Parl'invention créatrice, il échappe à l'ennui du 'théâtre-document', le plus souvent construit comme une morne réquisitoire. Il nous oblige à regarder de nouveau les mêmes images cruelles que nous apportent inlassablement la télévision, les journaux et qui finissent par constituer sans plus nous étonner notre univers quotidien. Avec lui, elles retrouvent leur valeur insolite et inadmissible. 16

This alertness to innovation in dramatic technique, coupled with his awareness of the problems facing mankind, brings Cousin a double benefit: first, it ensures a constant renewal of theme and direction in his work, as he himself says:

Je pense qu'à des thèmes nouveaux doivent correspondre des formes nouvelles, aussi bien dans l'écriture, que dans le jeu des comédiens, que dans la mise en scène; 17

secondly, it enhances his reputation and influence as a dramatist who wishes to attract an audience to his ideas both intellectually and, to quote L.C. Pronko, "to those who simply want to be amused by a colourful spectacle". 18  
Indeed, Corvin sees Cousin's theatre appealing primarily as theatre, for Cousin is no intellectual; he belongs to no school or category; he speaks simply as a man and for men; he is a complete man of the theatre, exploiting its technical and aesthetic facilities to produce "un spectacle complet".

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16. Sylviane Bonnerot, Visages du Théâtre Contemporain, Masson et Cie, 1971
17. Cousin, Programme for production of Le Voyage de derrière la Montagne at the Jeux dramatiques d'Arras, June 1966
18. L.C. Pronko, Theater East and West, University of California Press, 1967, p.134

Le théâtre [de Cousin] est un jeu dont il n'y a aucune raison de limiter les règles et par là les plaisirs... Toutes les pièces de Cousin se définissent d'abord en situations de théâtre, c'est-à-dire en attitudes qui portent en elles leur signification et parlent aux sens avant de parler aux esprits. 19

The diversity of form even within one play prevents Cousin's work from being categorised: realism mixes with satire, trite dialogue with poetry, human characters with caricatures. To place his work under one heading, as some critics have done, is not only a misjudgement, but is derogatory to a dramatist who has succeeded in combining many of the arts into individual dramas. The appellation 'théâtre poétique' is as meaningless as that of 'théâtre brechtien' when considering the work of Cousin. A blanket description must, however, include the term 'popular' since, in common with others of his generation generally working in the new subsidised theatres in the provinces, Cousin seeks to lead the spectator towards a prise de conscience of social and political issues. The fairest critics are those who recognise his continuing diversity and experimentation in the field of form, while acknowledging his deep sincerity and conviction in social issues derived from past personal experience. If the former quality is prone to varying shifts of emphasis and principle, the latter is a constant throughout his life and work.

Ce sont les jeunes militants qui détermineront demain [une] voie française vers un socialisme à 'visage humain' 20

Cousin's subsequent plea in this document is for a more humanitarian and democratically-reached policy towards minority groups, the quality of life, the work-leisure relationship and other such issues, instead of the demagogic

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19. M. Corvin, Le Théâtre nouveau en France, P.U.F., 1969, p.100  
 20. Cousin, Premières réflexions succinctes sur ma position par rapport au P.C.F., 22 septembre 1974 (unpublished notes in my possession)

dispensing of policy itself dependant on authority from the U.S.S.R. which, Cousin complained, characterised the decisions of the P.C.F. for too long.

This statement bears witness to Cousin's fundamental desire for an improvement in human relations - an improvement which can best be effected from the individual rather than from superior authority. His theatre reflects this attitude and has rightly been called more moral than political.

Je désire semer l'inquiétude dans la conscience des autres. Je ne veux rien imposer, et je ne désire rien prouver. Je désire simplement réunir et montrer ce qui se passe dans le monde. Mais réunir sans vouloir unifier les individus ni les groupes sociaux. Réunir dans un constat en laissant libres - et pourquoi pas en les accentuant - les réactions, les contradictions, la polémique, la diversité des jugements et des prises de position, afin de rendre plus vivant notre monde. Aux hommes de choisir ce qu'ils en feront. Je désire les rendre inquiets, donc conscients, ce qui ne veut pas dire tristes. Je leur donne également de la joie. 21

Cousin's concern for individuals and his portrayal of man's dignity struggling against social or universal threats of his own making have been praised by Ross Chambers:

His poems and plays - literature of celebration and denunciation in defence of a living-space for love - speak in so powerful a voice of a human situation so universal, that they deserve to be known, and heeded, wherever men and women are anxious to face the problems of living in the modern world with lucidity and courage. 22

Although Cousin raises the crowd to the status of protagonist in his plays, the crowd and the couple as concepts are not mutually exclusive; as interdependants, they form the basis of society's continuing struggle of forces for survival. Cousin treats him with equal affection and connection and avoids all suggestion that the one will allow itself to be

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21. Bettina Knapp, Interview avec Gabriel Cousin, University of Pennsylvania, November 1967
  22. Ross Chambers, Meanjin, University of Melbourne, 1965, no. 4, p.480

subjugated by the other. Critics have remarked on Cousin's preoccupation with these forces in society:

A crowd whose poetry - mute or verbal - finds expression in some of the most compelling scenes in the modern French repertoire 23

[Cousin] chante la réalité quotidienne du couple et tout ce qui, pas à pas, le consolide, l'éblouit ou le menace. 24

Robert Abirached rightly regards Cousin's contribution to modern French drama as primarily one of expressionistic innovation:

Gabriel Cousin n'est l'épigone d'aucun maître; s'il nous propose un théâtre militant, il ne se range à aucun titre sous la bannière d'une école. Tout au plus peut-on faire remarquer, pour définir sa place dans le mouvement dramatique contemporain, que son seul système consiste à mettre en honneur sur la scène une dynamique corporelle et sensorielle, mieux pratiquée jusqu'ici en Extrême-Orient que sur nos rivages. 25

Unlike the Theatre of the Absurd, the social drama that was produced by Cousin and his contemporaries will continue as a genre, because its insistence on continuous experimentation and adaptation is a life-giving factor. Neither its form, nor its content, nor the language in which it is expressed can stagnate, because it is by nature flexible and related to current events. The very diversity of this type of theatre, of which Cousin's work is typical, creates its own, mainly technical, problems, but the variety of subject-matter constantly available to authors, and the original, imaginative, and spontaneous way in which this material is treated, will ensure a life-span beyond the decade that it has already existed.

23. *ibid.*, p.476

24. Robert Abirached, programme for production of Le Voyage de derrière la Montagne, at the Jeux Dramatiques d'Arras, June, 1966

25. *ibid.*

CHAPTER X : CONCLUSION

A time lapse of ten years is insufficient to bring into focus the value of a recent literary movement, yet certain characteristics of the social drama era in France reveal its importance in the contemporary development of French culture.

First, the movement towards the decentralisation and democratisation of the arts in general, and of the theatre in particular, has since been extended to every community, through the establishment of Centres d'Action Culturelle.

Afin qu'aucune région ne reste à l'écart de la décentralisation, dans les villes de moyenne importance où il n'y a ni Centre Dramatique, ni Troupe Permanente, et où une Maison de la Culture ne sera plus édiflée, on crée un relais, récemment nommé Centre d'Action Culturelle...un organisme extrêmement simple, dont l'activité dramatique peut être permanente (Théâtre de la Cité Universitaire) ou périodique (Festival d'Avignon), ou occasionnelle (Le Creusot, Plougouven). Il permet d'officialiser et d'aider l'action de certains animateurs à moindres frais que les autres formes de décentralisation. Les risques de conflit sont moindres avec les municipalités puisqu'une plus grande responsabilité leur est laissée: elles ne contestent pas leurs propres choix. <sup>1</sup>

In 1972, the administration of the new subsidised theatres was put on a more secure footing with the introduction of three-year contracts for the animateurs of Centres Dramatiques and Troupes Permanentes. This marked the end of the distinction between the two types of institution whose directors no longer depended on local organisations for their finances.

Secondly, the diversification and fragmentation of the cultural experiment begun in the period 1945 - 1968 through the government - sponsored decentralisation movement in the theatre, has spread its influence to other areas of artistic endeavour. There has been a radical shift away from compartmentalised art forms towards a mélange des genres,

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1. Geneviève Rozental, Le Théâtre en France, Notes et Etudes Documentaires (nos.3907-8), juillet 1972, p.60

particularly noticeable in the fields of theatre, cinema, and television. In Britain, the term 'dramamentary' has recently been coined to indicate the fusion of fictional and documentary drama, while in France, the term 'infodrame' reflects a similarly hybrid creation. Television drama which mixes historical fact - through the recorded film footage of events - with a dramatised fictional account of those same events, has caused some critics to question the morality of the resulting product. Yet these attacks represent no more of a threat to the authors of such products than did the vituperation cast upon the social dramatists of the previous generation, whose motives were also viewed with the greatest suspicion. The new technology of videorecording has further multiplied the problems facing social dramatists whose work is aimed at the medium of television: not only are world events instantly accessible and repeatable to vast audiences, but they are also vulnerable to the twin critical vices of instant approval or instant condemnation. Perhaps criticism itself has thereby been devalued, yet it is still as true today as it was to the immediate postwar generation of social dramatists, that an acceleration of the flow of information can, and should, lead not to opinions or acts of prejudice or folly, but to each individual's greater understanding and treatment of human problems.

Thirdly, the attempts by authors of the new social drama movement to form associations in order to promote their own works and the cause of social drama generally, has led to a closer rapport between artists and society. Gabriel Cousin's personal efforts in this direction are outstanding examples of such cooperation. The personal experience gained early in his career from his association with Les Aurochs and les Compagnons de la Saint-Jean continued in a more professional context with the formation of ADITHEC (Association pour la Diffusion du Théâtre Contemporain) in March 1966, and CREFATS (Centre de Recherche d'Entraînement

et de Formation pour l'Animation Théâtrale et Socio-Educative) in 1972. The members of ADITHEC - André de Baecque, Gabriel Cousin, Guy Foissy, Armand Gatti, Pierre Halet, and Georges Michel - were dissatisfied with the lack of contact between dramatists and with the poor relations existing between authors and the State; they consequently set up a pressure group for the promotion of their work both in France and abroad. The common goals of these writers were a search for new forms in the theatre, a recognition of the right to experiment, the ability to work and collaborate independently of the commercial theatre, freedom from definitive condemnation by hostile critics, and the exercise of total artistic control over their productions without political or financial hindrance. These demands were to be repeated two years later by the much larger and more influential group of theatre directors who signed the Déclaration de Villeurbanne. In 1971, Lucien Attoun launched Théâtre Ouvert at the Avignon Festival with the objective of providing an outlet for new and untried plays and writers: this thriving and successful organisation may be seen as the culmination of those earlier struggles by Cousin and his contemporaries.

Fourthly, the social dramatists of the postwar period may now be justifiably assessed as having exerted a considerable influence on the repertoires of French theatre - an influence which still continues today through the policies of the present generation of theatre directors. In 1966, André de Baecque spoke of Gatti, Cousin, and Arrabal as examples of young authors having "une personnalité, une originalité, une diversité d'inspiration extrêmement attachante".

Leur théâtre est résolument tourné vers le présent. Il prend sa source dans la vie du monde contemporain. Il n'est pas là pour approuver ou pour rassurer mais pour contester. Dès lors qu'il met en cause les valeurs établies, il inquiète, il irrite, on essaye de l'étouffer sous les sarcasmes, on le qualifie de 'culturel', c'est-à-dire d'ennuyeux et de nocif, par



opposition au théâtre divertissant et plein de finesse qui est l'apanage du boulevard. 2

This new approach to theatre met with the approval of Jean Vilar, who saw in it the means to combat the stultifying forces of governmental intervention in the arts, typified by the activities of the de Gaulle régime. He used the new socially-orientated drama as a weapon against the Establishment:

Avec l'accord de la municipalité (socialiste) d'Avignon, Vilar veut transformer Avignon en un vaste lieu de contestation que la présence de nombreux jeunes étrangers pourra rendre international. Il pense y regrouper les animateurs de centres et de maisons de la culture comme, ces jours-ci, à Villeurbanne. 3

Since 1968, the theatre has continued to wrangle with authority; there are still numerous problems facing authors and theatre directors regarding the financing of politically extreme plays. Nevertheless, the desire to provoke audiences, awakened in the period of decentralisation by the social dramatists, is still present today in a moderate form - avoiding the extremes of Boulevard artificiality or pretentiousness on the one hand and strident Marxist didacticism on the other. Gilles Sandier believed that the new subsidised theatres were presenting drama with a prise de conscience which was wholly patronising and full of pious imagery:

Avec de fort bons sentiments, et dans des présentations scéniques souvent fort propres, [nos théâtres 'populaires'] ont volontiers donné - sur des thèmes 'progressistes' : contre la guerre, le racisme, le colonialisme, etc. - dans le patronage rassurant. Le patronage de gauche, cela s'entend. Or rien ne nous paraît plus détestable et plus dangereux que le patronage de cet acabit. Il est conservateur. 4

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2. André de Baecque, Nous jouons notre avenir, Nouvelles Littéraires no. 2024, juin 1966
  3. Le Nouvel Observateur, 12-18 juin 1968
  4. Gilles Sandier, Théâtre et Combat, Stock, 1970, p.104

Both Sandier and Bernard Dort criticise much of the theatre of the social dramatists for the same reason; speaking of the works of Halet and Cousin, Dort says:

Par un retournement assez commun au théâtre, de telles représentations qui visent d'abord à l'efficacité, voire à une efficacité de masse, risquent de confirmer le spectateur dans sa bonne conscience: il voit, il compatit, il s'indigne et, à la fin, il est quitte. L'oppression est devenue spectacle; sa représentation sur la scène libère, à bon compte, de toute responsabilité le spectateur dans la salle. 5

Yet despite these criticisms, many theatre directors are still largely aiming at provoking their audiences and at showing political plays, albeit in a non-didactic form.

Michel Dubois, director of the Comédie de Caen, has said of his own choice of repertoire:

Nous ne sommes pas une compagnie qui fait un travail d'Agit-Prop. Notre travail ne s'inscrit pas directement dans la ligne d'un parti ou d'une idéologie très précise. Ceci dit, il faut signaler que nous avons des rapports qui sont très importants avec des organisations progressistes, qu'elles soient organisations politiques ou syndicales ou associations de différents militantismes, mais notre répertoire reste simplement au service d'une réflexion politique assez large. 6

Dubois rejects the notion that theatre can change people's political opinions, but he nevertheless sees it as forming part of the socio-political structure of society:

Je ne pense pas personnellement que le théâtre à lui seul soit capable de transformer les opinions politiques chez les spectateurs ou de leur donner l'envie d'action révolutionnaire quelconque. Je crois, par contre, que le théâtre doit s'inscrire directement dans les préoccupations culturelles, dans l'information, dans tout un système d'attitudes sociologiques différentes, qui font que le théâtre peut participer directement à la transformation de la société. 7

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5. Bernard Dort, Théâtre Réel, Seuil, 1971, p. 216-7

6. Michel Dubois, answer to my questionnaire, February 1977

7. *ibid.*

Despite the reservations held in some quarters about the influence and effect of the social dramatists' work of the nineteen-fifties and nineteen-sixties on the repertoires of the new subsidised theatres in the French provinces, authors are continuing to produce new plays, and directors are staging them. Victor Haïm and Jean-Claude Grumberg, for example, who have been particularly scathing in their comments on the ineffectual "popularisation" of the theatre in recent years, the near-impossibility for authors to have their works performed, or the tendency of theatre producers to feather their own nests with the works of new writers,<sup>8</sup> have nevertheless had their plays performed and published regularly both in Paris and in the provinces in the past decade.

Gabriel Cousin's work since 1968 shows a shift of emphasis from the earlier socio-political thèmes to a more individualised expression of his own psychological state. This change has been a conscious one for Cousin, and he has described it in these terms:

Il est possible qu'il vienne - et je souhaite qu'il vienne - une autre forme qui soit une forme plus auto-psychologique, qui soit plus issue de mes fantasmes, de mes choses souterraines à moi, donc beaucoup moins sociale et politique.<sup>9</sup>

The audience should thus come to share Cousin's experiences as expressed in his new form of drama, by seeing a reflection of their own lives in his, and by recognising their own fears and imaginings in those vivified on stage. Through this process of self-identification, and through the medium of psychology, Cousin hopes to reach a wider public - a more popular public, currently felt by him to be anaesthetised by politics and the over-indulgence in information-seeking, but a public nevertheless open to statements on the broader issues of Man's lot in contemporary society.

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8. Expressed in letters to me, dated September 1978

9. Gabriel Cousin, Interview avec D.W. Jeffery, 30-7-1974

Cousin also attributes his desire for a change of emphasis in his theatre to his growing older - there are signs of political disillusionment but also physical fatigue in him which prevent him from participating in militant political movements to the extent he did as a young man. His theatre will consequently begin to express Man's emotional, as opposed to his social, state in present-day society.

One final reason for Cousin's realignment is the purely practical one of not wishing to attempt an interpretation of a world event when that event is almost instantly superseded by another which would contradict or negate his previously-held position. Such an acceleration of events on the political scene - and frequently also on a vast human scale - does not allow reasoned historical interpretation by any critic, let alone by an artist whose communicated judgment is the product of thought over a period of time. Man cannot stand at a sufficient distance from living history today to analyse the effects and results of these events; an empirical reaction to them is equally difficult.

His only chance of survival is a constant preparedness for the next event and a small hope that a pragmatic approach to history is marginally more reliable than private guesswork.

L'accélération des phénomènes des accidents socio-politiques devient délirant... Il y en a tellement [de thèmes] maintenant, il y a encore la guerre au Chypre, il y a les problèmes du pouvoir avec Nixon en Amérique, de certaines choses qui se sont passées en France bien qu'elles n'aient pas la même importance, il y a les renversements en Grèce, renversements au Portugal, au Chili. Alors, faire une pièce sur le Chili alors que, dès le lendemain, il se passe dans le Chili bien d'autres choses, ça ne se cristallise plus en moi de la même façon. 10

These radical changes in the recent plays of Cousin, both in their subject-matter and in their form, have led to the development of a new style. There has been an

abandonment of the realistic, popular dialogue of the early works and a new concentration on lyricism, or poeticism, to evoke the emotional states of the characters. The previously separate genres of poetry and theatre are thus slowly fusing in Cousin's latest work. In short, he has turned away from the art of representation, and moved towards the art of suggestion. This is apparent in both the form and content of Oratorio pour une Ville, a poetic fresco described by Jean-Marie Pierson as "le retour au théâtre du verbe, un long chant de l'histoire de l'humanité et de notre société moderne". The first performance, under the direction of Jean-Marie Pierson, was to take place in the Atelier Théâtre of the Action Culturelle du Bassin Houiller Lorrain in Freyming-Merlebach in May 1975. It was postponed until October of that year, then, after numerous serious problems had arisen, finally abandoned altogether. Cousin outlines the action of Oratorio pour une Ville in a separate document intended for potential producers of the work:

Cet oratorio est la combinaison de trois formes de textes: 1° Une évocation de la Ville et du Travail (ils m'apparaissent inséparables) suggérée par une expression lyrique basée sur le langage, les mots, avec les Hommes et les Femmes qui tentent de vivre. 2° La naissance de l'Homme et de la Femme aux premiers âges du monde - dûe aux hasards biochimiques - puis leur quête sans fin ni trêve pour se rencontrer, se compléter, communiquer et tenter de s'aimer à travers leurs contraires. Ce par une expression lyrique - poétique - basée sur des images. 3° Plusieurs scènes construites en flashes, dans une narration réaliste, traitant de situations et de problèmes humains concrets que l'homme affronte dans la société d'aliénation d'aujourd'hui. Tels les guerres, la compétition, l'argent, le chômage, l'exploitation de l'homme par l'homme, la pollution, la consommation. En bref, peut-être: métro-boulot-dodo. Ces flashes-situations peuvent être comparés aux songs brechtiens. Mais à l'inverse de Bertolt Brecht, c'est l'expression poétique-lyrique qui est le matériau principal. Ces situations qui représentent la 'leçon' nous 'montrant' notre propre vie seront 'distancées' scéniquement par le jeu, le ton, l'éclairage

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11. Gabriel Cousin, Présentation de 'Oratorio pour une Ville', mai 1974, (unpublished notes in my possession)

Under its new title of Oratorio pour une Vie, this piece eventually emerged as a 'Poème symphonique, exclusivement pour adultes' and was performed for the first time by the Théâtre de Marionnettes de Metz in 1977. In using marionettes, Cousin has joined other recent French theatre producers and writers - from Gaston Baty and Hubert Gignoux to Michel Fontayne, Antoine Vitez, Cyril Robichez and Armand Gatti - who have repeatedly discovered the potential of puppets as vehicles of satire or as representatives of human characteristics seen in a new perspective.

In Cousin's later documentary plays and dramatic frescoes - La Confession de Copenhague (1968), a short anti-Vietnam piece in the form of a confession by an American soldier to the Russell Tribunal; Alchimie des Villes (1970), an 'oratorio' depicting through poetry the jungle of cities; Requiem d'aujourd'hui (1971), a modern Mass depicting the problems facing contemporary Man; and Oratorio pour une Ville (1974) - we can see completed the cyclical evolution of form in his theatre. Cousin's early contributions to the collective creations of Les Aurochs and Les Compagnons de la Saint-Jean during and after the war developed into a more personal style in his socio-political dramas of the nineteen-fifties and nineteen-sixties; the works of his self-styled 'nouvelle période' since 1968 mark a return to those wartime days when 'collectivité' and 'corporéité' were the guiding spirits behind his creative efforts.

Although the nature and subject-matter of Gabriel Cousin's theatre clearly marks him as typical of that generation of authors whose prime concern was to arouse a 'prise de conscience' of social and political issues among their audiences in the new subsidised theatres, there is one overwhelming factor which places him indisputably within that group of writers both in spirit and in concrete achievement. That factor is his quality as a natural dramatist born to his trade and destined to fulfil an integral rôle within it. Gabriel Cousin's enthusiasms are innate, not studied: his

early love of sport led spontaneously to an interest in literary creation which could express the joys of his physical energy; Cousin's tenacity and inner resolution were self-taught, not the products of a rigid educational system: his thirst for knowledge brought him praise and eventual recognition from established literati; his preoccupation with the theatre in all its forms of expression was instinctive, not artificial: the desire to research new forms came from an initial emotional response and not from any intellectual persuasions; his political convictions were born of bitter experience, his dramatic theories from empirical research, his brand of popular theatre from a true knowledge of his own social class. In short, Gabriel Cousin admirably fulfils the conditions under which, according to Sartre, popular theatre should operate; he is the epitome of a popular dramatist, for not only are his origins in the working class, thereby lending his impressions of ordinary life authenticity and emotive power, but it is essentially those origins which have produced drama providing the popular theatre public, as Sartre had recommended, with "des pièces pour lui, qui ont été écrites pour lui et qui lui parlent de lui."

THE NEW SUBSIDISED THEATRES, 1945-1968CENTRES DRAMATIQUES NATIONAUX

|      |                              |                       |                                   |
|------|------------------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------------------|
| 1946 | Centre Dramatique de l'Est   | Colmar (1)            | Roland Piétri                     |
| 1947 | Comédie de Saint-Etienne     | Saint-Etienne         | Jean Dasté                        |
| 1949 | Grenier de Toulouse          | Toulouse              | Maurice Sarrazin                  |
| 1949 | Centre Dramatique de l'Ouest | Rennes                | Hubert Gignoux                    |
| 1952 | Comédie de Provence          | Aix-en-Provence       | Gaston Baty                       |
| 1960 | Centre Dramatique du Nord    | Tourcoing             | André Reybaz                      |
| 1963 | Comédie de Bourges           | Bourges               | Gabriel Monnet                    |
| 1963 | Théâtre de la Cité           | Villeurbanne          | Roger Planchon,<br>Robert Gilbert |
| 1966 | Théâtre de l'Est Parisien    | Paris 20 <sup>e</sup> | Guy Rétoré                        |

TROUPES PERMANENTES

|      |                                |           |                                 |
|------|--------------------------------|-----------|---------------------------------|
| 1960 | Comédie des Alpes              | Grenoble  | René Lesage,<br>Bernard Floriet |
| 1960 | Théâtre de Bourgogne           | Beaune    | Jacques Fornier                 |
| 1960 | Théâtre de Champagne           | Reims     | André Mairal                    |
| 1960 | Théâtre Quotidien de Marseille | Marseille | Michel Fontayne (2)             |
| 1960 | Comédie de Nantes              | Nantes    | Jean Guichard                   |
| 1962 | Tréteaux de France             | Paris     | Jean Danet                      |
| 1963 | Théâtre Populaire des Flandres | Lille     | Cyril Robichez                  |
| 1963 | Comédie de Caen                | Caen      | Jo Tréhard                      |
| 1966 | Centre Théâtral du Limousin    | Limoges   | Georges Regnier,<br>J-P Laruy   |
| 1966 | Théâtre du Bassin de Longwy    | Longwy    | Marc Renaudin                   |
| 1967 | Théâtre du Cothurne            | Lyon      | M-N Maréchal                    |

MAISONS DE LA CULTURE

|      |                             |                       |                 |
|------|-----------------------------|-----------------------|-----------------|
| 1961 |                             | Le Havre              | Reynold Arnould |
| 1963 | (Comédie de Caen)           | Caen                  | Jo Tréhard      |
| 1963 |                             | Bourges               | Gabriel Monnet  |
| 1963 | (Théâtre de l'Est Parisien) | Paris 20 <sup>e</sup> | Guy Rétoré      |
| 1965 |                             | Firminy               | Georges Garby   |
| 1966 |                             | Amiens                | Philippe Tiry   |
| 1966 |                             | Thonon                | René Jauneau    |

(1) moved to Strasbourg in 1954

(2) ceased to function in 1966



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