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THE EARLY PLAYS OF ARMAND SALACROU

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ANDREW POPE TALTON

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A SEARCH FOR EXISTENCE  
THE EARLY PLAYS OF ARMAND SALACROU

APPROVED BY

Willis H. Bowen

Lowell Kenyon

Seymour Feiler

James H. Aylott

Melvin B. Tolson, Jr.

DISSERTATION COMMITTEE

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A SEARCH FOR EXISTENCE  
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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Armand Salacrou is one of the most enigmatic figures in twentieth-century French literature. Almost every aspect of his life has been marked by contrast and contradiction. Praised by some critics as one of France's greatest dramatists, he is almost totally rejected by others. His long career encompasses all of the major literary movements of this century, but he has refused to swear allegiance to any of them. In the years since his first short story was published in 1916, he has written some thirty plays, several of which have become landmarks in contemporary French drama: La Terre est ronde, Archipel Lenoir, Les Nuits de la colère, Boulevard Durand. His plays have been widely produced in Europe and have appeared in Asia, Africa, Latin America, even Java, but he remains relatively unknown in the

English-speaking world. Only in 1967 has a volume of his work been published in English.<sup>1</sup>

In his private life Armand Salacrou is also a man of contrasts. Manifestly destined for the theater, he founded at a rather early age what soon became one of the largest publicity firms in Europe, rivaling even the immense Havas organization. However, the considerable wealth that this success brought seemed of little importance to him, and has been significant only in that it allowed him financial freedom to write. In spite of the apparent ease of his life, and the position he has earned as a cosmopolitan man of letters, world traveler and member of the Goncourt Academy, Salacrou has never seemed completely at ease in existence, has never fully taken on the coloration of the self-satisfied bourgeois. Led initially to seek friends through the theater and his early political activities, he also has sought isolation from society, a desire for solitude which attracted him to mountain-climbing.

It is as a man uniquely a dramatist that Armand Salacrou's enigma imposes itself most strongly. The purpose

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<sup>1</sup>Three Plays by Armand Salacrou, ed. and trans. Norman Stokle, (Minneapolis: The University of Minnesota Press, 1967).

of this study will be to analyze the critical rôle played by the theater in his life, both as a simple modus vivendi and also as an absolutely essential means of self-perception.

It is especially through the early plays that one understands how the theater became the fundamental force in his life, and how Salacrou sought, through his plays, to decipher the meaning of his own, personal universe. The emphasis in the present work will be on these initial essays, coming before Salacrou's first real public and critical acceptance, plays relegated to the position of mere oeuvres de jeunesse, but those in which the playwright most clearly exposes his motives for writing drama.

The ultimate goal of this dissertation will be to uncover the roots of Salacrou's major themes and to establish that the one major leitmotif, elaborated in these first plays and linking all those that followed, is perhaps the most universal of all literary themes, the search for image, be it called God, father or self, for all are simply different terms for the same quest. The inevitability of this search, the key to the contrast and conflict of Salacrou's life, will be shown to be predicated on a single question, continually posed by the dramatist, continually studied, re-cast, interpreted throughout all his plays, but perhaps best framed by his porte-parole, King Jerome, in Le Pont de l'Europe:



Pourquoi n'ai-je pas compris plus tôt que l'intérêt de la vie et de mon avenir n'est pas dans un choix parmi les objets du magasin d'accessoires de l'expérience des autres, mais dans la manière dont on les mêlait à notre vie. Qu'il est sot de dire Quoi! je serais un homme comme les autres; banquier, paysan, amoureux et de faire ainsi à l'avance le bilan de sa vie. Il faut dire et voici le vrai mystère:

"Comment serai-je un homme comme les autres?"<sup>2</sup>

Armand Salacrou thus thrusts upon his audience the dilemma which has remained at the core of his intellectual existence and which has been the central motivating force in almost the whole of his literary production. It is indeed a question which cannot be avoided by any man genuinely aware of himself as a being, existent in an essentially foreign universe.

"Comment serai-je un homme comme les autres?"

Becoming a man like the other implies a process of coming to terms with life, of reaching a conception of universal order in which one can find his place, can free himself from the anguish of doubt and the fear of impotence inherent in a world which appears unjust and directionless. It is a quest for authenticity in life, for identification in the despair of alienation. To become a man is, at its most fundamental

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<sup>2</sup>Armand Salacrou, Théâtre, I, (Paris: Gallimard, 1943), p. 189. This and all subsequent references to the plays are from Théâtre, 8 vols., (Paris: Gallimard, 1943-1966) except for plays published hors série and so indicated.

level, to conquer death, if only for the moment, to fabricate an existence which, though ephemeral, will be subjectively meaningful and at least seemingly significant.

The struggle to exist manifests itself in many ways, and the means employed in the search are as varied as the opportunities which life presents for action, for it is in action that we exist, through action that we gain at least a temporary victory over death. If death is passivity in its purest form, then life is surely action, and whatever man does in life is an attempt to dim the knowledge of the inevitability of this end to all that seems so real and so lasting. This is as true of the shopkeeper or laborer as of the greatest empire builder. But it is the artist, through his heightened sensitivity to man and his situation, who seems to function with the greatest awareness of the true significance of his actions. It might be said that the artist is knowingly constructing a life for himself in the simple act of creating his works, much as the bricklayer unconsciously combats inactivity/death by laying bricks.

This is the function of art at its most fundamental, least aesthetic, level, and Armand Salacrou has shown a profound awareness of this function of theater in his own life. Few dramatists have written more knowingly and freely about

their art than Salacrou. He has spoken not merely about his techniques or his methods of production, but about the absolute and inescapable necessity for doing what he has done. From these writings it is also clear, however, that Salacrou was drawn to the theater for reasons much more complex than the simple need to act in order to exist. It is evident that artist creation is not so entirely ego-centered.

The artist, while forging his personal existence through his production, is at the same time aiding others, his audience, in the perpetuation of their own lives. He presents them with something against which to react, a mirror, as it were, both in which to see facets of their own lives and at the same time to stimulate that very existence by the reaction which it brings about. Through the selection of elements from the life around him, and the molding of them into a new, more striking form, the artist's mental and aesthetic exercise of creation is translated into a physical, perceptual product which influences those to whom it is exposed.

The choice of drama as Salacrou's medium of expression is by no means gratuitous, for the theater is perhaps the art which most successfully demonstrates this life-through-action equation. In its creation, drama not only

serves that rather abstract function of personal stimulation for the artist, but it does in fact concretely present a new life, that lived by the actors on the stage. So the playwright both enriches his own existence, and literally creates life where there was none, even if only for the moment.

This opens tremendous possibilities for the dramatist. It allows him to see his ideas and his questions take physical form so that he might stand aside and watch himself live. As a medium for self-analysis it has no equal. It is this aspect of the theater which is the most vital for Salacrou. He has understood the opportunities both for expressing his own ideas and also for probing his own being in his search for meaning, both universal and subjective. He has seized the potential of the theater on all three of its levels: activity for existence, vehicle for expression, mirror for self-perception. For Salacrou, the theater is life itself. It is not an escape from reality, it is a flight into reality, an attempt to find something more vital than himself, to find answers to the unanswerable questions of existence. It is an atheist's search for God, with no hope of finding Him, but with the necessity for searching so absolute that the search itself becomes almost an answer.

Salacrou's is a theater in which almost every major character seems a fragment of the author himself. Where

many dramatists insist that their people are not to be taken as reflections of their creator, Salacrou readily admits that his plays are manifestations of his own personal anxieties and doubts. He indicates the degree to which he is involved in his plays in many places throughout his critical writings, but perhaps earliest in a short dialogue, "Interview de l'Auteur par lui-même," written for the December 1925 issue of the Revue de l'Oeuvre prior to the first performance of Tour à terre at Lugne-Poë's Maison de l'Oeuvre. In this "interview" the author discusses with several of the principal characters of his early plays his reasons for having created them.

Voyez-vous, mes amis, si j'avais su parler vous ne seriez jamais nés, avec cette précision écrite. Vous m'avez servi de truchement pour rechercher des amis parmi les hommes. Vous m'avez servi à me montrer, et qui m'aime vienne à moi.<sup>3</sup>

Salacrou has seemingly spread himself across his stages so that he might actually see himself, feel himself, know that he is alive. His characters constantly seek proof of their very existence, question the very validity of their gestures. His lovers do not say "Tell me you love me" but "Tell me I love you." Each protagonist is everywhere faced

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<sup>3</sup>Armand Salacrou, "Interview de l'Auteur par lui-même," Théâtre I, 45.

with that terrible question, "Comment serai-je un homme comme les autres?" For the "others" seem to have found solutions, they have become defined, have taken on comfortable limits. They have become bankers, peasants or lovers. But how? The young Salacrou, already seeing life in quite existential terms, realizing that he could not accept orthodox interpretations of man's strange existence, consciously chose the theater as his instrument for probing the absurdity of that existence.

Choosing a rather limited number of plays, and those from the formative period of Salacrou's life, poses several problems of research. Though there have been some major studies of Salacrou's work, and a number of shorter essays, these early plays have been generally ignored. Therefore, of the rather considerable amount of research that has gone into the preparation of this dissertation, very little is useful in the work itself, for it does not deal with the plays at hand. The effort necessary to establish that there has been relatively little done in a particular field is of course as great, or perhaps greater, than that required with a well documented subject. But of the mass of bibliographical references and the pages of critical quotations that have been gathered, almost none can validly figure as part of this

study. The bulk of the material in this dissertation, then, is essentially original criticism, with whatever value, and pitfalls, that might imply.

It is felt, however, that the study of Salacrou criticism which has been made is of value and that, since it might be of considerable use to a student of his theater, a brief summary of that criticism to date is not out of place here, even though it is not absolutely germane to the period being treated. The bibliography appended to this dissertation will also reflect research beyond the scope of these early plays, and should be considered the most complete Salacrou bibliography yet established.

The first critical interest attracted by Armand Salacrou is of course to be found in the reviews of his plays, beginning with Tour à terre, produced in Paris in 1925. Salacrou has never received universally good press, and his early plays were almost never understood, as they could not have been. Of the journeyman critics whose names have been associated with Salacrou's theater (Jeanine Delpeche and Martin du Gard in Nouvelles Littéraires, Lucien Dubech in Candide and l'Action française and, more recently, Jacques Lemarchand in Figaro), the Christian existential playwright and critic Gabriel Marcel, writing in Nouvelles

Littéraires, has been perhaps the most consistantly hostile critic of Salacrou's work. Almost always unimpressed by Salacrou's plays, his article "Singularité d'Armand Salacrou,"<sup>4</sup> published in 1945, is a damning attack on Salacrou's skill as a dramatic craftsman, and on his very significance as a man of letters.

Interest in Salacrou increased noticeably after the end of World War II, in large part because of the appearance of eight new plays in the span of five years, and, in 1947, the first book devoted entirely to a study of the playwright was published. José Van den Esche's Armand Salacrou: dramaturge de l'angoisse<sup>5</sup> is a critical biography of great value, particularly in the author's effort to define Salacrou's theater as an integral function of the playwright's very existence. Van den Esche seems the first critic to note the real significance of Salacrou's first six plays, those plays that Marcel had brushed off as "oeuvres de jeunesse."<sup>6</sup> He understands that these plays, although perhaps not valuable

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<sup>4</sup>Gabriel Marcel, "Singularité d'Armand Salacrou," Théâtre III, (Paris: Editions du Pavois, 1945).

<sup>5</sup>José Van den Esche, Armand Salacrou: dramaturge de l'angoisse, (Paris: Editions du Temps Present, 1947).

<sup>6</sup>Marcel, loc. cit.



as theater, established the themes for the entirety of Salacrou's work, and that the playwright, even in these chaotic first efforts, was beginning to create for himself a significant existence through drama. To Van den Esche, Salacrou's life and his theater were so inextricably interwoven that one could not be treated without reference to the other. "L'histoire du théâtre salacrien --- et de l'évolution qui s'y dessine, c'est surtout l'histoire de la vie et l'évolution d'un homme. Au-delà des drames, il y a le drame d'une destinée qui se poursuit de titre en titre, d'acte en acte, et qui n'est pas achevée."<sup>7</sup> Van den Esche subsequently published two major articles on Salacrou's theater, "Le Drame d'une foi qui se cherche,"<sup>8</sup> in 1952, and "Les oeuvres récentes d'Armand Salacrou,"<sup>9</sup> in 1958, and has remained closely in touch with his work.

Serge Radine, in his Anouilh, Lenormand, Salacrou:

<sup>7</sup>Van den Esche, op. cit., p. 9.

<sup>8</sup>Van den Esche, "Le Drame d'une foi qui se cherche," Le Théâtre contemporain, "Recherches et Débats 2," (Paris: Arthème Fayard, 1952).

<sup>9</sup>Van den Esche, "Les oeuvres récentes d'Armand Salacrou," Le Théâtre moderne, (Paris: Editions du Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique, 1958).

Trois dramaturges à la recherche de leur vérité,<sup>10</sup> published in 1951, gives a detailed psychological study of Salacrou's more important plays, and his book is quite useful. He treats Salacrou's work as essentially Existential, but unlike Sartre, he finds that Salacrou is never "satisfied" in his simple acceptance of the Absurd, but always en quête, always struggling to find an escape from the absurdity of existence. His evaluation of Salacrou's position as a playwright of "anguish" is much like Van den Esche's, and he admits his debt to Van den Esche's book. Radine's literary style is so extremely complex, however, that it sometimes becomes a stumbling block. His ideas are often seemingly buried in long, involved sentences that suggest an almost deliberate attempt to complicate an otherwise valid and simple conclusion. His position often seems to fluctuate, as well. Concerning the early plays (the only times he mentions them, in fact) he first says that "Elles ne présentent, en effet, que le seul intérêt biographique de marquer la première étape d'une évolution."<sup>11</sup> On the next page, however, he seems to

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<sup>10</sup>Serge Radine, Anouilh, Lenormand, Salacrou: Trois Dramaturges à la recherche de leur vérité, (Geneva: Editions du Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique, 1958).

<sup>11</sup>Ibid., p. 107.

see the genuine value of these plays.

A défaut d'une valeur artistique et théâtrale qui leur fait défaut, ces premières pièces ratées d'Armand Salacrou possèdent pourtant l'inestimable bienfait de nous apporter des renseignements précieux sur la personnalité même de l'homme qui les a écrites, et ne sauraient être contestés, puisqu'ils ont, pour ainsi dire, une valeur psychanalytique, un peu comme les découvertes des refoulements de la prime enfance, qui guident le psychiatre lorsqu'il veut aider l'adulte à se mieux connaître.<sup>12</sup>

Radine's is, however, an important book and, though perhaps uselessly obtuse, it is a significant contribution to Salacrou criticism.

A work that is bothersome for the opposite reason was published in 1953 by the British theater critic Harold Hobson. Where Radine's book is maddeningly obscure at times, Hobson's The French Theater Today<sup>13</sup> offers a long chapter on Salacrou that is often so folksy and conversational that even important ideas do not seem important. He is much more interested in Salacrou the man than in his work, and insists on speaking of him in very personal terms, discussing his pleasant apartment in Paris, what a nice luncheon companion he is, and other bits of biographical fact which are perhaps interesting but not particularly fundamental. There is also

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<sup>12</sup>Ibid., p. 108.

<sup>13</sup>Harold Hobson, The French Theater Today, (London: Harold Ober Associates, 1953).

continual reference to the London stage, dramatists and plays which are tedious for the reader interested principally in Salacrou's work. Nonetheless there are some rather detailed discussions of Salacrou's later, more successful plays and there is a great deal of value in Hobson's book. He is particularly interested in Salacrou's conception of the "unfaithful woman" and traces its development through several of the major plays. He does not, however, notice that this theme has its roots in the very earliest plays, and, indeed, scarcely mentions these plays. The overall feeling one has of Salacrou from Hobson's book is that perhaps he doesn't believe in God, perhaps he is buried under an existential anguish, perhaps his life has been dominated by a metaphysical despair, but he's still a jolly nice fellow.

One of the most significant, most coherent studies of Salacrou's work is that of the important writer and critic Pierre-Henri Simon, in his Théâtre et destin,<sup>14</sup> a collection of eight lectures given at the Institut d'Etudes Politiques during the winter of 1958-1959. In this study, Simon establishes the context of Twentieth-century dramatic evolution in a manner which reveals Salacrou's work as an integral part

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<sup>14</sup>Pierre-Henri Simon, Théâtre et destin, (Paris: Armand Colin, 1959).

of contemporary theater, rather than stressing the apparent contrasts between Salacrou's plays and those of his contemporaries, a contrast which is often over-emphasized because of Salacrou's refusal to become an active member in the various literary movements through which his career has passed.

Simon avoids the unfortunately frequent tendency of some Salacrou critics to indulge in anecdote, and he views Salacrou's work with considerable objectivity, often, in fact, treating with gratifying fairness those philosophical positions of the playwright with which he is clearly not in agreement. "Une critique de signification,"<sup>15</sup> as Simon calls his method, seeks to find in literary works "ce qu'elles veulent nous apprendre sur l'homme, sur le monde, sur nous-mêmes, généralement sur la conscience qu'une société, à un moment donné, prend de ses problèmes, de ses inquiétudes, de sa foi, de son espoir."<sup>16</sup> It is in this rôle, as a statement on contemporary man's dilemma, that he sees Salacrou's theater as vital and essential.

Simon does note the paradox evident in Salacrou the

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<sup>15</sup>Ibid., p. 8.

<sup>16</sup>Ibid.

playwright ("pessimiste radicale"<sup>17</sup>), the political Salacrou ("homme de gauche . . . il n'a jamais caché sa sympathie agissante pour le communisme"<sup>18</sup>), and the successful capitalist Salacrou ("celui-ci fait figure d'un homme heureux"<sup>19</sup>). This rather schizoid image of Salacrou, sometimes cited as an indication of lack of sincerity or integrity in either his drama or his life, is not as marked or significant as it might on the surface appear, concludes Simon, who opts for the "pessimiste" as the dominant Salacrou. Although he does not deny the obvious fact that Salacrou has been closely associated with the Communist movement, he finds almost nowhere in his theater any real manifestation of Marxism, and indeed feels that Salacrou is much too pessimistic to be a true Communist. "Nous sommes manifestement sur un autre versant de pensée que celui où l'optimisme rationaliste de Marx promet la plénitude du bonheur à l'homme émancipé de l'aliénation capitaliste et des fausses esperances de la religion."<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>17</sup>Ibid., p. 120.

<sup>18</sup>Ibid., p. 121.

<sup>19</sup>Ibid., p. 120.

<sup>20</sup>Ibid., p. 122.

The fact that Salacrou has been enormously successful in business is scarcely of significance in judging his work, Simon feels. What began as a simple attempt to make enough money to support his young wife and child eventually grew into a fortune of major proportions, and Simon points to the play Atlas Hôtel as indicative of Salacrou's true values concerning wealth and the theater. In the clear contrast between Albany, the hugely successful but prostituted novelist, and Auguste, the impoverished dreamer, Simon finds the true Salacrou: "Albany, c'est l'homme qu'il ne veut pas devenir; Auguste, c'est la part de lui-même qu'il veut sauver."<sup>21</sup>

Simon's overall interpretation of Salacrou's theater, and of Salacrou himself, is quite close to that of Van den Esche, and indeed, there can be little disagreement in their conclusions. "Pessimiste radicale" and "dramaturge de l'angoisse" are clearly terms referring to the same, essential element of Salacrou's philosophical posture, the anxiety of pessimism which is fundamental in all of his dramatic production. Simon sees this pessimism as absolute, when he speaks of

l'aspect d'inquiétude, la recherche passionnée et désespérée d'une foi ou d'une valeur indiscutable,

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<sup>21</sup>Ibid., p. 128.

comme d'un soleil suspendu au-dessus des obscurités du destin et de la misère des hommes; mais rien n'y luit qu'un soleil noir, qui rend les ténèbres brûlantes sans les éclairer.<sup>22</sup>

It is perhaps necessary for a critic who is operating from a position of belief to attempt to soften the obvious atheism of an author whom he admires, to attempt to bring his work into a religious frame of reference. The theater of Armand Salacrou offers great opportunities for this sort of critical evangelism, for Salacrou's continual search is obviously for God. But Simon avoids the too facile conclusion that Salacrou, since he is seeking God, actually believes in God without knowing it. He compares him with Albert Camus to point up the dilemma of an author who must deal with the concept of God, while manifestly not believing in his existence.

Comme le romancier de La Peste, le dramaturge de La Terre est ronde refuse d'intégrer le fait de l'injustice dans une conception du monde où il y aurait l'idée de Dieu, et, pourtant, comme lui, il a tendance à imputer cette forme du mal à ce Dieu auquel d'ailleurs il ne peut pas croire et qui n'est que le mot où s'accroche sa révolte.<sup>23</sup>

Simon seems driven, however, to end his critique with a bit of literary proselytising.

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<sup>22</sup>Ibid., p. 138.

<sup>23</sup>Ibid., p. 122.



Tant de cris de révolte et tant de blasphèmes ne doivent pas rendre inaudible cette voix secrète qui murmure dans le tumulte l'appel à un absolu; la violence même qui les inspire n'est pas le fait d'une âme vulgaire et sans amour. Quant à la conception du théâtre qui se rattache à cette anxiété métaphysique et à l'intention de la surmonter en la dramatisant, elle appelle dans tous les cas le respect; et davantage si l'on croit que Dieu seul est juge de ce que les vagabonds désespérés ont refusé ou reçu.<sup>24</sup>

Paul-Louis Mignon, the critic who, with Van den Esche, has been most closely associated with Armand Salacrou, had written several articles on his theater before the appearance in 1960 of his book, Salacrou,<sup>25</sup> in Gallimard's "Bibliothèque Idéale" series. This book is fundamental for the student of Salacrou's drama, but it is not without fault. It has both the advantages and the failings of any critical biography of this "case book" sort. Perhaps the major contribution of the work is an almost exhaustive bibliography, including not only published works of Salacrou himself, and critical works dealing with him, but a catalogue of photographs of the author, radio broadcasts made by him and recordings of his voice, as well as an invaluable enumeration of all productions of his plays, in France and abroad, with dates, theaters, and names of metteurs en scene.

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<sup>24</sup>Ibid., p. 141.

<sup>25</sup>Paul-Louis Mignon, Salacrou, (Paris: Gallimard, 1960).

Mignon's work can also serve as a basic source for biographical information, although this biography, drawn up rather in the form of a bilan, is sometimes bothersome in its omission of facts such as the names of Salacrou's children and its lack of specific details of Salacrou's publicity venture. He draws rather heavily on Van den Esche for much of this information, but adds some sketchy details of Salacrou's career since the publication of Van den Esche's book.

Mignon's critical analysis of Salacrou's plays is quite interesting, but his presentation is somewhat chaotic. There can be no doubt that he understands the plays and his comments are sound, but the section of his book devoted to analysis is arranged in a seemingly random order, and a reader not closely familiar with all of Salacrou's works might have considerable difficulty gaining a great deal from his comments. He generally appears to treat individual themes as they are found throughout all the plays, and this approach is certainly valid. His chapters, however, follow no logical order and, coupled with the omission of an index, this section becomes almost useless to one looking for comments on a specific play. Mignon's analysis is valid, but he does not have the critical insight of Van den Esche,

Radine or Simon, and it is clear that his book is destined for a popular, rather than a scholarly, audience.

To this end, there have been included numerous excerpts from commentaries by critics, friends, and enemies of Salacrou, in an effort to give a cross-section of opinion on the playwright. This section is valuable as a source for material which is no longer available elsewhere, such as early reviews of the individual plays, but frequently these excerpts are no more than a few phrases which, out of context, are of doubtful significance to the serious student. This is, of course, in no way the fault of Mr. Mignon, who was limited by space, and was trying to present as much material as possible.

The remainder of Mignon's book is made up of selected scenes from the plays, brief synopses of each play. The synopses are much too short to be of any real value and are useless to anyone familiar with Salacrou's work. For example, Mignon's resume of Sens interdit, a play of considerable significance and some difficulty, is simply

Un homme comme les autres tombe dans un monde dont les habitants viennent à l'existence vieux et infirmes, et progressent peu à peu vers la jeunesse, la santé, l'amour et le bonheur, avant de disparaître dans le néant.<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>26</sup>Ibid., p. 166.

The scenes from the plays which he presents are indeed important ones, but to the reader who was well enough informed to understand the analytical section of Mignon's book, these scenes are quite superfluous.

All of these shortcomings are obviously the by-products of the necessity of molding all available material into an "essential Salacrou," a task which Mr. Mignon has handled admirably. His book must serve as the starting point for any general study of Salacrou's theater.

Mignon's interest in Salacrou has continued and has led to another Salacrou book in which he is involved, although not ostensibly as author. He conducted a series of interviews with Salacrou, broadcast by the Radiodiffusion-Télévision Française during the 1965-1966 season, and which have been published by Salacrou under the title Impromptu délibéré: Entretiens avec Paul-Louis Mignon.<sup>27</sup> This book is somewhat disappointing. The interviews themselves do not offer a great deal of material that was not already available, most of it in Mignon's previous book, and they are mostly given to the repetition of already familiar anecdotes. The conversational tone of the interviews does allow the reader

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<sup>27</sup>Armand Salacrou, Impromptu délibéré: Entretiens avec Paul-Louis Mignon, (Paris: Gallimard, 1966).

to see Salacrou as a candid, pleasant gentleman, with a profound insight into the motivating forces of his life and his art. He emerges as a completely honest, completely civilized man, an image which is not surprising to one acquainted with his theater. Apparently to expand these six interviews into book length, however, a number of extracts from previously published materials, as well as whole scenes from some of the plays, have been included as "annexes" to each segment. Although these annexes are interesting in themselves, they are entirely superfluous to the material in question and must already be familiar to the audience to which this book is addressed.

Jacques Guicharnaud offers a very lucid, coherent, if somewhat less thorough interpretation of Salacrou's theater and his psychological motivation in Modern French Theater from Giraudoux to Genet.<sup>28</sup> It is significant that in this revision of his 1960 work, Guicharnaud has expanded his Salacrou treatment to full chapter proportions, where he had earlier combined Salacrou and Anouilh into a single chapter, as do many critics of contemporary French theater. He does not discuss the early plays, but his excellent criticism

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<sup>28</sup>Jacques Guicharnaud, Modern French Theater from Giraudoux to Genet, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1967).

of the major plays is equally valid for Salacrou's first attempts at drama. He, perhaps more precisely than the other critics discussed here, senses the rôle of the theater in Salacrou's life, and the interweaving of the essential themes which continually reappear in his work, and which have their genesis in the early works.

A theater of man, stripped of ghosts and demons, angels and magicians. In contrast to the enchantment of metaphors of the supernatural, the spectacle created shows man at grips with himself, aware of transcendancy, but a transcendancy by others, by the mystery of passing time, and by the physical cosmos, infinite and incomprehensible.<sup>29</sup>

Guicharnaud recognizes the importance of Time as a central theme in Salacrou's theater, and understands its Existential implications . . . another leitmotif which he might have traced to the first plays.

One is reminded of Malraux's words, "A life is worth nothing, but nothing is worth a life." As early as the 1930's, well before Sartre, Camus and today's playwrights, Salacrou was struck by that paradox, as well as by the play of time, its irreversibility, and the impossibility of understanding the past as existing and not existing at the same time --- that is, by the absurdity of life hemmed in between birth and death.<sup>30</sup>

Aside from the study by Guicharnaud, Salacrou has received relatively little attention from critics in the

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<sup>29</sup>Ibid., p. 87.

<sup>30</sup>Ibid., p. 94.

United States. Frederick Lumley devotes a chapter to Salacrou and Anouilh in his New Trends in Twentieth Century Drama,<sup>31</sup> but presents no new material or ideas. His judgment of Salacrou's theatrical career is a little harsh, and he finds very little to praise outside of La Terre est ronde and Les Nuits de la colere. He feels that L'Archipel Lenoir does not merit serious consideration and, of the recent plays,

Le Miroir and Une Femme trop honnête and Comme les Chardons have shown that Salacrou is out of touch with today's public, though his place among France's leading playwrights is assured. His work as a distinctive originality, and his virtuosity in describing the uncertainty of our times in terms of the theater is never absent from his work. But one fears he is anchored to fatalism without hope.<sup>32</sup>

The major work in English to date, at least in terms of scope and length, is a doctoral dissertation written in 1963 at the University of Nebraska by Juris Silenieks.

"Themes and Dramatic Forms in the Plays of Armand Salacrou,"<sup>33</sup> is a long, rather cumbersome attempt to treat all of Salacrou's plays, with the underlying task of uniting theme and form. The major fault of the work lies in its breadth.

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<sup>31</sup>Frederick Lumley, New Trends in Twentieth Century Drama, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1967).

<sup>32</sup>Ibid., p. 170.

<sup>33</sup>Juris Silenieks, "Themes and Dramatic Forms in the Plays of Armand Salacrou," (unpublished Ph. D. dissertation, Foreign Language Department, University of Nebraska, 1963).

None of the plays can be attacked in great detail, because of the necessity of establishing plot summary and discussing the biographical elements surrounding each play, so that the vast majority of Mr. Silenieks' dissertation is devoted to material already generally known, and not to new attempts to "explicate" the plays themselves. There is a great deal of value in the work, but most of it rests in its service as a source for reference materials, for biographical and bibliographical data, rather than its critical excellence. As to the early plays, Silenieks accepts the general critical position that there is nothing of value in them and passes them off with a scant chapter. Although one would not like to suggest that he did not, in fact, understand these complex, poetic dramas, it must be pointed out that much, if not all, of what was so important in the major plays could also have been found in the initial works of Armand Salacrou, except of course his continually developing dramatic skill. Mr. Silenieks, who is now chairman of the Modern Language Department at Carnegie-Mellon University in Pittsburgh, has also published an article in Symposium, "Circularity of Plot in Salacrou's Plays,"<sup>34</sup> in which he continues his study of

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<sup>34</sup>Silenieks, "Circularity of Plot in Salacrou's "Plays," Symposium, No. 20 (1966), 56-62.



the interdependence of theme and form.

In 1967 the Paris Book Center published an anthology of contemporary French plays,<sup>35</sup> with a general introduction by Jacques Guicharnaud. Salacrou's Sens interdit was included, with an introduction to his theater by Kenneth Faye and Alba della Fazia. This introduction, though rather complete, is almost useless to the serious student of Salacrou. Most of it has apparently been gleaned from Mignon, and the constant insistence that Salacrou is in fact a believer who simply doesn't know that he believes approaches the absurd. Of Casseur d'assiettes it is said:

The passionate exhortation of the hero at the end of the plays [sic], that each person search for God within himself, is an expression of Salacrou's own desire to cause Him to give manifestation to His existence, thereby releasing man from the enigma of his inexplicable destiny.<sup>36</sup>

This is a pure perversion of Salacrou's play, as will easily be seen when that play is treated in the present study. An additional complaint that might be lodged against this introduction is its lack of accuracy, particularly in bibliographical details. For example, listing Boulevard Durand

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<sup>35</sup>Paris Book Center, Anthology of 20th Century French Theater, (Paris-New York: Paris Book Center, 1967).

<sup>36</sup>Ibid., p. 654.

as "Never performed," when it is of course one of his most constantly performed works, in Paris, elsewhere in France, outside France, even on television, is a rather frightening mistake.

The fundamental source for information on Salacrou, both his life and his theater, is of course the man himself. Through his articles, his notes appended to his plays, his essays such as Les Idées de la nuit,<sup>37</sup> he opens himself to his readers to such an extent that the major themes of his life and work cannot escape detection. That his personal life, particularly his youth, has had a profound influence on his theater is undeniable, and is in fact readily admitted by Salacrou. Almost all of the critics discussed here recognize this influence, but none treat Salacrou's first plays as the obvious manifestation of these philosophical and psychological facets of his make-up. These driving forces of the mature Salacrou's successful dramas are not the sudden result of a flowering dramatic skill, but can be traced quite distinctly to events of Salacrou's youth, by way of these generally ignored early plays. The major task of this dissertation will be to establish that relationship between

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<sup>37</sup>Armand Salacrou, Les Idées de la nuit, (Paris: Arthème Fayard, 1960).

the young Salacrou and his first dramatic attempts. This is not justified merely by the fact that it has not yet been done, but by the certainty that all that has come since had its genesis in these works. And to trace these themes, we must turn to Salacrou's childhood, for it is there that they were first felt. Salacrou himself has said

J'ai traversé ma vie, enveloppé dans le souvenir de mon enfance, et combien de mes actions, incompréhensibles à mes proches, n'ont été que des cadeaux que faisait en passant l'homme que je suis devenu à l'enfant que j'ai été, cet enfant qui m'a toute ma vie accompagné avec tant de surprises et de déchirement.<sup>38</sup>

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<sup>38</sup>Salacrou, "Mes Certitudes et mes incertitudes," Théâtre VI, 196.

## CHAPTER II

### A PRECOCIOUS ANXIETY

Born in Rouen, rue Grand-Pont, on the ninth of August, 1899, Armand Salacrou was not yet three years old when his family moved to Le Havre, where his pharmacist father would be elected "conseiller municipal" in 1908 and continue to be re-elected until 1940. His childhood at 82 rue Casimir-Delavigne, and later at number 71 of the same street, was not unpleasant. He soon came to feel a strong attachment for his city and for his Norman heritage. His deep love for Le Havre, as well as his sense of being the product of centuries of ancestral evolution, would be strong forces throughout his life.

Parce que je vécus ma jeunesse dans un port, et qu'au delà de mes parents et mes grands-parents, l'éventail de mes ancêtres se déploie en Normandie, je m'étais d'abord voulu hardi navigateur.<sup>1</sup>

This youthful dream would be put to the test when, in 1932, Salacrou bought a ten-meter sailboat and made a

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<sup>1</sup>Salacrou, Les Idées de la nuit, p. 241.

three month voyage from Le Havre to Marseille. The trip was not altogether successful, however, and Salacrou did not prove to be an "hardi navigateur."

En arrivant au Vieux Port, je vendis ce voilier ardent que je ne méritais pas. L'eau m'effrayait tant, qu'en pleine mer, je n'osais pas me baigner autour de mon bateau en panne, le "vide" sous la surface des vagues me paralysait. Alors, m'accrochant toujours aux ancêtres, je me suis voulu paysan norman.<sup>2</sup>

In one of his earliest plays, La Boule de verre, Salacrou has the principal character, clearly autobiographical and named simply "le jeune homme," state very succinctly this feeling of his attachment to his past, a feeling of which Salacrou was apparently aware since early childhood:

Depuis une éternité on a engendré pour m'engendrer, et moi, par ma volonté, je brise la chaîne et j'arrête en mon corps un courant de vie créé avec le premier monde. Où sont toutes les races qui ont participé à ma naissance? Si tous mes ancêtres ressuscitaient on les compterait peut-être plus nombreux que les vivants d'aujourd'hui. . . . Un point d'arrivée: N'est-ce pas exaltant? Dire: Moi, et c'est fini.<sup>3</sup>

Of his adopted city, he would write a moving, poetic evocation in 1935, in which he says "un mélange d'activité commerciale et de beauté naturelle font de ce décor une

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<sup>2</sup>Ibid.

<sup>3</sup>Armand Salacrou, La Boule de verre, Les Inédits d'Estienne, (Paris: Estienne, 1958), p. 24. It is this edition of La Boule de verre which is used in this dissertation.

image de la vie contemporaine que je n'ai pas toujours regardée sans être bouleversé."<sup>4</sup>

Salacrou's childhood seems on the surface to have been quite normal. In later writings he recalls taking piano lessons, collecting stamps, receiving a stereoscope for Christmas. But in recounting each of these events he reveals an extraordinary awareness of the complexities of life and its philosophical problems which is quite astonishing in a child of grade school age. In a 1951 radio interview he tells that as early as the age of five or six he first felt "le sentiment de la mort, non pas de ma mort personnelle, mais de la mort en général. Et j'ai trouvé cela absolument révoltant, et je n'en suis jamais revenu."<sup>5</sup>

Again, in discussing as a mountain climber his feeling of danger, he remembers: "J'avais certainement moins de dix ans --- oui, dès mon enfance, j'ai regardé avec dégoût, sans trembler, la mort, d'un regard fixe."<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>4</sup>Armand Salacrou, "Une Ville à découvrir," Fiat (Paris), No. 6 (6 août, 1935), quoted in Paul-Louis Mignon, Salacrou, p. 21.

<sup>5</sup>"Qui êtes-vous, Armand Salacrou?" interview by Radio-Télévision Française (17 février, 1951) quoted in Mignon, loc. cit.

<sup>6</sup>Salacrou, Les Idées de la nuit, p. 238.

"Un jour, à sept ans, j'ai compris que j'existais, ce fut épouvantable."<sup>7</sup> The knowledge of the existence of death and the genuine assimilation of that terrible fact implies an equally terrible realization of one's own existence, what might be called the "leap into awareness of self." To speak of Existentialism in 1906 would be useless, but these words of young Salacrou might well have been spoken by Antoine Roquentin, the hero of Jean-Paul Sartre's La Nausée,<sup>8</sup> for, although Salacrou mentions no physical malaise, their discoveries of existence were quite the same.

An immediate result of this sensing of the finality of death is the feeling of transitoriness of apparently concrete things and of the meaninglessness of things which one has believed. Salacrou became acutely aware of this.

Quand petit garçon, dans cette cour si sombre de la rue Casimir-Delavigne, j'écoutais l'aventure de la Belle aux Bois et celle d'Ali Baba, avec quel désespoir j'apprenais en même temps que ces histoires avaient été vraies et qu'elles ne l'étaient plus, que jamais plus un bon génie ne m'offrirait un chiffre secret, qui conduirait au coeur des mystères et que le "sésame, ouvre-toi" que je criais devant les portes closes n'était qu'un cri dérisoire, un désir,<sup>9</sup> un rêve dans lequel on ne parvenait pas à s'endormir.

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<sup>7</sup>Jose Van den Esche, Armand Salacrou: Dramaturge de l'angoisse, pp. 23-24.

<sup>8</sup>Jean-Paul Sartre, La Nausée, (Paris: Gallimard, 1938).

<sup>9</sup>Salacrou, loc. cit.

From this early disappointment came an understandable desire to know of things far outside his "somber courtyard." It is in this context that he remembers his stereopticon slides: "Quand j'étais un gamin, j'étais avide de connaître ce qui était hors de ma portée."<sup>10</sup>

Perhaps in an attempt to give permanence to the things around him, Salacrou began to "collect." "J'étais encore tout jeune enfant --- cinq ou six ans --- que déjà je collectionnais."<sup>11</sup> He collected all manner of things, and numbered and catalogued all of his possessions. He finally turned to postage stamps, and with an amazing awareness of what he drew from them. "Je rencontrais dans cette passion une coexistence du passé, du présent, et du futur exceptionnelle."<sup>12</sup> In an attempt, years later, to probe his reasons for his passion for collecting, he said:

Mon goût de la collection . . . je me suis demandé: est-ce encore une timidité? est-ce une sorte de lutte contre ce qu'il y a d'éphémère dans notre vie? on se dit: je collectionne, cette collection va durer, c'est quelque chose . . . la collection, c'est anti-éphémère, vous comprenez, et le côté glissant

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<sup>10</sup>Ibid., p. 35.

<sup>11</sup>Ibid., p. 44.

<sup>12</sup>Ibid., p. 45.



de la vie, le côté fleuve de la vie, le côté fleuve  
qui s'écoule, m'a toujours angoissé.<sup>13</sup>

Even the inevitable piano lessons had for young Salacrou a singularly unmusical result which would be of great significance. He began taking lessons at the age of six and was a rather mediocre student, although four years later an uncle, a professor of music in Paris, would attempt to have Armand enter the Conservatory to study composition. Salacrou remembers, however, that he was amazed and impressed by the numerous strange paintings and drawings that he always found in his music teacher's studio. These art works, some hanging, others, unframed, leaning around the walls on the floor, were the work of Raoul Dufy, the brother of Armand's teacher, Léon. A few years later, in 1914, Salacrou would buy his first Dufy, for twenty-five francs, beginning a passion for collecting art which would give him great pleasure throughout his life.

Thus, it is clear, that by the age of ten Armand Salacrou had already sensed the major themes which were to run through the whole of his life and work: the inevitability of death and the subsequent despair which comes from the transitoriness which this implies. The inability of man to

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<sup>13</sup>Salacrou, Impromptu délibéré, p. 18.

actually grasp life, the impossibility of stopping time, of taking stock, were apparently very real and significant problems for the young Salacrou. But his weapon for striking back was also at hand.

During the same period that Salacrou was being confronted with these terrible truths of life, he came into contact with the theater.

A huit ans, j'ai eu la révélation du théâtre, devant une boîte de carton, dans laquelle une petite fille avait collé des décors d'Epinal. Je tremblais devant cette boîte beaucoup moins vide que des maisons entières. Je n'ai pas changé.<sup>14</sup>

Taken by his parents to the Grand Théâtre du Havre, Armand was especially struck by Carmen and Gounod's Faust. More important was the recognition of a fundamental power of the theater upon which Salacrou was going to draw immensely in the future. "Je fus ébloui par l'amour, par la mort, par cette possibilité mystérieuse de recommencer sa vie quand on s'était trompé."<sup>15</sup>

The germ of Salacrou's interest in the theater and its possibilities was surely planted during these early

<sup>14</sup>Armand Salacrou, "L'Amour du théâtre," Correspondance (Paris), No. 9, (octobre, 1929), p. 47.

<sup>15</sup>Cited by René Clair, Comédies et Commentaires, (Paris: Gallimard, 1959) and quoted in Mignon, op. cit., p. 22. Italics mine.

encounters, but he was soon swept up in other matters. After his father's election to the municipal council as a Radical Socialist, Armand became involved in political ideas. He met many workers and was strongly attracted to the Socialist movement. "Quand j'étais gosse, au lycée, tous mes camarades étaient certains que je ferais une carrière politique, j'étais très préoccupé de politique. Je voulais transformer l'économie du monde."<sup>16</sup>

Armand refused to accept his first communion, although his was a Catholic family, essentially because of his reading of the Catéchisme républicain.<sup>17</sup>

Vous ne savez pas d'où je viens, j'ai été un enfant qui a grandi sans connaître aucun Dieu et qui, à l'âge où les autres font leur première communion, connaissait les Lois de l'Evolution des Mondes. J'ai grandi en plein ciel, et quant je jouais aux

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<sup>16</sup>Salacrou, Impromptu délibéré, p. 117.

<sup>17</sup>Catéchisme républicain --- José Van den Esche describes this book so important to Salacrou's philosophical and moral formation: "C'est un volume grand format, à couverture cartonné rouge, comme il n'est pas impossible qu'on en donnât aux jeunes lauréats des distribution de prix, vers 1905. Des lithographies naïves, un texte établi avec toute l'application dont peut être capable un inspecteur primaire, expliquant aux enfants l'univers selon les pures doctrines de Lamarck et de Darwin. L'athéisme scientifique s'y élevait à la hauteur d'une mystique. Il faut avoir parcouru ces pages pour comprendre à quel point, par-delà les simples leçons de choses, un livre de ce genre peut être un bréviaire initiatique." (Van den Esche, op. cit., p. 24).

orbites des planètes. J'appelais par leur nom tous "nos ancêtres" des océans primordiaux et des mers siluriennes. Je connaissais Vercingétorix beaucoup moins bien que "nos ancêtres" le monotrème, le marsupial, le prosimien, le catarrhinien, l'anthropoïde; je passais des heures à contempler les étonnantes figures sur bois de Stéphane Servent qui illustrent ce grand et inconnu Catéchisme républicain.<sup>18</sup>

Salacrou was, thus, quite naturally drawn to determinism.

Alors, pour supporter ma vie, ainsi qu'un catholique se réfugie dans l'espoir du Paradis, je me suis enfermé, dès mon très jeune âge, dans une philosophie déterministe, sommaire, étroite, rigoureuse, dans un déterminisme mécaniste total.<sup>19</sup>

In 1910 the "affaire Durand" rocked Le Havre, and young Salacrou as well. Jules Durand, thirty years old and the secretary of the Le Havre dock workers' union, was arrested for the murder of one of the local's members who had refused to take part in a major strike which had been in progress for some time. This was a period of great political unrest in France and the fear of the rising Socialist movement set the stage for a trial not unlike that of Dreyfus a few years earlier, or Sacco and Vanzetti a few years later. Through apparent collusion between the police and the shipping companies, the clearly innocent Durand was

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<sup>18</sup>"Portrait d'Armand Salacrou par lui-même," extrait du Pont de l'Europe, preface to the 1929 edition (Paris: Nouvelles Editions Françaises, 1929), p. 149.

<sup>19</sup>Salacrou, "Mes certitudes et mes incertitudes," Théâtre VI, 211.

sentenced to be executed. A series of appeals began and it was not until 1918 that Durand, now a broken man on the verge of insanity, was given a full pardon. He died eight years later in a mental institution.

A major battleground for Socialist sentiment, the trial and subsequent events were, of course, widely discussed in the Salacrou household, and Armand's father was a good friend of René Coty, who defended Durand and who would one day become President of the French Republic. Young Salacrou was profoundly distressed by the injustices of the trial and by the impoverished workers whose plight thereby became known.

Je crois que toute ma vie d'homme fut marquéé par cette terrible "erreur" judiciaire, vécue dans mon enfance. Je ne pouvais pas l'oublier. Cette expérience que je fis, de la méchanceté et de la bonté des hommes, me servit toujours, presque inconsciemment, d'étalon pour mesurer tous les événements dont je devais être le témoin dans la suite de ma vie, et je m'étais promis de raconter un jour cette affaire.<sup>20</sup>

He would fulfill that promise in 1956 with the production, in Le Havre itself, of his play Boulevard Durand.

By the outbreak of the First World War in July, 1914, Salacrou was a confirmed Socialist. He had been strongly

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<sup>20</sup>Armand Salacrou, note to Boulevard Durand, (Paris: Gallimard, 1960), p. 269.

influenced by his father and his colleagues, "quelques ouvriers socialistes," who had been elected with him to the municipal council of Le Havre in 1912. Principal among them was a crane operator in the port, whom we know only as "Allan."

Donc, mon grand ami Allan, dans le crépuscule qui dramatise l'agitation du port, parle de la fraternité universelle à ce gamin tout heureux d'entrevoir son avenir dans les reflets du mot progrès.<sup>21</sup>

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Je connais mes impossibilités . . . L'une d'elles est de ne pouvoir oublier la vieille image de ma jeunesse dans laquelle s'est immobilisé, noir sur le ciel rouge, mon vieil ami Allan conviant les peuples à s'unir et les ouvriers à se libérer de leurs misères.<sup>22</sup>

Salacrou was naturally attracted to and influenced by Jean Jaurès, the moral and intellectual leader of the French Socialists. In 1904 Jaurès, with Aristide Briand, had founded l'Humanité, the daily organ of the Socialists, and had been a major spokesman for social reform for a number of years. On the very eve of the outbreak of general hostilities, July 31, 1914, Jaurès was assassinated in the Café du Croissant in Paris by a fanatic who had been spurred on by Jaurès' adversaries. Salacrou considered Jaurès, an outspoken

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<sup>21</sup>Salacrou, "Mes Certitudes et mes incertitudes," Théâtre, VI, p. 196.

<sup>22</sup>Ibid., p. 204.

opponent of the war with Germany, to be the first victim of that war.

Le premier mort de cette guerre, n'était-il pas Jean Jaurès qu'on avait du abbatre pour que la guerre puisse passer? J'ai acheté son portrait et il orna, pendant quatre ans, le mur de ma petite chambre si sombre.<sup>23</sup>

On the fourth of August, Jean Jaurès' burial took place in the midst of an immense popular demonstration on his behalf. War was declared on the same day.

Although France was locked in the stalemate of trench warfare during the years from 1914 to 1917, life continued in Le Havre. Salacrou's lycée was used as a hospital for the war wounded, but school work went on nonetheless.

La guerre qui dévastait alors l'Europe m'apparaissait absurde comme un accident, et, dans la mesure où les hommes en étaient responsables, monstrueuse. Notre lycée était transformé en hôpital, et après nos leçons de grec et de latin, nous assistions à l'arrivée des rescapés et des victimes du Front, jambes ou bras coupés.<sup>24</sup>

At the age of fifteen Salacrou was thinking seriously of literature, not only as something he would like to do, but already as something he must do. The strongest influence on him during this period was Flaubert. He found in Flaubert a

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<sup>23</sup>Ibid., p. 196.

<sup>24</sup>Salacrou, "Le Temps des autres," Les Idées de la nuit, p. 10.

guide for style: "J'ai été, à l'âge de quinze ans, envoûté par sa correspondance . . . Cette correspondance, pour moi est un manuel d'écriture, un manuel où l'on apprend à écrire."<sup>25</sup> But he also found more in Flaubert, a call to arms.

La préface que Flaubert a écrite pour les Dernières Chansons de son ami Bouilhet où il donnait des conseils aux jeunes écrivains et où il disait: "Enfin, si les accidents du monde, dès qu'ils sont perçus, vous apparaissent transposés comme pour l'emploi d'une illusion à décrire, tellement que toutes les choses, y compris votre existence, ne vous sembleront pas avoir d'autre utilité et que vous soyez résolu à toutes les avanies, prêt à tous les sacrifices, cuirassé à toute épreuve, lancez-vous, publiez!" C'est une phrase, évidemment, qui a éclairé, guidé toute mon enfance et toute ma jeunesse, enfin enfance à partir de quinze ans et jeunesse jusqu'à vingt-deux ou vingt-trois ans.<sup>26</sup>

In 1916 Salacrou passed the first part of his baccalaureat, and also saw his name in print for the first time. Late one evening during the summer, Armand had gone to the Le Havre train station to meet someone. There he saw an old Arab, apparently abandoned, squatting against a wall. He was deeply struck by the sense of alienation that this aged sidi reflected, and that very evening he wrote a story based

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<sup>25</sup>Armand Salacrou, "Flaubert, mon patron," interview with Robert Mallet, Parler en prose et le savoir, Radio-Télévision Française, 1954, cited in Mignon, Salacrou, p. 261.

<sup>26</sup>Salacrou, Impromptu délibéré, p. 13.



on the event. He immediately sent it to l'Humanité, his favorite journal. He heard nothing for several days but on the next Sunday, the 6th of August, 1916, he found that the editors had indeed accepted and published his story, "L'Eternelle chanson des gueux."

Young Salacrou raced to his father's office to exhibit his success, and then home to finish a second story, already begun.

Je voulais l'envoyer le soir même, afin que la Rédaction, qui ne m'avait pas encore écrit, le reçût à temps pour le publier le dimanche suivant. Ainsi, continuerais-je de semaine en semaine, et dans ma lettre d'envoi je suggèrai le titre "les Contes du Dimanche." Mais on ne me répondit pas. Et le deuxième conte ne parut jamais. La déception se dilua dans l'attente. La guerre qui continuait et la rentrée au lycée l'emportèrent totalement.<sup>27</sup>

At about this same time, perhaps motivated by his initial success, Salacrou wrote two romans. One of the novels was sent to Mercure de France, where it was refused, and neither are extant. During the winter of 1916-1917, encouraged by his history professor, Salacrou founded the Jeunesses Socialistes du Havre and also caused a minor scandal by donating to the municipal library of Le Havre its first volume of Anatole France, Le Crime de Sylvestre Bonnard.

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<sup>27</sup>Salacrou, Idées de la nuit, p. 15.

After passing the second part of his baccalaureat in 1917, Salacrou decided to go to Paris, "en pleine guerre," to prepare his P. C. N., the first year of general science studies. Instead of pharmacy, as his father wished, Salacrou chose medicine. His choice was not predicated on any burning ambition to become a doctor.

Mon père voulait que je sois pharmacien; je ne voulais pas être pharmacien pour cette seule raison que la première année de pharmacie se passait en stage, et que ce stage aurait eu lieu au Havre, or je n'avais qu'une idée, c'était de venir à Paris parce que, déjà, je pensais naturellement à l'écriture . . . et aux amis . . . que je rencontrerais.<sup>28</sup>

That he was already thinking of literature as a career is obvious, for of his choice of medicine he adds "Je trouvais que ce n'était pas si mal qu'un futur écrivain ait des connaissances en sciences."<sup>29</sup> He did, in fact, meet old friends in Paris, and also became a friend of the poet Robert Desnos. First a student at the Hôpital de la Pitié, he was later an extern at the Hôpital Sainte-Antoine. The importance of these two years of medical studies does not escape him. "En vérité, sur ces deux ans d'hôpital, s'est construite toute ma vie d'homme . . . J'ai appris à vivre

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<sup>28</sup>Salacrou, Impromptu délibéré, p. 19.

<sup>29</sup>Ibid.

avec lucidité, avec calme."<sup>30</sup>

After the war, classes continued, but Armand Salacrou had begun to widen his literary horizons, and his acquaintances among the artistic milieu of Paris had grown. "Je connaissais pas mal de littérateurs, de peintres, je fréquentais de petits bistrots littéraires du Quartier."<sup>31</sup> His medical studies were being neglected and he could not continue the pretense of a medical career much longer. His eventual departure from medical school was the result of a crise de conscience. With the poet Georges Limbour, who had been his friend since lycée days in Le Havre and who also was his companion in medical school, Salacrou decided that he could no longer continue on a path which was not truly his. This was his reasoning: "Non, ce n'est pas possible, dans dix ans, si nous sommes médecins, nous serons de mauvais médecins parce que nous aurons passé notre temps à lire des poètes au lieu de travailler notre internat."<sup>32</sup>

Jean-Louis Barrault recounts a different version of Salacrou's leaving medical school:

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<sup>30</sup>Salacrou, "Armand Salacrou," Problèmes, No. 23, (juillet-août, 1955), cited in Mignon, Salacrou, p. 24.

<sup>31</sup>Salacrou, Impromptu délibéré, p. 19.

<sup>32</sup>Ibid., pp. 19-20.

C'était en 1920. A cette époque d'après guerre, comme aujourd'hui, les livres d'études étaient devenus rares et chers. Un de ses camarades lui prêta un livre rare d'histologie et Salacrou, qui n'égare jamais un livre, perdit ce livre. De honte, il ne revint pas au cours . . . Et voilà comment --- parce ce petit acte manqué, Salacrou fut perdu pour la Médecine.<sup>33</sup>

It is possible that this amusing anecdote might have some basis in fact, but it is clear that Salacrou had always been "perdu pour la Médecine," that his studies had been little more than a means of reaching Paris. Of his efforts to get to and remain in Paris, Salacrou remembers:

Enfant, je n'avais d'autre ambition que Paris et le théâtre. J'y suis venu pour terminer mes études. Pour y rester, j'ai prolongé ces études. J'ai passé des licences; philosophie, droit, sciences. Tous les ans, j'envoyais une licence à ma famille, comme on envoie une carte postale.<sup>34</sup>

After returning to Le Havre to inform his parents of his decision to leave medicine, Salacrou, with Limbour, went back to Paris and in October, 1919, entered the Sorbonne to work toward his licence in philosophy. He brilliantly passed his examinations in July 1920 and left France for a vacation in Italy, his parents having given him a gift of

<sup>33</sup>Jean-Louis Barrault, "Salacrou et la médecine," La Vie Médicale, (décembre, 1950).

<sup>34</sup>Interview with Pierre Lagarde, Nouvelles Littéraires, No. 749 (20 février, 1937), p. 3.

1,000 francs. He had planned to visit the whole of the Italian peninsula but he was so impressed by Florence, the first stop on his trip, that he remained there for his entire vacation. It was the city's history, apparently through a reading of Gobineau's La Renaissance, which interested him, and he was particularly enthralled with the life of Savonarola, the fifteenth-century priest-dictator of Florence. While there, Salacrou sketched out the first lines of a five-act play on Savonarola's life, an outline which would seventeen years later become La Terre est ronde, one of his greatest successes.

Back in Paris in October, Salacrou began work under Victor Basch on the contemporary Italian critic-philosopher Benedetto Croce, in whom he had also become interested during his stay in Florence. Needing money to support himself, Salacrou again turned to l'Humanité, this time for employment. He went to the newspaper with a friend, who also sought work, and they were given a job on the spot. "On y portait la barbe et le titre d'élève de l'Ecole normale était, pour être reçu, une carte de visite indiscutée."<sup>35</sup> Unfortunately, there was only one position open at l'Humanité,

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<sup>35</sup>Salacrou, "Mes Certitudes et mes incertitudes," Théâtre VI, p. 197.

that of insuring that all the city's theater programs and the schedule of the Communist party meetings were included in each day's paper. The two young men decided to share the one job, each working for a period of two weeks. The salary was four hundred francs per month. Salacrou has commented on this apparent crossroads of his two directions of interest: "Si je croyais aux avertissements du destin, à quelles rêveries me laisserais-je aller aujourd'hui; pendant plusieurs mois je recopiais chaque soir la liste des spectacles de Paris et celle des réunions de sections du parti: croisée de chemins."<sup>36</sup>

This was a difficult period for Salacrou, in moral and philosophical terms. He felt growing doubts about his involvement in the Socialist movement. He was not yet, at the time of his joining the staff of l'Humanité, a card-carrying Party member, but he did consider himself a Communist after the 1920 Congress of Tours, which marked the split between the old Second International and Lenin's Third International. He remembers regretting that he was not a true revolutionary, and the pain that this knowledge gave

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<sup>36</sup>Ibid.

<sup>37</sup>Ibid., p. 199.

him while covering a workers' strike at Roubaix-Tourcoing in 1921 for l'Humanité.

J'étais ce qu'on appelle un intellectuel petit bourgeois individualiste, qui pensait à ses propres problèmes, et ne savait pas se donner, les yeux fermés, perinde ac cadaver, à la cause. Je n'étais pas réellement un des grévistes affamés; Je regardais; je ne m'étais pas jeté parmi eux et je ne m'étais pas fait ouvrier comme eux.<sup>37</sup>

In July, 1921, still writing for l'Humanité and now also for Daniel Renoult's l'Internationale, Salacrou received his diplôme d'études supérieures de philosophie with a thesis on Croce.

For l'Internationale Salacrou exhibited some of the talent for publicity which would one day bring him to found his immensely successful publicity firm, when he conceived a contest to raise the paper's circulation; "Qui est le plus mauvais patron de Paris?" This contest was finally "won" by Louis Renault.

Increasingly disenchanted with Communism, Salacrou finally left l'Humanité in October, 1922. "Un nouvel 'œil de Moscou' arriva porteur de nouvelles consignes. J'en pris prétexte pour une démission que je sentais nécessaire depuis quelques mois."<sup>38</sup> He also left the Party.

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<sup>37</sup>Ibid., p. 199.

<sup>38</sup>Ibid.

Non seulement je ne pouvais pas, mais je ne voulais pas oublier mes problèmes individuels. Pour mon repos et mon bonheur, je le regrette encore: le socialisme militant m'offrait une possibilité de vivre dans le monde, de m'accrocher à l'existence. Sans joie, avec déchirement, je quittai le parti comme on abandonne une grande espérance. J'avais vingt-deux ans.<sup>39</sup>

On June 7, 1922, Salacrou had married Mlle Jeanne Jeandet, whom he had known in Le Havre, and they were living at 13, rue de Plélo. He was now working on his licence de droit and making more friends in the world of letters. "Je commençais à me lier d'amitié avec de jeunes poètes, je jeunes peintres. Le surréalisme allait naître."<sup>40</sup>

It is quite interesting to note that during the period in which Salacrou had been edging away from the Socialist movement, he had been moving ever closer to what was to take its place, the world of literature, the theater. Of the two great forces that had dominated his life, he was clearly opting for the latter. And he seems to have been drawn toward each of these for very similar reasons: an attempt to find something solid, meaningful in life on which to s'accrocher. This constant theme, discovered in his early youth and reinforced repeatedly throughout his formative

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<sup>39</sup>Ibid.

<sup>40</sup>Ibid.



years, appeared strikingly to Salacrou upon his first reading of André Breton.

Tenez, je me souviens très nettement de mon émotion quand j'ai lu pour la première fois les Pas perdus d'André Breton. C'est son premier livre, et j'avais vingt-deux ou vingt-trois ans. Eh bien, il y encore des phrases qui me hantent et qui sont restées pour moi extraordinairement vivantes. Je voudrais vous en lire une, qui est comme une préface à toute ma jeunesse et peut-être le thème de toute ma vie intellectuelle: "Absolument incapable de prendre parti du sort qui m'est fait, atteint dans ma conscience la plus haute par le déni de justice que n'excuse aucunement, à mes yeux, le péché originel, je me garde d'adapter mon existence aux conditions dérisoires, ici-bas, de toute existence . . . Et quelle vérité peut-il avoir s'il y a la mort?"<sup>41</sup>

Armand Salacrou had turned to Socialism for the very purpose of fighting against this injustice of the meaninglessness of life, through social and political efforts, to right some of the wrongs he saw on all sides. Now he would turn to literature for the same reasons. Perhaps he could no longer change things, but he felt that he must now express his anxiety. "Et dans cette angoisse, c'est le passage du futur inéluctable vers un passé ineffacable qui m'étreint. Dans l'anxiété, je ne suis que le témoin de ma vie."<sup>42</sup>

Is this not the same "côté fleuve de la vie" which

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<sup>41</sup>Salacrou, Impromptu délibéré, p. 12.

<sup>42</sup>Salacrou, "Mes Certitudes et mes incertitudes," Théâtre VI, p. 312.

had led Salacrou to collect stamps in his childhood? He felt that he was not living, but was merely watching life pass through him. "La vie passerait au travers de moi sans laisser de traces?"<sup>43</sup> This, another of those terrible questions which Salacrou will put into the mouth of King Jérôme a few years later, echoes throughout all his plays, and his life as well. Pierre, the principal character of Tour à terre is obviously speaking for Salacrou himself when he makes this frightening confession: "J'ai vécu à tâtons. Les hommes que j'ai rencontrés ne m'ont jamais connu: j'ai toujours marché à côté de ma vie."<sup>44</sup>

This speech is a key insight into Salacrou's philosophical position at the time he turned seriously to writing for the theater. He was not living "authentically," to use a term from the Existentialism he would later partly espouse. "Lorsqu'on écrit c'est qu'on ne sait pas vivre, ou qu'on n'a pas le goût de vivre."<sup>45</sup> In his inability to live, to dominate the act of living, he chose writing in an attempt to grasp his feelings, to label the elements of his life, the occurrences and events in the "côté fleuve," just as a

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<sup>43</sup>Salacrou, Le Pont de l'Europe, Théâtre I, 185.

<sup>44</sup>Salacrou, Tour à terre, Théâtre I, 63.

<sup>45</sup>Salacrou, Impromptu délibéré, p. 14.

child might mount stamps in an album to study them, to wonder at them, to give them an order.

En effet, à mes debuts, je ne concevais pas qu'on puisse écrire pour d'autres raisons que des raisons qui vous amènent à essayer d'élucider, à essayer de comprendre, à essayer de s'expliquer, à essayer aussi de rechercher des amitiés.<sup>46</sup>

Salacrou had been making a great number of important friends. Having met the painter André Masson, he frequently went to his house on rue Blomet and there became friends with Juan Gris, Tristan Tzara and Antonin Artaud, among other painters and writers. This was an exciting time in Paris. Dadaism had reached its summit, was on the decline, and the advent of Surrealism was at hand. Having decided to write, Salacrou came under the obvious influence of the Surrealists (we have already seen his debt to Breton), but he refused to become a "member" of their movement, a posture of non-affiliation which he has maintained since leaving the Communist Party.

Après cette expérience manquée [the disenchantment with Communism] je me promis que, par fidélité à ma jeunesse, jamais je n'appartiendrais à un autre parti. Je tins parole: je ne dis pas que ce fut toujours sans regret.<sup>47</sup>

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<sup>46</sup>Ibid., p. 10.

<sup>47</sup>Salacrou, "Mes Certitudes et mes incertitudes," Théâtre VI, p. 199.

Though his earlier literary efforts had been in the fields of fiction and journalism, Salacrou chose drama as his vehicle of expression, and it is not absolutely certain why. He has wondered about it himself. One explanation, seemingly insignificant, but which might have in fact had an unconscious effect:

Je me souviens d'une promenade au bord de la mer, au Havre, j'étais encore au lycée, nous étions trois amis; il y avait un peintre, enfin il avait déclaré qu'il serait peintre, c'est Jean Dubuffet, il y avait aussi un poète très influencé alors par Lamartine et Laforque, il avait quinze ans, c'est le poète Georges Limbour, et je me souviens encore de Limbour me disant: "Mais pourquoi n'écrirais-tu pas des pièces de théâtre?"<sup>48</sup>

Salacrou is obviously not satisfied with this reason for having become a playwright. "Après, longtemps après, j'ai cherché des explications J'ai cru en trouver un dans ma timidité. Je trouvais que je me cachais mieux derrière des personnages de roman, ce qui n'empêche pas qu'on prétend que mon théâtre soit autobiographique."<sup>49</sup>

In wondering about the genesis of his career, can Salacrou be forgetting the "boîte de carton" to whose walls a little girl has pasted the "images d'Epinal," and that he had long ago sensed the theater's "possibilité mystérieuse de recommencer la vie?"

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<sup>48</sup>Salacrou, Impromptu délibéré, p. 16.    <sup>49</sup>Ibid.

### CHAPTER III

#### ELABORATIONS OF DESPAIR

A young man walks into the wings of a music hall. In this fantasy world of chorus girls, singers, caged animals and the applause of an unseen audience, the young man is engaged in a strange quest. He tries to explain to the chorus girls why he has come, that he has a mission to accomplish, "un devoir sacré, une bonne action."<sup>1</sup> He is seeking a lost cat, a tiny cat with a miraculous gift of speech. Alone in this unfamiliar world, carrying no identification, he demands to see the director of the company, for he is certain that his cat has been stolen and is being hidden in the theater.

No one understands this strange young man, for no one is aware that anything is missing from existence, nor can one comprehend this anguish for a world in which there

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<sup>1</sup>Armand Salacrou, Le Casseur d'assiettes, Théâtre I, 10.

is no longer "un petit chat divin."<sup>2</sup> The young man himself is not entirely coherent. While attempting to communicate his desperation to the stage manager he admits: "Ma volonté court dans ma tête, sans rattraper le souvenir. Je me sens retenu ici, pourtant; mais comme l'homme est retenu sur terre, avec la même violence et la même incertitude quant à l'utilité de ma présence."<sup>3</sup>

Asked for a description of his lost cat, the young man finds it impossible to speak precisely about the cat's appearance or even his reasons for searching for it. "Croyez-vous qu'en puisse expliquer ainsi le mystère d'une vie en trois mots: 'Dieu, le Fils, le Saint-Esprit' ou, ainsi qu'on répète: 'Je vous aime' avec la même facilité?"<sup>4</sup> Unable to remember exactly when the cat was stolen, the young man knows only that he was once happy and that now he is not. He is particularly upset that the cat might be in the music hall, rather than somewhere else. "Le petit chat souffrira inutilement dans un music-hall. On ne livre pas un être si rare à la stupidité d'un tel public." Thus the theater seems

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<sup>2</sup>Ibid.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid., p. 12.

<sup>4</sup>Ibid.

<sup>5</sup>Ibid., p. 14.

to have a double rôle for the young man. It is the place in which a fragile cat might be destroyed, and it is also the very place in which the young man must search for his lost friend, the place in which lost cats are found.

Armand Salacrou seems to have entered the world of the theater in much the same manner as his protagonist, this Young Man of his first serious dramatic effort, le Casseur d'assiettes. He began his career as a dramatist seeking his own "petit chat divin" and the search has continued, just as that of the Young Man of his play will. The choice of a theater as the setting for le Casseur d'assiettes is, of course, representative of Salacrou's own choosing of drama as his vehicle of expression, but, more significantly, this chaotic scene of irrationality found behind the music hall stage is clearly the world itself as Salacrou conceived of it, again the "côté fleuve de la vie," into which the young playwright thrust himself seeking solutions to his unanswerable questions.

That the play is a direct extension of Salacrou's own psychological universe is emphasized by the fact that its plot came almost in its entirety from a nightmare which the playwright had himself experienced. The similarity between nightmares and the stage did not escape Salacrou. Both drama and the theater are rituals in which the thoughts

of the creator are acted out by others, and the author is merely the witness, at least at the ultimate moment of the appearance. In Les Idées de la nuit Salacrou discusses this phenomenon.

Des cauchemars venant de loin, à exposition presque méthodique, organisés, construits, et qui m'amenaient, par une fatalité dont j'avais, me semble-t-il, consciences dans mon rêve, à la crise où je reprenais dans le noir, une autre conscience de moi-même, haletant, en sueur. Dans un instant d'hébetude, je devais faire coïncider ces deux parties de moi-même, celle qui sortait du cauchemar et l'autre qui regardait cette sortie, bouleversée. Le Casseur d'assiettes, les quatre ou cinq dernières pages de conclusion exceptées, est la trace exacte d'un de ces cauchemars.<sup>6</sup>

Le Casseur d'assiettes was written during the summer of 1923, first at Neris and then at Plestin, where the Salacrous were spending the month of August with André Masson and Michel Leiris. Returning to Paris to continue his law studies, Salacrou submitted the play to Charles Dullin at the Théâtre de l'Atelier. Among the people whom Salacrou had met at Masson's home in Paris was the influential art dealer Daniel-Henri Kahnweiler, who was also a publisher. He had already printed the work of Apollinaire and Max Jacob and would later publish Artaud, Malraux and Desnos, among others. In December he proposed to Salacrou that he publish Casseur d'assiettes, and the playwright withdrew his

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<sup>6</sup>Salacrou, Les Idées de la nuit, p. 27.



manuscript from Dullin. He found on it a notation in Dullin's hand: "Intéressant --- à relire." It is likely, however, that Salacrou did not have high hopes for his play being produced, for in November his good friend Max Jacob had written him: "Ta pièce est charmante mais injouable, totalement injouable, et puis vraiment un peu hamlétique. Tu en feras mille autres."<sup>7</sup> Jacob was apparently right for Salacrou's first play was not to see the stage until 1954 when it would be produced in Leiden by the Leids Studenten Toneel. It would, however, be broadcast by the French National Radio in 1941.

For Kahnweiler's edition, Salacrou was asked to prepare a short explanatory introduction to his play, and he wrote:

Prisonnier du ciel, l'homme traîne la littérature à sa remorque. Avec l'utilité de sa vie à défendre, perdue dans le bazar des siècles, il regarde l'étalage de toutes les morales impossibles. Déconcerté par l'histoire de la pensée, alors il prête l'oreille aux paroles des innocents dans l'espoir d'y surprendre une imprudence divine, il attend les miracles: passe-temps désespéré.<sup>8</sup>

The Young Man continues to seek his cat, his innocent "petit chat divin" in whom he has perhaps already sensed an

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<sup>7</sup>Max Jacob, Lettres aux Salacrou, (Paris: Gallimard, 1957), p. 27.

<sup>8</sup>Salacrou, Théâtre I, 35.

"imprudence," a glimpse of meaning, a hope of catching an instant of revelation that the keeper of the "mystère de la vie" has let slip free. But he also realizes that there will be no miraculous ending to this desperate pastime.

C'est effroyable, je dois toujours recommencer, et c'est le commencement qui est impossible. Où commence le cercle? Ma vie est un cercle qui m'étouffe. Et dans cette vie, toute de solitude, je ne me suis jamais senti aussi seul que ce soir, ici.<sup>9</sup>

In this world which he cannot understand, peopled with figures with whom he cannot communicate, he is like a young child who has learned that Ali Baba will never give him the secret password. He is the Young Man struggling against "ce qu'il y a d'éphémère dans notre vie." He is the young playwright . . . "lorsqu'on écrit, c'est qu'on ne sait pas vivre."

To la disease, the only character who has taken him seriously, the Young Man talks of his first discovery of the divine speaking cat. He had found himself walking down a long, straight street which seemed to disappear into a cloud in the distance. He was walking alone, but within a mass of silent people. They passed each other, looked at each other, and the Young Man could see a certain compassion in their eyes. But there was no communication. "Je continuais

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<sup>9</sup>Ibid., p. 15.

d'avancer dans cette rue étrange, animée, me semblait-il, de ma seule présence. Elle vivait de la vie que je lui prêtais en passant. Le néant mangeait la rue après mon passage et ce sillage de mort me désolait."<sup>10</sup>

Salacrou in his nightmare, the playwright in his theater, the Young Man in his melancholy street . . . all see themselves as alone in the mass of humanity, unable to believe in anything, or to make contact with anyone. All is ephemeral, because death chews up each moment just past, leaving man constantly leaning backward into a gulf of emptiness, without support. But the Young Man has seen his cat.

Au bas d'une porte, ouverte sur un couloir noir, apparut un petit chat misérable. Il leva sur moi des yeux où je retrouvais derrière un scintillement d'or, cette détresse parfaite déjà lue dans le regard des hommes mystérieux. Je m'arrêtai. Alors, d'une voix presque malicieuse et cependant si douce, le petit chat misérable me dit, avec des paroles, vous entendez, avec des mots: "Ne pleure pas, puisque je t'aime."<sup>11</sup>

Is this Salacrou's glimpse of a divine imprudence? Did the Young Man find in this simple and honest communication the key to what might make life in the mechanistic universe of the Catéchisme républicain meaningful and human, or at

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<sup>10</sup>Ibid., p. 19.

<sup>11</sup>Ibid.

least bearable? This would certainly seem to be what Salacrou is saying. But this was no more than a glimpse, for the cat disappeared, and the simple fact that it had existed, that it had said "je t'aime" was not enough. There was no continuity, the Young Man was unable to put his newly found knowledge to use, for once said, the words of the cat were gone, vanished into that void of the past. Memory is not existence. "Ma vie s'est si bizarrement ordonnée que je ne peux me réfugier ni dans des souvenirs, ni dans un espoir. Je me'explique mal; pour se reconnaître dans une existence, il faut un don que je n'ai pas reçu."<sup>12</sup>

Each moment of life is lived as though isolated from each other moment. The Young Man sees his existence parcelled out in events which are unconnected, each thought, each act, like postage stamps, collected but never unified.

Vivez-vous par petits morceaux? Votre existence, n'est-elle qu'une collection de nos jours séparés? Le petit tas des feuilles arrachées chaque matin au calendrier . . . Mais à chaque seconde, notre vie entière se modifie, et je ne vous conterai pas la mienne ce soir, comme je vous l'eusse contée ce matin. Pourtant, je porte ma vie en moi-même, depuis ma première heure. Mais je dois la découvrir. Toutes mes aventures ne sont que les contemplations successives de cette même vie. Ah! le ridicule des théories médicales sur la vieillesse! La vieillesse n'est qu'un changement de point de vue.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>12</sup>Ibid., p. 21.

<sup>13</sup>Ibid., pp. 21-22.

The Young Man had on occasion had other moments of insight, seen other glimpses of divine imprudence. He had once noticed a young girl eating a bowl of soup. "Je m'attendris devant l'universalité des gestes."<sup>14</sup> Later, he saw a poor emigrant wiping his son's nose, and he had cried at this tenderness. But these were still isolated events. "Voici deux moments de la vie. Si l'on pouvait isoler le lien qui les attache . . . Mais qui nous montrera ce lien? Qui? La nature est le langage de Dieu, vous dis-je; on l'y peut surprendre."<sup>15</sup>

To pick out the thread which links the isolated moments of life would, of course, be to solve the ultimate mystery of the universe, to discover God. For these isolated moments, the events in which we can actually perceive our existence as concrete, can become universally meaningful only if we can see them as merely the visible manifestations of that fundamental and hidden life force which would flow from a Supreme Being. Not having been granted that simple gift of unquestioning faith that makes it so easy to become "un homme comme les autres" the Young Man, Salacrou, must search for that thread. It is a search that will never end,

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<sup>14</sup>Ibid., p. 27.

<sup>15</sup>Ibid. Italics mine.

for he will never find it.

After a farcical scene in which the Young Man tries to save the foundering music hall show by proposing a plot in which the characters are to shoot at themselves with real guns, he describes the anguish of being stalked by Death. He pictures his life as a checker board. He moves from square to square, hounded by Croquemitaine, the French child's equivalent of the boggy-man. He is constantly called upon to give the total sum of the numbers of all the squares he has ever crossed, and he can never do it. He cries out numbers, but they are always the wrong ones. Man, rushing through life, is continually faced with the necessity of giving definition of his life, is constantly seeking some answer which might save him from the boggy-man, from Death. He is seeking God, salvation. "Il attend des miracles: passe-temps désespéré."<sup>16</sup>

The Young Man clearly rejects the God of orthodox Christianity. When he is told that God will judge and punish him, he replies

Dieu va me juger? . . . je n'ai pas peur de ce jugement-là. Comment veux-tu que Dieu puisse juger un homme? Pour juger un homme, il faut être un homme, et, si Dieu est homme, il n'est plus Dieu . . . et

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<sup>16</sup>Salacrou, Théâtre I, 35.

qui appliquerait les sentences divines? Satan? le Diable exécuter des hautes oeuvres de Dieu? La curieuse association! Je m'amuse au moment de mourir, les yeux bandés. Et pourtant, je me sens tout près de la vérité, et tout près de Dieu.<sup>17</sup>

And he is indeed near god of sorts, le casseur d'assiettes, the breaker of plates who has just entered. This man insists that he is God, or one of them . . . the God of Plates. When told that the function of the casseur is just that, breaking plates before an audience, the Young Man is horrified, for he cannot conceive of a God who destroys rather than creates. Le casseur d'assiettes points out that he creates broken plates from whole ones, that he juggles plates just as God juggles worlds. " . . . et je les brise comme Dieu vous brise . . . par nécessité professionnelle."<sup>18</sup> The Young Man refuses to listen. "Je ne veux plus comprendre. Je veux un Dieu bon ou je n'en veux pas."<sup>19</sup>

A fireman who has been standing nearby tells the Young Man that he would not listen to the breaker of plates, that he does not know what he is talking about. The fireman

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<sup>17</sup>Ibid., p. 31.

<sup>18</sup>Ibid., pp. 32-33.

<sup>19</sup>Ibid., p. 33.

insists that God created the world and then on the seventh day He rested. But, he continues:

Ce qu'on ne dit pas, c'est que Dieu, après avoir créé la terre, le soleil et les hommes, s'est endormi. Dieu dort. Il fallait un Dieu pour créer le monde, il fallait le sommeil de Dieu pour qu'y naisse le malheur. Entends-tu? Dieu dort.<sup>20</sup>

This distresses the Young Man, but he believes it to be the truth. "Nous ne sommes que les créations d'un cauchemar divin."<sup>21</sup> Startled by the sound of a drum roll on the music hall stage, he asks the young girl to whom he has been attracted to explain what is happening. She replies that the casseur d'assiettes, who has himself almost gone to sleep during his act, is letting too many plates drop, and the director has called for the drum to wake him up. It strikes the Young Man that she has said "to wake him up" in exactly the same voice that his lost cat had used.

Pour l'éveiller? Pourquoi, en disant ces paroles, as-tu copié la voix sauve de mon petit chat, qui n'est qu'un rêve, comme nous-mêmes? Dieu dort? Dieu rêve? J'ai compris. C'est simple. Il faut éveiller Dieu! Dieu! Mes amis, brisez-vous; je vous explique; torturez en vous-mêmes Dieu, pour qu'un excès de souffrance l'éveille et nous libère!<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>20</sup>Ibid.

<sup>21</sup>Ibid.

<sup>22</sup>Ibid.



And the curtain falls on Armand Salacrou's first play with the entire cast dashing about the stage, shouting to awaken God. Although the Young Man in this play seems to have found an answer to the enigma of existence, to have learned the truth about God, it is obvious that his discovery has given him no solace. His search to awaken God, to ferret Him out and force Him to take responsibility for the chaotic world that He has created is an angry denunciation of religion, a bitter parody of man's turning to God for answers to life's mysteries. It is Salacrou expressing the same feelings that would cause him to write years later:

Si je ne comprends pas les messages de Dieu, que ne parle-t-il plus clairement, qu'il soit le Dieu d'Israël, des Arabes ou des Aztèques? Pourquoi nous envelopper ainsi de ténèbres? La vie est-elle une devinette? Une loterie? A quoi rime cette course douloureuse à travers ce labyrinthe noir, où tout le monde trébuche, et dont personne ne sort que dans l'effroi de la mort? Pourquoi tous ces mystères et tant de contradictions chez les prophètes? Et ces incertitudes? Ce jeu cruel? Pourquoi tant de divinités si diverses exposées à travers l'histoire et la géographie comme dans une dérisoire fête foraine? Lorsque mon tour viendra, je n'attends rien d'autre qu'un effacement comparable à l'effacement qui précéda ma naissance, mais si je me réveillais subitement à la face de Dieu, alors, c'est moi qui lui reprocherais ses silences, son absurde jeu de cache-cache et qui lui demanderais raison de son abandon, de mon aveuglement et de ma solitude.<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>23</sup>Armand Salacrou, "La Vie et mort de Charles Dullin," Théâtre, VI.

Le Casseur d'assiettes is not the work of the skilled theatrical craftsman that Salacrou would become, and is clearly not a major play. It is scarcely more than a scene, short and undeveloped, but its poetic intensity makes the play an emotional document if not a theatrical event. And it is in this first work that Salacrou sketches out a great portion of his symbolic vocabulary, establishes those elements which will become characteristic of his theater, because they are so much a part of the playwright himself.

Structurally, the play is little more than a tableau vivant. The speeches of the Young Man are almost soliloquies, so little do the other characters play roles of real significance. Jacob called the play "hamlétique" and this is a fair commentary. Salacrou has perhaps established the frenzied music hall backdrop as a metaphor for modern society, but it is the Young Man alone who gives dramatic force to the play. This is not to suggest that there are no complexities in le Casseur d'assiettes. The play raises a number of questions which are quite difficult to resolve. But these are not theatrical questions. They are, rather, metaphysical or philosophical problems, those "questions sans réponse" which Salacrou had been posing himself almost since childhood. To attack these complexities, the play must be approached as one might approach a difficult poem.

Salacrou first presents the basic metaphor, outlines the problem to be treated in his play. Man is lost. Life seems to be moving along around him, and everyone else seems to be functioning in some sort of meaningful, or at least ordered, manner. But the Young Man of the play cannot become "un homme comme les autres." He cannot do this because he has seen that life is not as it seems, that it is not an orderly, meaningful series of significant events. In short, he doubts the existence of God. Why?

We have seen that Salacrou, as a young child, had already felt this absence of God, and that this bitter knowledge had come from an awareness of death. It is much the same for the Young Man of Casseur d'assiettes. The certainty that all is transitory makes all human activity meaningless. He tells the chorous girls:

Si toutes les femmes du monde m'aimaient, je donnerais tous leurs amours pour aimer l'une d'elles, même la plus laide. Hélas, sur un visage de femme je sais lire le futur. En prenant sur vos lèvres notre premier baiser, je saurai percevoir le goût de notre dernier baiser. A quoi bon commencer ce dont on sait la fin?<sup>24</sup>

In fact, it is this inevitability of death that is the proof of the reality of life. "Le monde existe-t-il

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<sup>24</sup>Salacrou, Théâtre I, 28. Italics mine.

seulement? . . . Je crois qu'il existe parce que j'ai vu des gens mourir et eux seuls disparaître. Un homme mort, une pierre à la mer, et les vagues continuent."<sup>25</sup>

The existential undertones of this conclusion are apparent. Salacrou's Young Man is not unlike Sartre's Antonin Roquentin in the public park of La Nausée's "Bouville"<sup>26</sup> as he discovers that the world does, indeed, exist and that he is an alien in it. It is exactly this leap into awareness of his existence that makes Roquentin an alien, just as it is the Young Man's knowledge which forces him to be unlike the others around him. For the masses, those people he had passed in the street, were not faced with the Young Man's terrible problem: "Comment serai-je un homme comme les autres?" They were les autres. They did not know that life was not as it seems.

The problem being stated, Salacrou then offers a potential solution. We must assume that the Young Man was in search of an answer when he found himself in the street crowded with silent people. He was no different from those people, except that he questioned. He, like the young

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<sup>25</sup>Ibid., p. 21.

<sup>26</sup>Jean-Paul Sartre, La Nausée, (Paris: Gallimard, 1938).

Salacrou, had simply not succumbed to the hypnotic rhythm of existence. His position was one of bewilderment. It was not revolt, not yet even hostility against a world which was not as it should be. But then he saw his cat, heard those words spoken out of simple compassion. The cat is clearly a glimpse of the power of love, sympathy, human understanding. The cat seems to represent for Salacrou the simple beauty of natural things in life. It has the same value as the young girl eating soup, of the man wiping his son's nose. It is man's inability to accept the simplicity and beauty of humanity which isolates him from his fellow. "Enfermés en eux-mêmes, les hommes suivent, sans se tendre la main, des vies paralleles, qui pourtant se rencontrent à l'infini. Ah! Epuiser sa vie, comme on épuise un rêve, et mourir comme on s'éveille."<sup>27</sup>

The Young Man clearly recognizes this bitter irony. Man spends his actual life as though it were unreal, a dream; and when he finally reaches "l'infini," the end, all men come together in death. And this death is real, and final. Just as man awakens from a dream into the real world, he must at the end of his existence recognize the reality of

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<sup>27</sup>Ibid., p. 25. Italics mine.

death. And at this moment, the final awakening to the reality of existence becomes the ultimate tragedy of humanity. The realization of the supreme importance of corporal life and the absolute necessity of human interaction during this life comes too late.

As a result of having been spoken to by the divine cat, the Young Man sets out, perhaps for the first time, to struggle against the ignorant acceptance of life as it seems, a life without real human communication, without compassion. The cat has given him a moment of hope, and he feels that he must find it again at all costs. It is with an air of hostility that he enters the music hall. He has been robbed of something precious, the key to his very existence. The cat has become the potential saviour of the Young Man.

The possibility of the cat functioning in the role of Christ figure is not as tenuous as it might at first seem. The overall tone of the play is anti-religious, and it would be foolish to insist that Salacrou intended to establish the cat as a complete symbol for Christ. But it is not difficult to see that the rôle of the cat and that of a human and loving Christ, accepted as an historical reality if not a divine incarnation, are quite similar. The Young Man experienced his moment of hope as a result of the pure human love expressed by his cat, just as one might see

in Christ a moment of hope for the solution to man's loneliness, not, perhaps, in eternal salvation, but in the concept of love for one's fellow man. It is Christ not as the son of God, but as a supremely human being, who is here the symbol of the power of human love. But this potential is never realized, for Christ dies, and the cat is lost. This instant of insight into what could have been makes all the more bitter the knowledge of what came to be.

The violent hostility of the Young Man in Casseur d'assiettes is the obvious reflexive lashing out at the unjustness of God, but there is another element which is equally as interesting, that of self-imposed martyrdom. When the Young Man shouts out at God, he is also flagellating himself for his own impotence, for he also is unable to change the order of things, even though he has now become aware of life's potential. Salacrou had written very early of this in l'Eternelle chanson des gueux, where he speaks of the pain he felt when the solitude of man was concretely symbolized for him in the figure of the aged Arab seated in the corner of the Le Havre train station.

. . . je découvris dans un coin, dans un renforcement mal abrité des courants d'air, un "sidi" coiffé d'un fez, accroupi, grelottant de fièvre, le corps secoué par la toux. Des émigrants, depuis des années, passaient par Le Havre: Siciliens, paysans d'Europe centrale, Africains, fuyant leur misère, emmenés comme

les bêtes d'un troupeau, vers les plaines inhabitées des Etats-Unis et du Canada. Cet Arabe avait-il été oublié? Que faisant-il, seul, dans son dénuement, parmi ces indifférents? Quel était son avenir sinon s'effondrer sur le trottoir pour être jeté inconnu à la fosse commune du cimetière Sainte-Marie? Il avait été un petit enfant dans le soleil. Quels pouvaient être ce jour-là, ses souvenirs? Sentait-il encore se poser sur les derniers jours de sa vie le regard d'Allah? J'avais seize ans, je tournais autour de lui, trop timide pour lui tendre la main.<sup>28</sup>

Just as the people whom the Young Man had passed in his nightmare street did not hold out their hands to one another, Salacrou himself was unable to find strength to hold out his hand to this deserted, lost human. The result of this confrontation was Salacrou's initial literary effort. His first play was a manifestation of his continuing anguish. Jacques Guicharnaud has written:

His plays are, above all, answerless questions, the theatrical manifestation of an anguished surprise in the face of existential contradiction. A testimony and a protest, they show man's capacity to overcome anguish by way of theatrical games and are thus the symbol of an ambiguous victory.<sup>29</sup>

Although little attention has been given to le Casseur d'assiettes, even by Salacrou scholars, it is obvious that it is the prototype of Salacrou's theater as Guicharnaud interprets it. Certainly the Young Man has gained no more

<sup>28</sup>Salacrou, Les Idées de la nuit, p. 12.

<sup>29</sup>Jacques Guicharnaud, Modern French Theatre, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1967), p. 97.



than an "ambiguous victory." He has changed nothing, has solved no problems, for the problems are impossible to solve, the questions about the meaning of existence impossible to answer.

Toutes les questions que je me suis posées sont des questions sans réponse car, dans le fond, la seule question que l'on se pose toujours c'est la signification de notre passage sur la terre, c'est la question du mal et de la mort et personne au monde n'a pu encore y répondre; ce qu'on appelle nos réponses, c'est la façon de poser la question. Vous savez que je suis sans foi et par conséquent, je ne peux pas dire que j'ai trouvé des réponses aux questions que je posais précisément parce qu'elles étaient sans réponse.<sup>30</sup>

So he has made protest, he has shouted out against the injustice of this existence. He has perhaps offered catharsis in its true, Aristotelian sense. He has not purged us of our metaphysical anguish, but he has shown it up for what it is, an existential "given," a fact of life which cannot be altered, but which can be accepted when it is understood. It is in this sense that man can "overcome anguish by way of theatrical games." This is the very essence of theater. Jean-Louis Barrault, in a book to which Salacrou himself wrote the preface, sees the theater as "le premier sérum que l'homme ait inventé pour se protéger de la

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<sup>30</sup>Salacrou, Impromptu délibéré, p. 11.

maladie de l'Angoisse."<sup>31</sup>

Thus, if le Casseur d'assiettes is not dramatically sound, is not "good theater," it is nonetheless an example of theater functioning in its purest form. Salacrou had, consciously or unconsciously, grasped the real potential of theater, had launched a career which would seldom waver from the serious study of man's condition.

Le Casseur d'assiettes was published by the Galerie Simon in the autumn of 1924, in an edition of 100 copies with a lithograph by Juan Gris. In June Salacrou had received his licence en droit and had already written his second play, la Boule de verre.

La Boule de verre fut écrite pendant le mois de juillet 1924, chez un menuisier à Nemours. Afin de passer des vacances peu coûteuses et de travailler les uns près des autres, le peintre André Masson, le poète Michel Leiris et moi-même, avec notre aîné le peintre Juan Gris, nous avons loué, au-dessus d'un hangar, une cuisine et des chambres qui sentaient bon le bois fraîchement scié.<sup>32</sup>

Salacrou showed la Boule de verre to Antonin Artaud, who took the plot and characters and rewrote the play in a much condensed form, publishing it as his own in l'Ombilic

<sup>31</sup>Jean-Louis Barrault, Nouvelles réflexions sur le théâtre, (Paris: Flammarion, 1959), p. 19.

<sup>32</sup>Salacrou, Impromptu délibéré, p. 35.

des limbes, under the title le Jet de sang.<sup>33</sup> Salacrou's play was published in December, 1924, in Intentions, a Belgian review which had published some of Mme Salacrou's poetry in its November issue. This play is not included in the complete Théâtre which is published by Gallimard and which has now reached eight volumes, and it is difficult to understand why this play was excluded, apparently by Salacrou himself, when le Casseur d'assiettes was not. Not only is it as interesting, from a philosophical and psychological viewpoint, it is a stronger play, both dramatically and structurally. It contains, as well, some of Salacrou's most poetic work and several passages of striking power. Salacrou's own apparent lack of interest in the play is evident when he mentions it only in passing in the note appended to le Casseur d'assiettes in Théâtre I: "Puis, j'écrivis un autre acte: la Boule de verre, qui fut publié dans une revue."<sup>34</sup>

The similarities between this "autre acte" and Salacrou's first play are apparent at first glance. The music hall has become a fête foraine, but the significance

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<sup>33</sup>Antonin Artaud, l'Ombilic des limbes, (Paris: Editions de la Nouvelle Revue Française, 1925).

<sup>34</sup>Salacrou, Théâtre I, 35.

of the two settings is obviously the same: a world in which there is great motion, apparent action, but whose real function is a perpetuation of fantasy.

Salacrou has again chosen no name for his protagonist. This continued appearance of "le Jeune Homme" with no name has two obvious interpretations. One might see it as an attempt at universality, a common device to indicate that his hero is at once everyman and noman. A much more interesting and likely possibility is that the Young Man could have no name other than Armand Salacrou, that the playwright at this early point in his career found it difficult to mask the autobiographical nature of his characters under a name he knew to be unreal. One can perhaps see as a development of dramatic skill the fact that in Tour à terre Salacrou will begin to name his protagonists and that they will become perhaps more artistic and less autobiographic creations.

In some aspects la Boule de verre is considerably more conventional than Salacrou's first play. Less hamlétique, the basic skeleton of its plot might have come from the romantic or boulevard theater. The Young Man is apparently in love with Marie-Anne, who lives with her father, the eccentric Chevalier, her mother having died in child-birth.

Marie-Anne is attended by la nourrice, who from the beginning of the play displays a suspiciously maternal interest in her, and who clearly seems to be under a rather tyrannical power of the Chevalier. As the play nears its end, we learn that the nurse is, as we have suspected, Marie-Anne's mother. Marie-Anne is told this by a man who had been her mother's lover at the time she was seduced by the Chevalier, and the Young Man challenges this man to a duel. The play would have ended with the inevitable murder of the Young Man, except that he commits suicide first.

What makes this play interesting is its position in the development of Salacrou's dramatic skill, for his increasing ability to manipulate his characters and situations is frequently apparent here, and also its function as a vehicle for the further exposition of Salacrou's psychological and philosophical posture at the time of its writing. In le Casseur d'assiettes he had presented his fundamental feeling of anguish in the face of the inevitability of death, his inability to accept a God who could permit life to be as it obviously is, and ultimately, the impossibility of becoming a man "comme les autres" by the meek acceptance of an unquestioned existence. In la Boule de verre these ideas are again fundamental, but where the Young Man of Casseur shouted out in open revolt against the obvious

imperfection of existence, the Young Man of this play is used to examine much more subtly some of the most intriguing manifestations of this anguishing rôle of existence followed by non-existence. It is in this context that Salacrou begins an exploration of another major theme which will obsess him, that of Time, inexorable, destroying and mystifying.

The curtain rises on a short, chaotic scene which is reminiscent of the opening moments of le Casseur d'assiettes, and which serves the same purpose, to establish the frenzied tone that will carry the play. This scene is visually much more striking, however, and might have been extremely effective theatrically had the play been produced. The setting is a country fair, with all the stands and amusements that one would normally expect to find there. No one speaks during the opening sequence, but a number of people are walking around the fair grounds and there is loud, raucous carnival music punctuated by the shriek of sirens. Among the other booths, one sees a shooting gallery and its proprietor. Hanging above the counter where the guns are resting is a large glass ball, of the sort one sometimes finds on a pedestal in gardens, and the proprietor is slowly moving a large lighted candle around the ball and pointing to the sun with the end of the candle, bursting into laughter. This glass ball is, of course, the object from which the play

takes its title. Although its significance is obscure at the beginning of the play, one can easily imagine that with skillful lighting it would dominate the stage, and that the motions of the shooting gallery man might give a wonderfully menacing and sinister potential to this preface to the play's action.

When Marie-Anne and the Young Man enter the stage, the music stops abruptly, "et le silence semble bondir sur les premiers mots du jeune homme."<sup>35</sup> This is obviously a rather trite dramatic trick to center attention on the play's two central characters, but it does suggest once again that Salacrou's Young Men do not, at this point, operate within society but that they are attempting to find solutions as spectators rather than participants who have accepted their rôles. The two young people are discussing Marie-Anne's mother, and it is apparent that they are in love. It is also apparent, however, that this Young Man is tormented by questions that cannot be answered by that love. One feels quickly that it is the intensity of his love, not Marie-Anne as its object, which is the major element. "Toutes ces musiques, marchandes d'enfances, gonfler mes souvenirs! Chaque année, mêlé à cette fête, m'exaltant de ma solitude

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<sup>35</sup>La Boule de verre, p. 5.

. . . de ma solitude."<sup>36</sup> The two key words are, of course, "m'exaltant" and "solitude."

Salacrou then employs perhaps his first genuine, traditional dramatic device, the "unit of peril," when he had the Young Man and Marie-Anne pass near an old woman who says "Elle peut vivre dans un chateau, c'en est pas moins une batarde. Mon fils le lui dira bien, un jour ou l'autre."<sup>37</sup> The preparation for the play's denouement is thus made.

We soon discover the cause of the Young Man's torment, and it is very much like that of the other Young Man seeking his lost cat. The Young Man of Boule de verre is also after the secret of the universe, of life, and of death. He sees three soldiers at the shooting gallery, watches them for a moment, and then sees them go away. He bursts into tears at their disappearance. Clutching Marie-Anne for support, he cries:

Ta main! Ta main! Il ne faut pas me laisser. (Montrant les soldats qui partent.) Vois, lorsque l'homme quitte les villes et les fetes, c'est comme s'il n'etait pas parti, s'il revient comme s'il n'etait pas revenu. Ecoute, c'est le meme air de valse et deja tu ne les vois plus . . . Cette chanson accompagnait un de mes triomphes d'enfant. Que me reste-t-il de cette joie? Pas meme un regret.<sup>38</sup>

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<sup>36</sup>Ibid., p. 7.

<sup>38</sup>Ibid., p. 9.

<sup>37</sup>Ibid., p. 8. Italics mine.



Nothing lasts, the very existence of people is insignificant, since their absence or presence has no effect on the life around them. The music is the same, the fair is unchanged, but now the three soldiers, who had a short time ago been a part of it, are no longer there, absolutely no longer exist, at least as far as the fair scene is concerned. The recognition of this phenomenon places the Young Man in the same very tenuous position as that of his predecessor who felt the street gobble up life behind him as he walked through it. The past does not exist. Man is always simply present, with some hope of future, but with nothing concrete behind him upon which he may draw for support. Time is Death. As Baudelaire has written, Time is the Enemy.

O douleur! Ô douleur! Le Temps mange la vie,  
Et l'obscur Ennemi qui nous ronge le coeur,  
Du sang que nous perdons croît et se fortifie!<sup>39</sup>

The memory of having once been happy while listening to the same waltz he now hears is useless to the Young Man, just as having once been told "Je t'aime" by his divine cat was later useless to the Young Man in the music hall. "Seul ce qui dure toujours peut ne pas me lasser."<sup>40</sup> His only

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<sup>39</sup>Charles Baudelaire, "L'Ennemie," Les Fleurs du mal, (Paris: Garnier, 1960).

<sup>40</sup>La Boule de verre, p. 10.

hope is love, but it is not being loved that he needs, it is the transitive, the function, the act of loving someone else that might convince him that he does indeed exist. He tells Marie-Anne "Je veux t'aimer à en perdre le souvenir."<sup>41</sup> He does not ask her if she loves him; nor does he say "Je t'aime," or even "Je t'aimerai," but "I want to love you."

At this moment the nurse and the Chevalier enter, looking for Marie-Anne. The Chevalier is a ridiculous personnage whose single, consuming passion is his collection of enveloppes de nougat, candy wrappers which he picks up from the ground. It is apparent that he has a large collection of these castoff wrappers, and that he is something of an authority on them. He sees in them the reflection of the entire universe:

Nourrice! Sachez que pour des enveloppes de nougat nouvelles, j'irais jusqu'à la fête des barraques en bois démontables, bois des îles, îles déboisées, déboires des îles . . . dérive des coeurs, ô mon si long voyage autour des mondes! Les belles couleurs du soir des dernières fêtes de Singapour; et ce retour accroché sous le ventre d'une île flottante, dans des mers chaudes, près de crabes gigantesques des fonds clairs, moi-même mêlé aux algues dansantes parmi des poissons bizarres, qui avaient votre tête, nourrice, votre tête pendant que mes yeux devant presque toute l'eau du monde, pour être ouverts, justement sur trop d'eau, n'osaient plus pleurer!<sup>42</sup>

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<sup>41</sup>Ibid.

<sup>42</sup>Ibid. p. 11.

We never know whether the Chevalier has actually made the trip to Singapore and back, or whether this rather dadaiste speech is pure fantasy. It is rather obvious that he did not make it, in any event, under the bottom of a ship, floating among the giant crabs. In the interplay between his fantasy and his candy wrapper collection it is, however, clear that he is seeking in his nougat papers the same pleasure that a young child might find in collecting stamps, both the excitement of distant lands, and the desire to grasp something concrete to nail down the fleeting events and ideas of life. One might also see in the similarity between the brightly colored enveloppes de nougat and the colorful squares of paper with which letters are mailed a reference by Salacrou to his passion for stamp collecting in his youth.

But the Chevalier is not the only one who collects. When Marie-Anne and the Young Man reappear, the nurse hurries to retrieve a hair which falls from Marie's head. "Attends, puisqu'il est tombé, je le prends pour ma collection. (Au jeune homme.) Quand je serai morte, la continuerez-vous? Depuis sa naissance, chaque mois, j'arrache à Marie-Anne son plus long cheveu. Je les colle douze par douze, année par année, sur de beaux cartons blancs."<sup>43</sup>

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<sup>43</sup>Ibid., p. 14.

It is clear here that Salacrou is insisting that we all collect, that it is a function of man to attempt to stop time by grabbing vainly at it as it rushes past. We shall later see, in fact, that in writing his plays, Salacrou is attempting to convince himself that he has actually lived, is actually living, in much the same way that the Chevalier and the nurse try to furnish self-convincing evidence of their own existence.

It is at this point that the Young Man first notices the shooting gallery proprietor and his glass ball. There is considerable ambiguity in the real significance of this glass ball. It seems to represent alternately the earth, the sun, and perhaps all the physical universe. When the Young Man asks the meaning of the proprietor's motions, circling the ball with his candle, he is told that he is making "des équateurs et des pôles!"<sup>44</sup> The Young Man points out the obvious irregularity of these imaginary lines as the proprietor is making them. "J'essaie de corriger la nature. Elle manque tellement de fanaisie."<sup>45</sup> At this moment the glass ball represents the earth, encircled by man with imaginary lines which he thinks have brought it

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<sup>44</sup>Ibid., p. 15.

<sup>45</sup>Ibid.

under his domination. It is seemingly something understood, an object which has been tamed, just as man thinks he has understood and tamed life. Very quickly this image changes, however. The proprietor blows out his candle, in a breath extinguishes man's pitiful victory over nature, and, pointing to the sun, asks the Young Man "Vous ne songez donc pas à souffler cette chandelle-là?"<sup>46</sup> The irony in this question is obvious.

The proprietor of the shooting gallery is, in a sense, playing the same rôle as the breaker of plates in Salacrou's first play. He is a démystificateur, not in that he solves problems or answers questions, but that he rather mockingly does away with the pleasant illusions which man has about the world and life. In both plays, the Young Man had been seeking answers, or was at least not completely disillusioned about the possibilities for success, until he encountered the casseur and the propriétaire du tir. From the moment he understands the absurd implications that these two gentlemen reveal to him, his actions are no longer search, but tragic and, in the latter case, self-destructive vengeance.

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<sup>46</sup>Ibid., p. 16.

What the proprietor has said, in effect, is that one might indeed think that he is trying to solve a problem which can be solved, as man assumes he is dealing with tangible elements when he studies and quarters and examines the earth. But the solution to the riddle of existence is as impossible to penetrate, or even to meditate, as the sun is susceptible to being blown out by this Young Man. Salacrou has skillfully drawn the Young Man, and the audience, into the enigma of the universe by an almost completely visual means. Accepting the ball of glass as the world, with equators and poles, something he can understand, the Young Man is then directed to the sun, representing all that he cannot control, and then back to the glass ball, which has now taken on the symbolism of the enigma itself. The world is now seen not as a sympathetic seat of Mother Nature, but as a closed, foreign and completely impenetrable thing. It is a glass ball in which we can see reflections of ourselves, but into which we cannot see.

The Young Man, his attention brought back to the glass ball, is transfixed by its hermeticism. "La prunelle reste immobile et fixe, c'est la chair qui bouge. Jamais je n'ai vu remuer mes yeux. Quels mouvements ont-ils? . . . Oui, les boules de verre nous emprisonnent dehors."<sup>47</sup>

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<sup>47</sup>Ibid., p. 20.

The boule de verre comes, then, to take on its ultimate significance. It is life itself, or the mystery of existence. It is the one thing into which man cannot see. The human eye can see in every direction except inwardly. Man's vision, physical or spiritual, cannot probe the depths of his own being, nor can it offer solutions to questions of existence. We can know and see everything except what is truly the most important, ourselves. Salacrou has stated the problem fascinatingly, "les boules de verre nous emprisonnent dehors." Man was not born into life but out of it. Our physical existence keeps us from being part of universality. We are denied answers because we exist, and the secret of the universe is sealed within this glass ball which only returns our own reflections when we dare to probe it.

Marie-Anne has left the stage and until she returns, the Young Man goes through a tortured period of discovery. At every turn he is more disillusioned. Finding a pigeon that has just been shot out of the sky:

Mort? Mort? A-t-il jamais monté aussi haut? ces ailes-là, mais regarde comme elles sont lourdes, n'empêchaient-elles pas son vol? Mort? Ah, passer ma tête entre ces nuages sombres pour y surprendre l'entourage de Dieu. Quelles choses oubliées reverrais-je?<sup>48</sup>

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<sup>48</sup>Ibid., p. 21.

This is an interesting speech, which says exactly the opposite of what one might expect. Rather than assuming that the bird, now dead, can no longer reach the heights he once knew, the Young Man suggests that the dead pigeon is now flying in regions he could have never reached while alive. His heavy wings, his physical existence, impeded his flight into the realms of God. It is perhaps at this point that the Young Man first contemplates suicide. The clear implication is that he feels that he has known the answers to his questions before coming into existence. If he returned to non-existence, might he not rediscover what had been stripped from him at birth?

His attention is attracted by the fortune teller and he turns to her, not so much to ask about his future, as to explain it to her. When she begins his reading, he stops her: "Attends que je t'explique . . . "<sup>49</sup> She refuses to stop, however, to allow the Young Man to tell his own fortune. Continuing, she tells him that he will die "smothered." She has said this impatiently, and probably for no reason, but the Young Man takes it as prophetic. But he changes it to fit into his poetic conception of himself and his life.

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<sup>49</sup>Ibid.



"Etouffé? Dans un éboulement d'astres? Ah! Dégringolade des mondes . . . "50 The fortune teller had, of course, said nothing of stars, but simply had wanted to stifle this Young Man who would not stop talking.

This idea of his impending death, taken lightly perhaps at first, even by the Young Man, is in spite of himself developed into a rather coherent statement of man's position, sitting on his finite, pitiful earth, faced constantly with the billions of stars beyond his grasp or comprehension, and by undreamed of mysteries beyond. It is a theme which has forever appeared in man's musings about himself, confronted with universal infinity. Man is indeed a "prisonnier du ciel" as Salacrou had called him in the preface to Casseur d'assiettes.<sup>51</sup> And again this Young Man insists that he will be smothered "de vivre trop bas. Si nous pouvions vivre ailleurs que sous le ciel. Mais non! Prisonnier du ciel . . . "52 Salacrou invokes an imagery similar to Pascal's "deux infinis" when he pictures man looking into the very finite glass ball, but unable to see down into the meaning of life, and also buried under the

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<sup>50</sup>Ibid., p. 22.

<sup>51</sup>Le Casseur d'assiettes, Théâtre I, 35.

<sup>52</sup>La Boule de verre, p. 22.

stars. He is surrounded by infinitely unanswerable questions. Sandwiched, as it were, between the impenetrable physical existence of the earth and the impenetrable spiritual existence of the universe around him.

Again the Young Man clutches at love as a possible route of escape. He asks the fortune teller if he indeed does love Marie-Anne. "Mais dis-moi si j'aime encore Marie-Anne, je ne parviens pas à me l'apprendre."<sup>53</sup> He knows, of course, that he does not love her. Although he wants desperately to do so, this evidence of his existence will be denied him. His final acceptance of this leads him to make a striking estimation of his position in life, one that is perhaps applicable to all men at all times. It is a rather frightening, undeniable assessment of man's rôle in life.

Depuis une éternité on a engendré pour m'engendrer, et moi, par ma volonté, je brise la chaîne et j'arrête en mon corps un courant de vie créé avec le premier monde. Où sont toutes les races qui ont participé à ma naissance? Si tous mes ancêtres ressuscitaient on les compterait peut-être plus nombreux que les vivants d'aujourd'hui . . . un point d'arrivée: N'est-ce pas exaltant? Dire: Moi, et c'est fini.<sup>54</sup>

At the request of the Clown, who has been in evidence throughout the play, the Young Man mounts a platform

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<sup>53</sup>Ibid.

<sup>54</sup>Ibid., p. 24.

and begins a speech to the assembled crowd with one of the most striking sentences Salacrou has written. This statement, brilliant and horrible, succinctly expresses the fundamental cause of the Young Man's anguish, and that of the playwright himself. "Je me suis regardé avec l'oeil de Dieu."<sup>55</sup> He has viewed himself not from the finite position of egocentric man, acting in relationship with other men, functioning along the paths set up for men to follow, but in a much more universal sense, seeking to know more than was within his scope. He has seen himself from without, with all his possibilities open to view. With the eye of God, he has seen all his past and all his future, and has understood the pitifulness of his pretensions to existing. In sensing the absurdity of that existence, he has disintegrated his being and become fragmented, nebulous. He has become inhuman, superhuman, while wanting to simply be human, to love, to feel, to become an homme comme les autres.

Et je me suis étonné de penser. Si je m'isole, je n'ai plus peur. Mais du haut des ossements qu'ont entassés quarante siècles d'hommes, je ris de mes prétentions à l'éternité. Me voici perdu dans le bazar des siècles avec l'utilité de ma vie à défendre.<sup>56</sup>

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<sup>55</sup>Ibid., p. 25.

<sup>56</sup>Ibid.

This is, of course, the same thing that Salacrou had said in discussing his Young Man of Casseur d'assiettes. And in attempting to defend the usefulness of their lives, both Young Men reach the same point of despair. "Ne sommes-nous pas seulement le rêve affreux qui trouble le sommeil de Dieu? Nous ne sommes que les créations d'un cauchemar divin."<sup>57</sup> asks the protagonist of the first play, and this awful question is echoed in Boule de verre when the Young Man sees the Clown's hat being tossed from head to head in the crowd. "Voilà! L'Eternel s'est posé sur moi comme ce chapeau sur cette foule, comme un oiseau sur un arbre. Ah! je comprends mon regret du ciel . . . Nous ne sommes que le frémissement d'une grande chose qui nous est étrangère."<sup>58</sup>

The Clown, however, seems quite happy, laughs all the time, and perhaps has some solution to this despair. His solution is quite like that of the plate breaker of the first play. His solution to the absurdity of life was to function absurdly, to break plates. The Clown's modus vivendi is equally absurd, and apparently just as effective. He covers his face with mud and is paid by the crowd which laughs at him. Unable to defeat the feeling of absurdity,

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<sup>57</sup>Le Casseur d'assiettes, Théâtre I, 33.

<sup>58</sup>La Boule de verre, p. 26.

he joins it.

Back at the shooting gallery, the proprietor insists that the Young Man try his luck and tells him that he might win an alarm clock to get him to work on time. The Young Man has no desire to work, nor to live, and wants nothing to do with alarm clocks.

N'entends-tu pas la traînée des réveille-matin qui va, mêlée aux cris des coqs, d'un pôle à l'autre, précédant la lumière dans la nuit mourante. Le calme, un vague de bruit clair, et la tempête vaine, jusqu'au soir, tandis que la terre tourne devant le soleil pour se chauffer comme un chat. Ne mettez pas de réveille-matin dans mon cercueil . . . Puisque je vais mourir.<sup>59</sup>

Now in almost total despair, the Young Man reaches Salacrou's fundamental question: "How does one choose from all the possibilities in the magasin d'accessoires de l'expérience des autres<sup>60</sup> in order to "find" an existence, to become a man like the others?

Mais que devenir? Clown de cirque? Homme d'affaires? Qui me donnera des affaires assez démesurées à diriger, quelque chose comme la marche du monde? Clown! Clown! Allons! De la boue! (il se barbouille.) Je vous suivrai. Vivre épars sur la route, allant d'un mystère à un autre mystère avec la résignation de vos mulets qui, de ville en ville, tirent vos musiques détraquées. Je pars avec toi.<sup>61</sup>

<sup>59</sup>Ibid., p. 28.

<sup>60</sup>Théâtre I, 189.

<sup>61</sup>La Boule de verre, p. 23.

Of course, one does not simply choose, and there is the problem. He is what he is. And if he has made the fatal error of asking himself questions, of having seen himself "avec l'oeil de Dieu," then he can be nothing, for he sees that his choice is no more than that, an arbitrary choosing rather than the genuin élan of existence. The shooting gallery proprietor knows this. He tells the Young Man "Tes mains sont trop blanches quand même. On ne peut pas aimer la lune sur la route et dormir dans son lit. Achète plutôt ce joli parapluie."<sup>62</sup>

He is saying, in effect, "If you want to become something to escape the absurdity of life, then you cannot do it. You must be, and not want to be." His advice to the Young Man, "achète plutôt ce joli parapluie" is something one might say to a child who wants to do something reserved for the grown-ups. Do not worry about these universal problems; accept life as it is and amuse yourself with the pretty accoutrements of existence.

The play reaches its most frenzied moment when the Young Man cries out

Explique-moi! Explique-moi! Les mystères des vies!  
Les mystères des insectes, des mondes et leur aventure

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<sup>62</sup>Ibid., p. 29

me retiennent à la vie. Libère-moi! Un coup de poignard qui résoud un problème politique, calme-t-il une inquiétude? Parle-moi! Entouré de tant de morts possibles . . . prends tes pistolets! Ah! tu vas parler?<sup>63</sup>

Liberty is predicated on explanation. If he can know the secrets of the universe, the meaning of existence, he can be freed from that existence, he can penetrate the boule de verre and be released from his search. As the proprietor leans over to whisper into his ear, the music and crowd noise increase and one cannot hear what the Young Man is told. But he hears. He seems to be nearing an answer. "Oui! je crois que je vais comprendre. Parle encore! Ah!"<sup>64</sup>

We cannot know what the shooting gallery proprietor has told the Young Man but he has been profoundly affected by his words. Marie-Anne comes in at this moment and immediately remarks that the Young Man has changed, that he does not look the same as before. He has decided that he must kill himself in order to become one with the universe. "Mes angoisses me dépassent trop. Les hommes qui tuent des bêtes se passionnent pour ce jeu nécessaire à leur

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<sup>63</sup>Ibid.

<sup>64</sup>Ibid.

nourriture. Et c'est moi qu'il me faut tuer pour nourrir les inquiétudes de mon âme."<sup>65</sup> This necessity for suicide in order to join the universe was also expressed, a short time later, by Antonin Artaud. Speaking of killing himself, his words are an explication of the feelings of the Young Man in Boule de verre.

Si je me tue, ce ne sera pas pour me détruire, mais pour me reconstituer, le suicide ne sera pour moi qu'un moyen de me reconquérir violemment, de faire brutalement irruption dans mon être, de devancer l'avance incertaine de Dieu. Par le suicide, je réintroduis mon dessin dans la nature, je donne pour la première fois aux choses la forme de ma volonté.<sup>66</sup>

The Young Man also considers suicide because he has discovered that life is not meaningful, at least his individual life is not. He has finally accepted the inexplicable nature of the universe and the fact that his life is of no value in it. "Nos malheurs ont peu d'importance dans la marche du monde, et durent si peu. La terre elle-même est obéissante et sans caprice."<sup>67</sup> He has made the existential leap into awareness of his existence. "Il m'est arrivé ce malheur de

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<sup>65</sup>Ibid., p. 30.

<sup>66</sup>Antonin Artaud, Sur le Suicide, "réponse à une enquête sur le suicide faite par le Disque Vert (n° 1, 3<sup>e</sup> année, 4<sup>e</sup> série, janvier 1925) collected in L'Ombilic des Limbes et autres textes, (Paris: Gallimard, 1968).

<sup>67</sup>La Boule de verre, p. 30.



me sentir vivre."<sup>68</sup>

This Young Man is, of course, Armand Salacrou himself. "Un jour, à sept ans, j'ai compris que j'existais, ce fut épouvantable."<sup>69</sup> "Vers cinq ou six ans, un soir d'orage, j'étais dans un petit jardin de Normandie . . . C'est là où j'ai eu le sentiment de la mort, non pas de ma mort personnelle, mais de la mort en général. Et j'ai trouvé cela absolument révoltant, et je n'en suis jamais revenu."<sup>70</sup> "J'avais certainement moins de dix ans --- oui, dès mon enfance, j'ai regardé avec dégoût, sans trembler, la mort, d'un regard fixe."<sup>71</sup>

The play moves very rapidly to its conclusion after this moment of dénouement. The Young Man has made his decision. All that remains is to arrange his suicide. In order to do this, Salacrou again takes up the question of Marie-Anne's mother in a scene that had been prepared much earlier. The sinister former lover of la nourrice approaches Marie-Anne and reveals to her the facts about her legitimacy. This brings on a duel between this man and Salacrou's

<sup>68</sup>Ibid.

<sup>69</sup>Van den Esche, op. cit., pp. 23-24.

<sup>70</sup>Mignon, op. cit., p. 21.

<sup>71</sup>Salacrou, Les Idées de la nuit, p. 238.

protagonist. After a scene in which the Young Man shoots a card off Marie-Anne's head, to prove that he is indeed a marksman, the final moments of the play arrive. Marie-Anne's having allowed him to fire at the card on her head has proved to the Young Man that her love is real. This having been proven, there is nothing else to pursue in it.

Quelle plus belle preuve d'amour pourras-tu jamais me donner? Je n'ai pas le goût des recommencements inutiles. Je sais maintenant ce que tu peux m'apporter . . . Allons, mes amis, l'ère des suicides est ouverte."<sup>72</sup>

In terms quite similar to those of the enraged Young Man of Casseur d'assiettes, wanting to awaken God, this Young Man calls on all the bystanders to begin shooting at everything. In a mechanistic universe where all is pre-ordained, all is permitted.

Qu'attendez-vous, mes amis? Déserte, la terre roulera encore demain. Je sais, toutes les 24 heures, la terre nous fait faire le plus merveilleux des voyages du ciel! s'asseoir et savoir regarder à cette portière qui s'ouvre sur l'infini . . . oui, c'est le goût des mystères qui nous retient décontenancés sur cette boule. Eh! bien tuons-les [sic]. Allons, donne tes fusils et tes pistolets. Tuons, tuons tous les mystères, éteignons toutes les étoiles, trouons la lune!"<sup>73</sup>

For a moment no one fires. "Je veux entendre une

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<sup>72</sup>La Boule de verre, p. 34.

<sup>73</sup>Ibid.

fusillade et m'intercaler dans le crépitement pour être mieux porté vers l'éternité blanche. Quoi, vous hésitez?"<sup>74</sup>

They hesitate no longer and the Young Man falls, mortally wounded. "(exalté, en chantant.) C'est le marchand d'écailles qui passe pour m'endormir. Allons, mes amis, tuons les mystères --- j'étais fou: pour atteindre le but, ce n'est pas une question d'adresse, mais de bon sens."<sup>75</sup>

In this play Salacrou is obviously presenting as one possible solution to the anxiety of life the destruction of that life. The Young Man has escaped the limits of existence by once again becoming one with the universe, in the sense that it is finite, physical existence which defines and confines man, and that non-existence means universality. This is, of course, a very valid solution to the problems of existence, and one that has been meditated by man perhaps since the existence of thought. But it is not the course which Salacrou chose for himself. Although it is very clear that in most aspects the Young Man of Boule de verre is indeed the young Salacrou, the playwright did not, in fact, kill himself. He is no less the pessimist for having not taken his life, however. There is almost nothing positive

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<sup>74</sup>Ibid.

<sup>75</sup>Ibid.

optimistic or even mildly hopeful in these two plays. In both cases the protagonist is reduced to blind rage which results in apparently impotent acts --- shouting at a non-existent God and suicide. Both plays are simple, bitter attacks against the very order of things. But the plays in themselves are representative of a positive direction in Salacrou's own artistic life. Negative in content and theme, they are in fact positive acts by the playwright. He was, in a sense, creating himself, functioning, and was indeed fighting the absurdity of life in the only valid way, by presenting it concretely so that one might be better equipped to face up to it. He was choosing a path rather similar to that of his first Young Man, speaking out in indignation, even against the order of the universe itself. He has reached the conclusions about absurdity, death and suicide which Albert Camus would express almost 20 years later in le Mythe de Sisyphe.<sup>76</sup>

Once again love has been posited as a potential means of finding authenticity in life, and again it has proved useless. The realness of Marie-Anne's love for the Young Man is unquestioned, but once it is made certain, it also

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<sup>76</sup>Albert Camus, Le Mythe de Sisyphe, (Paris: Gallimard, 1942).

becomes victim of time and is simply another past, unreal moment in the Young Man's life. He seems interested only in the mysterious. When an event or a sentiment can be catalogued into the conscious order, it is no longer of value. One can attempt to hold onto life through collecting candy wrappers, or hairs, or stamps, as the young Salacrou had done, but even this is futile to one who has seen his pitiful existence avec l'oeil de Dieu.

Salacrou was again beginning a collection, of a sort. He was collecting his own life. He was, in writing his plays, attempting to stop the moments of his life in order to better understand them, and in a deeper sense, to convince himself that he existed. Since 1923 he had written dozens of short plays, on a number of subjects.

En 1923, je préparais une licence en droit, mais je n'allais jamais à la Faculté. J'avais pris l'habitude de passer plusieurs heures l'après-midi dans le sous-sol de l'Olympia, grande salle assez sombre et peu fréquentée où l'orchestre jouait sans repos des airs de danse. Je ne dansais pas. Je m'installais à une table et, entraîné par la musique, j'écrivais. J'arrivais sans plan --- sans autre plan que celui d'écrire. Je m'accrochais à la première idée qui se présentait et d'images en images, je continuais, en suivant le rythme de l'orchestre, mais sans abandonner une apparence de dialogue. Je m'entraînais, avec une manière d'écriture automatique, à l'exercice d'une sorte d'antithéâtre de l'époque. Combien de "pièces" ai-je ainsi composées? Certainement des dizaines et des dizaines.<sup>77</sup>

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<sup>77</sup>Salacrou, Les Idées de la nuit, p. 29.

Of all these plays only three are today extant: Magasin d'accessoires<sup>78</sup> and les Trente Tombes de Judas,<sup>79</sup> published in the Belgian review Sélection in 1925 and 1926 respectively, and Histoire de Cirque,<sup>80</sup> of which Salacrou has kept a manuscript copy. These plays are of little dramatic value but they do serve as further vehicles for Salacrou's ideas at that period of his life, and are interesting in what they indicate about his psychological and philosophical posture. In all of his plays, he has dealt with essentially the same anguishing themes, and he has not yet, even today, found an adequate solution. He speaks of those days spent at the Olympia, "alors que j'allais à la recherche de ce qu'aujourd'hui encore je crois n'avoir jamais trouvé."<sup>81</sup>

Les Trente Tombes de Judas<sup>82</sup> is a very complex play, a surrealistic pièce à lire whose meaning, however, can be rather firmly established. It could not have been produced

<sup>78</sup>Sélection, 4<sup>e</sup> année, n<sup>o</sup> 10, juillet, 1925.

<sup>79</sup>Sélection, 5<sup>e</sup> année, n<sup>o</sup> 9, juin, 1926.

<sup>80</sup>Salacrou, op. cit., pp. 64-83.

<sup>81</sup>Ibid., p. 50.

<sup>82</sup>The text of les Trente Tombes de Judas used in this dissertation is that published in les Idées de la nuit, pp. 51-64.

on stage, for obvious technical reasons, and perhaps should not be treated as a play for that reason. As Salacrou frequently pointed out later in his career<sup>83</sup> an audience is an absolutely necessary element of the play as a literary form. But les Trente Tombes de Judas is fascinating as an intellectual exercise in explication and shows a skillful, if sometimes chaotic, use of symbol and allegory. With considerable changes, it would later see the stage as a part of le Pont de l'Europe.

The play might, on its most fundamental level, be viewed as a reenactment of the symbolic suicide of Judas for the supposed salvation of man. Salacrou's feeling about Judas is quite similar to that of much modern philosophical interpretation of the Bible and the crucifixion. If one accepts the fact that Christ had to be put to death in order to take upon himself the sins of the world, then the Judas rôle was a necessary one, and Judas himself was simply acting out a part which he could not escape. In this light, he is not the terrible traitor of orthodox thought, but a terribly tragic figure, in the Greek sense of man struggling

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<sup>83</sup>See, for example, Salacrou's "Le complice est dans la salle" in: Conférencià, N° 9, 1948, collected in Impromptu délibéré, p. 67.

against overwhelming forces which he can neither defeat nor understand. Judas must betray Christ and then must kill himself. But he cannot die. He has become legend, a symbol of treachery, and it is this Judas whom Salacrou presents in les Trente Tombes de Judas.

The protagonist is again a Young Man, again Salacrou himself. Here the Young Man is the companion of Judas and not the absolutely central figure that he has been in the two plays previously discussed. In fact, the two rôles of Judas and the Young Man seem at times to interweave, so that one feels that Salacrou saw in Judas the reflection of elements of his own situation, and that of all man. It is often evident that the Young Man is watching himself play out a facet of his own existence in being a witness to Judas' continual attempts to hang himself, an attempt that has been repeated since the crucifixion of Christ. There is also a hint of the Boule de verre theme of the man-made world coming into conflict with the natural world. It is not here, however, a problem of man not being able to understand the mysteries of life, but of man's attempts to create reality, attempts which are never successful. Two clear examples are found in the opening scene of the play when the Young Man notices butterflies around some electric lights in the form of flowers. "Les papillons s'y noirciront



les ailes. Quel piège!"<sup>84</sup> Again, a few moments later, speaking of the wooden parquet floor, "Ces pavés de bois ne regretteraient-ils pas les feuilles qu'ils ont nourries?"<sup>85</sup> Man continually violates the natural order by imposing his will and by creating false images of reality. Man is an unnatural element in the natural order of the universe.

The scene of this frantic play is a dance hall, probably inspired by the Olympia where it was written. There is no direction to the plot, indeed no plot. Soon after entering, for no apparent reason, with the Young Man, Judas tries to hang himself from the neck of a violin in the orchestra. "C'est la treize millionième fois que je rate mon suicide. Quand donc pourrai-je mourir?"<sup>86</sup> A series of wild, surrealistic events follow which seem impossible, and perhaps useless, to attempt to interpret. Judas turns into a rag and slips from the violin, again unable to kill himself. There is considerably play of lights, a spotlight which comes on in the center of the stage, music, and an almost continual bedlam among the crowd of dancers on the dance floor. The Young Man is thrust onto center

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<sup>84</sup>Les Trente Tombes de Judas, p. 51.

<sup>85</sup>Ibid.

<sup>86</sup>Ibid., p. 52.

stage and ordered to sing by the crowd. He replies that he is singing. "Ne m'entendez-vous pas respirer?"<sup>87</sup> Life is song, existence is art, breathing is singing, the true song of Man. In the frantic crush of life, in the dance hall, the simplicity of truth is lost.

Judas, recovered from his unsuccessful suicide attempt, understands quite well his own rôle in life. "Je porte malheur, c'est une destinée comme une autre. Quelle sottise que de ne pas m'en accommoder!"<sup>88</sup> But the Young Man is not so stoic. "Oh! Je me souviens, ma mère, vous n'avez jamais su pourquoi, si petit, et tandis que vous me chantiez cette romance, j'ai sangloté un jour, inexplicablement."<sup>89</sup> This speech is illustrated, in a sense, by the events taking place on the stage around the Young Man. A child has entered and is surrounded by a ring of singing birds. Suddenly the birds stop flapping their wings happily and fall to the floor as the child bursts into tears. He then leaves the stage with the birds walking around him. This apparently represents the child's fall from innocence, and that of the Young Man, and Salacrou, upon discovery of

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<sup>87</sup>Ibid., p. 53.

<sup>88</sup>Ibid., p. 54.

<sup>89</sup>Ibid., pp. 54-55.

the existence of death. The birds are, of course, the child's conception of life before his knowledge that things, and people, die, and the fact that they are walking after this knowledge, an un-birdlike action, suggests the despair and anguish which comes from this knowledge. "Ce fut mon premier chagrin. Je ne l'ai jamais compris."<sup>90</sup>

Judas cries out in anguish "Jésus, Jésus, pourquoi deviez-vous mourir?"<sup>91</sup> This seems to be both a reference to Judas' own terrible role in life and to the instant which Salacrou remembered from his childhood, that awful moment when he realized that Ali Baba would not give him the secret password, that death existed and that God did not. "Jesus, why did you have to die?" meaning, in effect, why could life not be victorious over all death. For the young Salacrou who had long ago given up any religious belief and been completely indoctrinated by the philosophy of mechanistic determinism could still look longingly at the symbol of Christ and wish that it could have been as it is told.

Marie-Madeleine is also drawn into Salacrou's religious framework of allegory and Judas complains rather bitterly "O Jésus, vous aviez gardé pour vous aussi Marie-

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<sup>90</sup>Ibid., p. 55.

<sup>91</sup>Ibid.

Madeleine . . ."<sup>92</sup> Christ and Judas were involved in the same pre-determined drama, but Christ emerged the savior of mankind, and Judas emerged the eternal monster. He feels that his rôle should have brought him a better reward.

"N'ai-je pas attiré sur moi tout le malheur du monde?"<sup>93</sup>

Salacrou associates Judas and death with man, and Christ and life with man's hopeless desires. It is an interesting reversal of dogma, for Salacrou has Judas forever alive and Christ comfortably dead. It is death which is real, and it is Judas who is alive to perpetually symbolize the existence of death. The playwright sees Judas as an allegorical figure representing man's anguish.

Mais tu vas parler maintenant, Judas, toi qui te pends à tous les arbres de notre désespoir, toi qui te balances accroché à nos désirs, et tombes, dérisoire ami de notre faiblesse, toi qui fus peut-être le meilleur des hommes pour avoir su le plus mal montrer ta tendresse, parle. Toi qui erres sur tous les sentiers de nos passions, les yeux ouverts, les mains molles, maladroit, abandonné de tous et de Dieu, sans légende d'amour, sans grâce d'enfant, sans même un chien ou un baton, en chemise, la corde au cou. Sans autre grandeur que ta misère et une marche de nuit dans la résine des flambeaux.<sup>94</sup>

Even in a play with relatively little dramatic merit, a

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<sup>92</sup>Ibid., p. 56.

<sup>93</sup>Ibid., p. 57.

<sup>94</sup>Ibid., p. 59.

speech such as this must surely indicate great potential. The image of the wandering Judas, friendless, hated without even a dog or a stick to carry in his hand, is piercing and devastating . . . and incredibly human.

Marie-Madeleine also seems to play a role of personal significance for Salacrou. In many of his works, there is a hint of some early disenchantment with women, of some female perfidy which he discovered as a young man. At the end of a very surrealistic scene in which a number of transformations take place on the stage, there is the image of the ocean, and a stormy beach. The Young Man remembers "Sur cette terrasse d'hôtel, il manque Marie-Madeleine qui me délaissait pour un procher."<sup>95</sup> She was dressed in a "chemise de petite fille, festonnée à l'image de mon coeur."<sup>96</sup> Then the Young Man seems to speak to the image of himself which he sees standing in this past scene, much as Salacrou will often speak to characters representing himself and seem to be using his plays as witnesses to events in his own life. He tells the Young Man of his thoughts "Jeune garçon timide, ne reste pas si seul devant les vagues de la mer, les soirs de crépuscule citron . . ."<sup>97</sup>

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<sup>95</sup>Ibid., p. 56.

<sup>97</sup>Ibid.

<sup>96</sup>Ibid.

Then the image of the Young Man takes physical form and there are both the Young Man and his younger self on the stage, confronting each other. The Young Man had evidently contemplated suicide at that past moment of disappointment in love (had Salacrou?), for his image in the play takes a revolver, plays with it a moment, and then shoots himself. The Young Man is dismayed. This is not, in fact, what he had done, but it is perhaps what he feels he should have done. "Mais pourquoi? Je croyais me revoir et je ne me suis pas tué. J'avais pleuré seulement . . ." <sup>98</sup> In a few moments he sees the real Marie-Madeleine enter the dance-hall and cries out in pain. She is quite amused. "Quel effroi? Joue donc aux dames sur ma robe, il y a encore des cases de libres." <sup>99</sup>

This image of woman wearing a dress with the pattern of a checker board on it and asking men to play on the unfilled squares is obviously a not very veiled attack on the morality of woman. It is a bitter comment by a young man who has been disillusioned in love. In the imagery of the play Marie-Madeleine represents sensuality, vanity, in short, humanity in its physical aspect. As she begins to

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<sup>98</sup>Ibid., p. 57.

<sup>99</sup>Ibid.

comb her hair very coquettishly, her comb pulls out all of her hair and she is left bald. Out of shame she sinks into the floor and as her head reaches the surface, it turns into an orange and rolls on the floor. It is a Valencia orange, still apparently representing physical sensuality, with Spanish overtones. The orange tells the Young Man "C'est toute l'Espagne qui t'attend."<sup>100</sup> All the joys of physical involvement with life are open to him, but he hesitates, just as he had at the sea shore when he lost her to the porcher, with the implications in "swineherd" obvious. It is this hesitation at the moment of action which will plague Salacrou's protagonist throughout most of his work.

An impatient dancer throws a dagger at the Young Man but it misses and strikes the orange. A stream of blood gushes out, and the oranges calls for some castanettes. At the sound of the castanettes, Judas cries out "Quels sont ces clous que l'on enfonce?"<sup>101</sup> in obvious reference to the crucifixion. The sound of the castanettes, the image of physical sensuality and lust, are the nails of the cross of Christ. Man fell into sin through tasting of the knowledge

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<sup>100</sup>Ibid., p. 58.

<sup>101</sup>Ibid.

of the flesh. Christ, who no longer exists, represents the spiritual side of existence and everything else in the play represents the sordid, physical aspect: Judas, Marie-Madeleine, the dancers, the orange, the music. Only the Young Man, who is only little more than an observer, seems to balance between the two facets of existence. There is still, for him, a glimmer of hope . . . or at least the impression that things might have been different, that man might have gone a different route in his development. "Judas! Judas! Pourquoi as-tu prévenu les Romains? On aurait été si tranquille pendant vingt siècles!"<sup>102</sup> It is not Judas himself who betrayed Christ and man, however, but man's own bestial nature. Judas sees that the Young Man, and perhaps Salacrou, is confusing two degrees of despair. The Young Man's anguish for the loss of Christ through Judas' betrayal is only the reflection of the Young Man's own bitterness over his personal loss to the porcher. And perhaps all metaphysical anguish is merely the transfer of our own, minute pains onto a universal scale in order to give us the security of feeling that even our pain is atuned to some sort of eternal flow of life. Judas' sardonic reply to the

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<sup>102</sup>Ibid.



Young Man's suggestion that life might have been different had he not given Christ over to the Romans is crushing.

"Et ton porcher?"<sup>103</sup>

As the dance continues around the bleeding orange, another man enters. His rôle is quite difficult to interpret. He is called simply "l'homme au sourire en arc-en-ciel."<sup>104</sup> Judas knows who he is, though, and thinks that the Young Man should also. "Tu n'as pas vu son sourire."<sup>105</sup> It is clear that this man is powerful. All the dancers rush over to caress him when he sits down and he is brought something to drink immediately. But he is also capricious. He flings his glass of alcohol to the floor, announcing "J'en ai assez d'être charmant."<sup>106</sup> The alcohol bursts into flames and beautiful young women rise from them. At a sign from the homme au sourire, the women approach an old man standing among the crowd of dancers and, caressing his body, are assimilated into him. One becomes new hair, another wipes away wrinkles as she disappears into his face, a third enters his mouth and becomes strong, bright teeth. Soon the

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<sup>103</sup>Ibid.

<sup>104</sup>Ibid., p. 59.

<sup>105</sup>Ibid., p. 60.

<sup>106</sup>Ibid.

old man rises and walks youthfully away, to the applause of the crowd. Everything leads to the assumption that the homme au sourire is indeed God himself. He has the power to recreate life. He is capricious, as God would have had to seem to Salacrou. He has a smile "like a rainbow" which suggests both vastness, purity, confidence, and also adds the element of universality to his image. His real purpose in the play remains a mystery, however, beyond marking simply the contrast between the happy, well-fed bourgeois (God) and the anguished poet-thinker (Young Man/Salacrou).

The play takes another turn, however, and the man with the smile is mentioned no more. There now begins a rather grotesque scene during which no one speaks. A woman begins a dance that is evidently a rather vivid representation of the sex act. She becomes more and more frenzied, turning like a dervish on the stage. Finally she is lying on the floor with her feet in the air, when a small child's head, "vaguement foetus," emerges from between her legs and announces to the rapt audience "Ce n'est pas encore moi qui sauverai le monde!"<sup>107</sup> Man continues to repopulate the earth, continues to multiply in the hope that one of the future children will be Christ returned. He does not come

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<sup>107</sup>Ibid., p. 62.

back. The hideous sensuality of the woman's dance remains no more than that, for the child who is born is not He.

Judas finds this last scene immensely interesting and he bursts into laughter. The play is nearing its climax as Judas rips a radiator from the wall and begins to play it like an accordion. The Young Man wants to join in but none of the orchestra's instruments will function for him. He tries them all and finally leaps into the open piano, which closes on him. As the piano begins to play the Young Man's song, Judas suddenly stops the dancing, for the moment of his departure is come. Everyone laughs, but the laughter changes to horror as he kicks the orange and it smashes against the wall, sticking there and turning into a clock. Judas then hangs himself from a beam in the ceiling and swings slowly in front of the orange/clock. As the beam turns into a large night bird and slowly flies away with Judas swinging below its claws, thirty pieces of silver fall on the stage floor. From each of them sprouts a flower. The Young Man, having escaped from the piano, bends to pick the flowers; he recognizes in each of them the image of a face which is painful to him. He races from the stage screaming as the curtain falls.

These final moments of the play might at first pose a considerable enigma. To be sure, much of what happens may

be discounted as infatuation with surrealistic techniques, but there remains at the center of this bizarre symbolism the fundamental idea which Salacrou was expressing. To decipher its meaning adds to the understanding of the young playwright's conception of life.

The essential force behind these last scenes, and indeed the entire play, seems to be the dialectic nature of existence. Judas, at once evil and innocent, represents both the murder of Christ, whence stems man's hope, and also the single force that continues to live, Death. He cannot kill himself, for Death must continue to live. In the wild dance of the woman, the very basic act of life is performed, the ritual by which humanity continues to exist. It is performed with the hope of salvation, but it again fails, theoretically. But for Salacrou, to whom salvation is impossible, it succeeds, for it creates not God, but man, who is the only existent. The sensuality which creates man is the lust which has led Judas to destroy Christ who is the savior whom man hopes to recreate in the act of giving birth to man. And in the final scene it is emphasized that this cycle has continued, and will continue, forever. The smashed orange, the clock, before which the quasi-dead Judas swings, clearly indicates that it was merely again time for his ritual suicide. The thirty pieces of silver, lust, human weakness, fall from

his pocket and flowers, life, beauty, rebirth spring from them, just as human life comes from lust. But even in this new life, with its potential for hope, the Young Man sees the faces of the already dead and the soon to be dead and the pieces of silver become symbolic of the ultimate cemetery that awaits all men.

A central theme in Histoire de cirque is again the perfidy of woman, and there is continued development of the agony of a young man who sees himself confronted with the enigma of existence. A slight shift of setting has converted the music-hall and the fête foraine into a circus, with the same music, chaos and atmosphere of fantasy.

In the opening moments, the interest is focused on the center ring, where the Acrobat and the écuyère have just entered to the applause of the audience. The crowd watches in anticipation as the two mount their individual trapezes and begin to swing toward each other. They swing closer and closer, the tension mounting in the crowd, and then they make their first exchange, each leaping to the bar of the other. After several such manoeuvres, the Acrobat shouts to the écuyère that she is love of his life, and then "une étreinte et mourir!"<sup>108</sup> The pace increases,

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<sup>108</sup>Histoire de cirque, Les Idées de la nuit, p. 65. The text of this play used here will throughout be that of Les Idées de la nuit.

the music reaches a crescendo and it is apparent that a climactic moment is near. Suddenly the Acrobat does not complete his leap, but grabs the écuyère in mid-air and they both tumble to the floor of the circus, "belle figure de géométrie."<sup>109</sup> It is the Acrobat who hits first. The écuyère disentangles herself from his inert body, stands over him like a victorious hunter, her foot on his chest and her arms crossed haughtily and shouts to the anxious public, "Et voilà!"<sup>110</sup> Two clowns remove the corpse of the Acrobat and the audience applauds, reassured.

This is a very sensual opening scene, an allegory perhaps on the sex act itself. The va-et-vient of the trapezes, the suggestion of an ultimate and intense moment of love, and the symbolic death of the male partner. It is also a scene of considerable latent bitterness, of a sort we have already seen in Salacrou's work. Woman has again been victorious, much as Mary Magdelene had conquered the Young Man of Trente Tombes de Judas. There is again the bravado of victory. And again there is a feeling of fatality, of injustice in the order of life. The Acrobat was apparently willing to meet his death with the écuyère if, in that death,

<sup>109</sup>Ibid., p. 66.

<sup>110</sup>Ibid.

he could experience an instant of pure love. But it was only the Acrobat who was destroyed (although he will reappear as the play progresses) and the écuyère emerges confident and unscathed, as the crowd knew she would.

What Salacrou seems to be presenting in this scene is the fundamental confusion of love and lust, and his interpretation of it is somewhat the reverse of the normal understanding of these terms and their rôles as assigned to male and female. In Salacrou's conception it is the male who has a very poetic, romanticised vision of love, while the female represents lust and little more. Just as Mary Magdelene was the lover of the Young Man and then left him for the porcher, the écuyère of this play is the willing partner of the Acrobat in his moment of emotion, but she is fundamentally unaffected by the experience. He is consumed, having given himself totally to their union, and she has been involved only physically. He has cried "Amour de ma vie" and "Une étreinte et mourir!" and she has remained silent, perhaps smiling inwardly at his, and all man's, naivete. Her first speech in the play is her victorious "Et voilà." Man has again eaten the apple.

Another Young Man has witnessed this scene, but he has not learned from it. When the écuyère returns to center ring for a last kiss to the crowd, "Hélas! le jeune homme a

vu les yeux de l'écuyère."<sup>111</sup> But for a moment he does not act. A man in a frock coat comes in and announces "Je suis le prestidigateur."<sup>112</sup> This gentleman goes through a series of surrealistic tricks to impress his audience and then raps on his table of paraphernalia and tells the crowd that he is capable of psychokenesis, of sending anything anywhere. In reply to this announcement there is activity in the midst of the audience. "A plat ventre sur les chapeaux des dames qui rouspètent, marchant sur les yeux des enfants et se retenant à des seins de jeunes filles, un grand corps dévale des hauteurs du cirque: c'est le jeune homme qui s'étale devant la table du prestidigitateur."<sup>113</sup>

The magician, assuming that the Young Man is the new partner who was to have been planted in the crowd to aid in his tricks tries to continue his act. He asks the Young Man what he wants. "Que votre mouchoir s'emplisse de pièces de cent sous? . . . Qu'un lapin sorte de votre chapeau? . . . Que vos doigts deviennent des cigarettes?"<sup>114</sup> These things are not what he wants. He asks "Oui ou non, êtes-vous capable d'envoyer n'importe quoi, n'importe où?"<sup>115</sup>

<sup>111</sup>Ibid.

<sup>114</sup>Ibid., p. 68.

<sup>112</sup>Ibid., p. 67.

<sup>115</sup>Ibid.

<sup>113</sup>Ibid.



The magician knows he is lost but must answer "Yes." But the Young Man's request seems to be one the magician can handle. "Envoie mon amour dans la poitrine de l'écuyère, et son coeur . . . son coeur."<sup>116</sup>

The magician begins this trick. He has the écuyère blow a soap bubble, for which he deftly substitutes a glass ball. The écuyère has supposedly blown her heart into the bubble and, through a series of glass balls, each smaller than the one which contained it, the magician inserts a tiny, pill-sized glass ball which is the essence of the écuyère's heart. He tells the Young Man to swallow the glass pill and he will have half of his wish fulfilled. But the Young Man does not know how to swallow. He inadvertently bites the glass ball and it shatters, cutting his gums. As the Young Man spits out blood and sinks into a faint, the magician tries to pull himself out of a bad situation. "Il saigne? N'est-ce pas déjà le commencement de l'amour? Le coeur de Madame est dans sa poitrine."<sup>117</sup>

Now begins the attempt to perform the second part of the stunt, to send the Young Man's heart and love into the breast of the écuyère. The magician goes through a complicated manoeuvre in which he spins several white plates on

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<sup>116</sup>Ibid.

<sup>117</sup>Ibid., p. 71.

their edges, the plates finally turning into a large white flower. He then tells the Young Man to present the flower to the lady and his request will be granted. When the Young Man fixes the flower on the écuyère's white tights, the flower disappears, enveloped by the whiteness and one sees all the Young Man's love symbolically soaked up and obliterated by the laughing écuyère. She plays along when the magician asks if she does not now feel love for the Young Man. She replies "Un amour profond, inattendu, inaltérable . . .",<sup>118</sup> and the Young Man swoons hearing of this love.

With him completely in her power, the écuyère now decides to play with her Young Man, to show the world that he will do anything she asks. "Le jeune homme va faire pour l'amour de moi, et pour la première fois du trapèze volant."<sup>119</sup> He tries, and almost succeeds. He manages to swing on his trapeze, but when he attempts to change trapezes in flight he cannot turn loose, and the manoeuvre ends with him suspended in mid-air, his hands holding one bar and his feet over the other, a posture which the crowd finds extremely amusing. The magician cuts the cords holding one of the trapezes and the Young Man falls at the écuyère's feet,

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<sup>118</sup>Ibid.

<sup>119</sup>Ibid., p. 72.

embarrassed but not defeated. "J'ai fait ce que j'ai pu."<sup>120</sup>

The écuyère is no longer amused with her game. "Ton numéro est fini . . . "<sup>121</sup> For the first time the Young Man realizes that he has been tricked, so innocent has been his love. "Quoi, vous ne m'aimiez donc pas pour la vie?"<sup>122</sup>

There follows a very interesting scene which is rather difficult to comprehend at first study. When the Young Man turns sadly to the magician to ask for help, the magician holds his hands in the air and begins to perform. From his hands he pulls cigarettes, oranges, 100 sou pieces, eggs, until finally his fingers come off, and then his hands. More and more hands come out of his sleeves. The center ring is covered with garlands of hands. This is "sleight of hand" in its highest form. Suddenly the magician stands on his hands. His feet touch the tent's ceiling and the magician pulls himself and all his equipment up into the darkness at the top of the tent and disappears. Darkness falls on the circus.

After a time one hears a long note on a saxophone, the lights come up again, and the center ring is covered with

<sup>120</sup>Ibid.

<sup>121</sup>Ibid., p. 73.

<sup>122</sup>Ibid.

thousands and thousands of pairs of old gloves. The clear implication is that the magician, just as the shooting gallery man and the plate breaker, seemed to be playing with reality, to be able to operate on life. But their tricks were empty. The magician ran amok when the Young Man asked for genuine help. He had earlier thought that the Young Man was a part of the act, and his request had not bothered him. But now he has been called on to make a genuine act, and he flees. The symbolism of hands and gloves is quite appropriate, for the hand is concrete, real, human, and it at first seemed that the magician was performing a real miracle. But after his escape, it is seen that the reality of the hands has become the unreality of the gloves. For the gloves are the absence of hands, the antithesis of hands, and the tricks of the magician are not only unreal, they are the reverse image of reality. A glove is not only not a hand, it represents the emptiness left by a hand's absence. Salacrou is perhaps suggesting, as he had in the scene of the shooting gallery proprietor symbolically marking equators on his glass ball, that it is man's supposed ability to function in life, to cause things to happen merely by his wanting it, in the end to engender hope, that makes life even more painful. If there were no hope, then there would be little deception. Had the Young Man not been tricked into thinking that the

magician could help him, he would not have depended on the reality of that help, represented by the hands. And had the false image of the hands not existed, then the horrible reality of their absence would not be so evident.

M. Loyal and two clowns enter to clean up the piles of gloves, and they find the Young Man buried under them. They assume he is dead and discuss what they should do with the body. When they realize that he is still alive, they must amuse him. In a farcical bit of stage business which apparently has no significance, two clowns roll themselves into balls which become the wheels for a human wheel-barrow, of which the axle and handles is the Young Man. A third clown pushes this grotesque machine around the ring and it falls apart near the entrance, leaving the Young Man lying in the doorway.

The Young Man, conscious again, asks for the écuyère and she immediately comes riding in on a beautiful white horse, leaping over the Young Man as she makes her grand entrance. He is entranced when she gives him a lash with her riding crop. "Oui, je voudrais être ton cheval."<sup>123</sup> Another facet of love is, of course, the desire to be

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<sup>123</sup>Ibid., p. 76.

dominated, a masochistic element which is not infrequent in Salacrou's works.

Suddenly the horse balks and the écuyère falls into the arms of the Young Man, who is quite pleased that they have finally come together. She haughtily asks him if he thinks she really needs him. "D'abord d'où viens-tu?"<sup>124</sup> He gives the Young Men's characteristically poetic reply: "Je viens . . . Le sais-je? Il me semble que je suis immortel et que je viens de naître."<sup>125</sup> All of Salacrou's young men in these early plays are seeking existence. All are ill at ease in reality, or concrete life, and do not seem to be able to orient themselves or, again, to function "like the others."

Even victory is temporary for Salacrou's young men, as the next scene shows. Seeing a juggler enter and begin his act, the Young Man decides to impress the écuyère, much as a schoolboy might. "Veux-tu que je charme des violons? Monsieur Loyal, apportez-moi des violons."<sup>126</sup> Ten violins are brought in and the Young Man announces "Sérénade en l'honneur de ma belle, et de la manière de lui porter ma

<sup>124</sup>Ibid., p. 77.

<sup>125</sup>Ibid.

<sup>126</sup>Ibid.

musique jusque sur son balcon."<sup>127</sup> He begins juggling the violins, throwing them higher and higher into the air. Each violin turns with a different rotation and friction with the air causes the strings to emit a strange melody. The young man sings a short song in rather shaky Italian. Finally the violins fall in a heap, except for one which remains aloft, tangled in some rigging. The Young Man calls for a bow and arrow. "Celui-ci jouera encore."<sup>128</sup> The écuyère has been completely conquered by the Young Man's prowess and calls the Young Man "mon cheri."<sup>129</sup> She is so overcome with love for the Young Man that she begs him "Tire dans mon coeur, maintenant."<sup>130</sup> as he begins firing arrows at the remaining violin. But life and love are much more complex than this. The Young Man's success with his violins has changed him. Rather than rejoicing at his conquest "le jeune homme n'écoute pas. Il écoute sa musique."<sup>131</sup> He has become momentarily entranced with himself. But as he fires his last arrow he notices a young girl who has been looking

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<sup>127</sup>Ibid., p. 78.

<sup>128</sup>Ibid.

<sup>129</sup>Ibid., p. 79.

<sup>130</sup>Ibid.

<sup>131</sup>Ibid.

at him from the balcony. She smiles. The Young Man loads himself into his bow and fires himself into the balcony, into the arms of the young girl.

This entire play is a series of hope followed by disillusionment, of false starts toward happiness. As soon as the Young Man has arrived in the loge, the girl says "Tu es moins joli dans l'ombre, et de près."<sup>132</sup> All is illusion. And the Young Man suddenly cries out. He sees behind the girl eight sinister men dressed in mourning clothes. The young girl calls them "ma cour."<sup>133</sup> The obvious implication of eight sombre men dressed in black is death, pallbearers. The Young Man is terrified. He sees the écuyère down in the center ring and he leaps back to her, landing at her feet, their rôles again reversed. "Pardon. Pardon. Ah! les enfances sérieuses et dignes préparent des vies de malheur. Pourquoi n'ai-je pas toujours vécu dans un pantalon trop large, entouré des larmes des clowns?"<sup>134</sup>

As with much in these early plays, one might discount this last speech as rather romantic melancholy, as

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<sup>132</sup>Ibid., p. 80.

<sup>133</sup>Ibid.

<sup>134</sup>Ibid.



poetic moanings about the sadness of love. But one can also see here a possible reflection of Salacrou's own youth and view this Young Man's position as a genuine statement of the playwright's feelings about his own life to that point. He had indeed spent a childhood that was serious and worthy and his indoctrination with mechanistic determinism had brought him nothing but metaphysical anguish. He is saying, in effect, "Why did I not spend my youth frivolously and not as I did? Rather than surround myself with real tears, many of them my own, why did I not surround myself with the tears of clowns, in a world that I did not see as real?"

The écuyère has resumed her cynical tone, she has again become Woman. "Vous ne jouez plus de violon à la belle demoiselle?"<sup>135</sup> The Young Man tries to save himself, but the situation has changed. He is told "Oui, mais ici, maintenant, c'est elle que tu regardes et regrettes."<sup>136</sup> At this point the Young Man has reached a point that awaits all of Salacrou's young men, and which figured greatly in his conception of life; "Hélas! la vie me glisse des mains . . ."<sup>137</sup> He has attempted to act honestly. He sought to

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<sup>135</sup>Ibid.

<sup>136</sup>Ibid.

<sup>137</sup>Ibid., p. 81.

win the écuyère, was made a fool of but finally persisted and won. Then, in a moment of perfectly natural human weakness, he acted rashly and that one unwise act will color the rest of his life. And these events no longer are real, but they cannot be discounted. His having left the écuyère momentarily will stain their relationship forever, and make it impossible. He can do nothing, for time is not concrete and events cannot be manipulated, once past.

The play now ends rather quickly, and strangely. M. Loyal returns to announce that in his will the dead Acrobat had asked that his body be borne around the center ring for one last time by the circus horses, and that it will be done as he had requested. The funeral cortege begins and moves much too slowly for the Young Man. Then the plumes on the funeral wagon begin to dissolve and turn into butterflies, which soar up into the air and make intricate geometric patterns. Soon the Young Man can make out letters of the alphabet in the figures the butterflies are forming. And then he makes out a name, his own. But at the same time, it does not seem to be his name. Since this is a pièce à lire and the reader has before him the stage directions which would not be available to a regular theatre audience, the problem is even more complicated. It would seem, in fact, that Salacrou might have left out a spoken line in this

sequence, for it is only in the stage direction that he tells us "et bientôt le jeune homme distingue des lettres de l'alphabet, et déchiffre un nom: le sien."<sup>138</sup> This revelation is followed immediately by the driver of the funeral carriage saying "Quelle présomption! Il y a plus d'un ours au cirque qui s'appelle Martin."<sup>139</sup> This is followed by the Young Man "D'abord je ne m'appelle pas Martin."<sup>140</sup>

It is left to the reader to work out this problem of the Young Man who recognizes the name spelled out by the butterflies as his, the cocher who sees the same name and says that it is "Martin" and the Young Man who then points out that his name is not "Martin." In any event it is clear that Salacrou is using this confusion of identity to underline the inability of man to know who he is, and for any man to actually know those around him. It is possible that the Young Man's name is Martin and that it is not, at least this is possible in Salacrou's world of continuing evolution of seemingly concrete things. Or perhaps the Young Man, actually seeing his name over the funeral cortege was attempting to deny himself, to say that it was not he who was

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<sup>138</sup>Ibid., p. 82.

<sup>139</sup>Ibid.

<sup>140</sup>Ibid.

involved, was perhaps in the coffin itself, for he had indeed taken on the rôle of Acrobat after the original had died. Perhaps he had died at the same time, perhaps he had been the Acrobat as well as the Young Man. Denying his name seems to have left him in a state of complete isolation. He, in a sense, has rejected his existence, has abdicated.

The Young Man does not continue the point, however, for he has recognized in the cocher one of the eight sinister men he had first seen in the young girl's loge. He glances up and sees that the loge is now empty, and then he sees the seven remaining men following the hearse, their bodies rigid with arms outstretched. The Young Man looks wildly around for the écuyère but sees only the circus tent being torn away by the wind. He is surrounded by snow, and seven black trees covered with snow, their "arms" pointing toward the black sky. The snow comes down in swirls.

"Arbres dépouillés, comme mon coeur --- mais pourquoi, ô ciel, tes larmes sont-elles si voyantes? Mes deux amies, je n'ai pas su rester près de vous, ni choisir."

Il s'agenouille. La neige s'organize sur son désespoir et le recouvre vite. Une bande de gamins arrive. Ils lancent des boules au bonhomme de neige . . . Le jeune homme s'efforce de ne pas bouger, et s'endort, engourdi. LE RIDEAU tombe lentement sur les cris de joie des gosses.<sup>141</sup>

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<sup>141</sup>Ibid. Italics mine.

This last sentence of the Young Man, at the ultimate moment of his despair, is another of those stunningly perceptive insights which mark the entirety of Armand Salacrou's theater. In this simple statement he uncovers a major element in the continual defeat of his Young Men. They cannot act, cannot function, cannot impose themselves upon existence. Had this Young Man made a choice, had he not balanced between the écuyère and the young girl, he might have been able to take hold of life, to become un homme comme les autres. But he could not do this, perhaps because he had seen himself "with the eye of God," or simply because he was too idealistic to cope with the frustration and illusion of life. He dies then, not crushed by the disasters of a life of action, but stifled under a blanket of snow. And he dies apparently willingly. "Le jeune s'efforce de ne pas bouger."<sup>142</sup> Not being able to act, he allows himself to simply cease to exist.

Histoire de cirque, perhaps more than Salacrou's other early plays, explores the relationship between man and woman. In the plays already discussed the female characters play an essentially passive role. With the possible exception of Marie Madeleine in les Trente Tombes

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<sup>142</sup>Ibid.

de Judas, Salacrou's women have to this point been merely mirrors against which the protagonists react. In this play, although the Young Man is clearly the principal character, the écuyère and the young girl have taken on active rôles which determine, to a great extent, the outcome of the play. They are, indeed, one character, rather than the two as they appear. They are one woman, Woman. The écuyère represents the lustful, the physical, dominant side of Woman, while the young girl represents the simple, innocent, poetic aspect. Or that is what the Young Man thinks. At the opening of the play we see the écuyère in her most powerful mode. She is cynical, mocking, and completely self-confident. She is a star, and the Young Man is attracted to her for this reason. Being a star, however, she is unobtainable. Only after she has been conquered by the Young Man's physical, therefore mediocre, prowess, does she lose her position of dominant female. Seeing that she can be conquered, the Young Man loses interest and seeks what he thinks is the pure love of the young girl. Having conquered sophisticated Woman, the Young Man is now free to seek what he really wishes, without the necessity of further proving himself. But he soon learns that this supposedly pure, idealistic young girl is no different from the écuyère. Salacrou seems to be again attacking Woman, insisting that she is never pure and innocent, but

only takes on that appearance to dominate man. She is not impressed by the sincerity of love, but by the éclat, the outward show of love showered on her by her suitor. And when this show falls short, she is no longer interested.

Each aspect of Woman might also be seen to suggest two different forms of death for their hopeful male counterparts. The Acrobat, an active suitor, died a violent but stunning death at the feet of his mistress. It was the sort of death, or murder, worthy of the écuyère. The death presented by the young girl was more subtle. Had she accepted the Young Man, he would have nonetheless died, at the hands of her court, the eight pall-bearers. The implication here being that "innocent" love, unlike the more violent, burning love of the écuyère, will kill by a slower, more insidious process of assimilation. One might almost imagine the Young Man giving himself entirely to the young girl and simply melting away, being digested by her sweetness, losing his maleness in her all-enveloping innocence. This would have been charlatanism on her part, of course, for Salacrou sees the innocence of Woman as only a façade behind which lurks her dominant characteristic of perfidy and destruction.

As it happened with Salacrou's Young Man, however, neither female was dominant, for he could not choose. His death was one of non-choice. At the opening of the play he

had glimpsed a preview of his death had he chosen the écuyère, for he had seen the Acrobat die. And at the play's end he saw the sinister purpose of the young girl's eight servants. The fact that these eight men, representing the young girl, are pall-bearers at the funeral of the Acrobat, who died of love for the écuyère, is further evidence that these two female characters were simply facets of the same being, Woman.



## CHAPTER IV

### TOUR A TERRE: FLIGHT FROM SELF

In January, 1925, Salacrou visited his friend Max Jacob at Saint-Benoit-sur-Loire and read to him the first scenes of his most important play to that time, Tour à terre.<sup>1</sup> It was a long play in one act and Salacrou completed it in Paris on February 7, 1925. It suddenly became a full three act play, however, after an interview with Lugné-Poé.

"J'ai lu le Casseur d'assiettes, me dit-il. Ce n'est pas mal du tout, mais je ne veux rien risquer sur un acte. Avez-vous une pièce en trois actes?" Je courus chez moi, je pris mon acte Tour à terre, je le coupai en deux endroits par le mot RIDEAU, et le lendemain j'apportais en tremblant au Directeur du Théâtre de l'Oeuvre, mes "trois actes": Lugné reçut la pièce, me tutoya, partit pour la Norvège. Moi, j'allai en Normandie écrire une autre pièce: Le Pont de l'Europe, en trois actes véritables. Quelques mois plus tard, j'appris que Tour a terre était entré en répétitions.<sup>2</sup>

Tour à terre marks a considerable development in Salacrou's skill as a playwright, both in terms of dramatic

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<sup>1</sup>Tour à terre, Théâtre I.

<sup>2</sup>Théâtre I, 35.

construction and in ability to develop and motivate his characters. It is his first play in which there is a series of consecutive events which lead to a dénouement. It is still rather surrealistic, highly improbable and poetic, still not "good theater." But in this play his protagonist, now become "Pierre," not quite so anonymous as the Young Man, is a real person. Perhaps the events of his life and his present situation are not believable, but he is no longer the ethereal, poetic fantôme that his predecessors have been.

The central theme of this play is not a radical departure from those of Salacrou's earlier plays. Indeed, it could not be. For the central theme of Salacrou's very life has been the search for reality, for concrete meaning that appears in this and almost all of his plays. There does not seem to be the emphasis on religious seeking, nor the attacks on a criminal God that have appeared in his earlier works, however. The message of this play is much more personal, much more finite.

The play's setting is also considerable scaled down from the fairs and music-halls. It is as though Salacrou were gradually moving in on the real, egocentric, human problem of living one's individual life. We are now in a cheap port bar and the decor is quite realistic. The only element

that might seem surrealistic is the wax bust of a woman in the cashier's cage. But even this is explained as having been stolen from a dress shop window and set up to amuse the sailors who frequent the bar. Gone are the wild lights and the throngs of people. This is reality.

Pierre is seated at a mechanical piano, absent-mindedly picking out the same three notes. Three other people are on stage: Catherine, the young barmaid, a workman, and a Puertorican sailor. They are discussing something strange that has been going on in Paris. The workman tells the sailor that since he has been gone "they" have been tearing up all Paris. "Au début! Les journaux? Motus! on ne parlait de rien. On ne savait rien. Mais ces loustics-là ont été crier dans les rues qu'ils étaient les auteurs de ces beaux exploits; et qu'ils allaient continuer."<sup>3</sup> The sailor would prefer to talk about the terrible passage his ship had back from the South Seas, but the workman insists on telling him of what has been happening. "Et le portrait? Tu as vu? Regarde: c'est inespéré! Et aujourd'hui, pour la première fois, le journal publie son portrait, le portrait d'Isabelle!"<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>3</sup>Ibid., p. 49.

<sup>4</sup>Ibid.

From the ensuing conversation it becomes clear that a rather large group of young men in Paris have been doing outrageous things to express their love of Isabelle. They have stripped the pants off a policeman on the Place de la Concorde "afin d'étudier le rapport préétabli entre sa dignité purement personnelle, et la dignité de l'uniforme."<sup>5</sup> The workman is not fooled by this explanation they have given. He knows that it is because they are in love with Isabelle. "Chaque fois qu'ils sont arrêtés, ils racontent des balivernes. La vérité, tiens, elle est là! C'est qu'ils sont amoureux d'Isabelle."<sup>6</sup>

A sailor from the ship Bonne-Espérance enters and tells of more exploits. "They" painted a movie screen black. The day before, Paris awoke to find all the pissotières lined up in a row, forming a procession down the boulevards. Inside were discovered lovers of Isabelle, mounted on roller skates. Three weeks before that, lovers of Isabelle were found sleeping in all the historic beds of the museums of Paris, Versailles, Chantilly and Chambord. They were dressed in pink pyjamas. One evening "they" sold hand grenades for pomegranates, and a market place was wiped out. Six months

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<sup>5</sup>Ibid., p. 51.

<sup>6</sup>Ibid.

ago an express train had been derailed.

Several others arrive: a sailor from l'Ange du nord, bringing flowers for Catherine and the wax figure, followed by Margot, who is evidently a prostitute who operates in the bar. The sailor from l'Ange du nord asks Catherine for a date and Margot is amused. "Ah! Ah! Elle est toujours prise, mon cher, tous les soirs, avec son laveur de vaisselle."<sup>7</sup> This is the first reference to Pierre, who has seemed little interested in the discussion of Isabelle, or in any of the people in the bar. He finally moves away from the piano and we learn from the others' conversation that he has been working in the bar as dish-washer for three months, and that Catherine is apparently in love with him.

It is soon established that Pierre is seeking new experience, and that he is perhaps fleeing something in his past. He walks to the bay window which faces the sea and asks Catherine, who has not left his side, whether the ship Magellan is already back in port. Seeing that it is, he appears upset. "Le capitaine du Magellan hésita à me prendre dans l'équipage, le jour même de mon arrivée dans ce port. S'il avait accepté mes services . . . Et je pense que je

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<sup>7</sup>Ibid., p. 55.

pourrais débarquer aujourd'hui dans une ville inconnue, et entrer peut-être ici, pour la première fois."<sup>8</sup>

Now the sailor from the Ange du nord remembers Pierre. He had seen him that night, roaming the docks, the beam from the lighthouse striking him full in the face. One forms the image of Pierre, escaped to the very limits of the land, out on the docks, seeking to flee. He almost succeeds, but at the last moment he cannot find a berth. He is left, standing in the dark fog, the searchlight revolving, monotonously picking him out of the night.

He had retreated to the bar "A la figure de Cire" where he has taken refuge. All agree that his arrival brought on a great change in Catherine, who had been the sweetheart of all the transient sailors. Margot understands the change. "Depuis, dame, Catherine a changé. Elle est amoureuse, maintenant. Mais ce n'est plus de vous tous . . ."<sup>9</sup> The sailor from the Ange du nord is particularly bitter that Catherine has been lost, and there is some hint of future trouble between him and Pierre.

Pierre has remained apart from the others, carving something on the head of a cane. After a monosyllabic

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<sup>8</sup>Ibid., p. 56.

<sup>9</sup>Ibid.

conversation in which Catherine tries to find out something about Pierre, and to express her love for him, he finally admits that he thinks he was in Paris a year ago, but that his past does not interest him. He then recounts a dream he had had the night before. It is a very interesting dream, and one which tells us a great deal about Pierre.

Cette nuit, j'ai rêvé que je passais entre deux longs quais mais au milieu de la mer. Près de moi, une femme riait . . . Avec la poitrine qui sautait comme la main d'un joueur de guitare. Je lançais à coup de revolver de petites balles tendres comme des boutons de roses dans les fenêtres ouvertes des maisons de cette ville en façade dont les rives s'écartaient sur une mer lisse comme du vin dans une carafe. La mer avait la couleur du vin. Les balles trop lentes n'atteignirent jamais les maisons. La femme riait. Des voyageurs me plaignaient. Le bateau lui-même disparut . . .<sup>10</sup>

Dreams can perhaps never be completely explicated, but the main elements of Pierre's dream do seem to have major significance. The sea, purple as wine, apparently has a double meaning. It is both life, and escape. Pierre sees himself on this sea, passing between the two quais, whose façades represent the physical reality around him, and the water here symbolizes the uncertainty, the dangers of his life. The sea is contrasted to the concreteness of the houses on either side of him. The motion of his passing

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<sup>10</sup>Ibid., pp. 58-59.

between these two banks of reality is also apparently indicative of Salacrou's feeling of slipping through life without ever taking hold, possessing it. Pierre has attempted to function, has shot at the houses, tried to dominate. But he cannot do it. The laughing woman is obviously Isabelle, as we will later discover, although Catherine hopes that it might have been herself. The image of the revolver which was too weak to reach the buildings is a classic projection of fear of impotency and the continuing laughter of the woman in this dream might be that of Isabelle, Marie Magdelene or the écuyère, for it is simply Woman. The ultimate humiliation of being pitied by those around him was followed by the sinking of the boat itself, suggesting both the inevitable disaster of his own life and also the loss of the final means of escape, perhaps even the Magellan as it sailed away without him on board.

Catherine does not like the sombre tone of Pierre's dream. She is offended that she does not seem to have a part in it and that Pierre does not see her as a possible avenue of escape for himself. "J'aimais à rire, et j'aurais fait se trémousser un tas de cailloux, autrefois. Qui te pousse à prendre ce ton-là, pour me parler de toi? Je veux redevenir une femme qui rit."<sup>11</sup> She turns on all the lights,

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<sup>11</sup>Ibid., p. 59.



pours herself a drink and starts the mechanical piano.

Pierre wavers a moment. He almost gives in, almost dances with Catherine, but he falls into a trap which often awaits Salacrou's young men. He shifts his own, personal situation onto a universal plane and his concrete moment of action dissolves into poetic musings. "A travers des distances d'anges bondissant de planètes en planètes, la chaleur du soleil sait se refroidir juste assez pour venir s'éteindre sur la joue des hommes . . . Dans cette cage tournoyante qui se caresse dans le ciel, à la dérive . . ."12

The other sailors have called Catherine to dance while Pierre is speaking and she finally decides to dance alone, since Pierre obviously cannot join her. "J'ai toute ma vie pour danser."13 This is obvious rationalization of the sort that led the Young Man of Histoire de cirque to that awful final moment of discovery, "Je n'ai pas su choisir."

Pierre accepts the offer of a new sailor, from the Tropique, to have a drink with him. This sailor is rather hostile and he pushes Pierre in an attempt to find out about

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<sup>12</sup>Ibid.

<sup>13</sup>Ibid., p. 60.

the relationship between Pierre and Catherine. "Do you love each other?" he asks.

Nous aimer? Ah! Ah! Quelle belle certitude! Les autres y voient plus clair. Ils jugent sur des gestes et peuvent compter: deux citrons et deux carottes, voilà quatre legumes . . . Ah! Ah! Mais les dénommés amoureux ne comprennent pas même ces gestes où les autres voient des preuves de leur perspicacité. Allons! Allons! crois-moi. Il est plus facile d'aller d'ici à Rome pieds nus que d'aimer le Pape.<sup>14</sup>

Again the question of love arises and Pierre, unlike the earlier Young Men, makes no romantic judgments. No one can know what love is, and least of all those who are supposed to be in it. All definitions come from the outside, and are therefore invalid.

The sailor from the Tropique becomes quite angry because he thinks that Pierre is playing with him, since he will not give straight answers to his questions. He calls him an enjoleur, a trickster. Pierre is surprized at this, since the one thing he has not been able to do is trick himself.

Je n'ai même pas su me charmer moi-même et j'ai vécu dispersé. J'ai vécu à tâtons. Les hommes que j'ai rencontrés ne m'ont jamais connu: j'ai toujours marché à côté de ma vie . . . Quand j'entrais ici pour la première fois, ma souffrance créait un malaise à l'entour . . .<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>14</sup>Ibid., p. 62.

<sup>15</sup>Ibid., p. 63. Italics mine.

This is a stunning speech, a terrible summation of Pierre's life, and perhaps of Salacrou's. It has a double face. Pierre has never been inside life, has never functioned with meaning. Having no goals, he has simply moved along from event to event like a blind man, feeling his way with his cane. In the expression à tâtons there is again the idea of impotency, of powerlessness to cause his life to unfold at his direction. "J'ai toujours marché à côté de ma vie" is a reflection of the Young Man of La Boule de verre who had seen himself "avec l'oeil de Dieu." Pierre had watched himself live in much the same way. He had walked along beside himself as a stranger, his acts always not quite his own. He has not known himself in the same way that the others have not, for what he really was could not be seen. He has lived dispersé, fragmented, has never found that thread which would link the apparently unconnected events of his life. In short, he cannot discover himself, the fatal flaw of Salacrou's young protagonists. He is seeking that "image" of himself that would allow him entrance into his being . . . "comme les autres." It is a hopeless task and he knows it. When the sailor asks what he could have done that was terrible enough to cause this plight, he replies "Rien, mettons . . . ou incapable

de faire quoi que ce soit."<sup>16</sup>

After hearing the sailor's story of running into several other sailors in Melbourn who knew and loved Catherine, Pierre decides to name his cane, on whose pommel he has carved a likeness of Catherine, Jalousie. The significance of this is not absolutely clear, but Pierre is apparently saying that the emotion that makes the sailors return time and again to see Catherine is not love, but simply jealousy, the desire to possess. For when they had been in Melbourn, the sailors had argued angrily about Catherine's love and had made wagers on which of the sailors would be the first back to her bar. He is suggesting that she has a power over them which is not the positive power of love, but the negative power of jealousy, or perhaps a possessive lust.

Catherine is not pleased with this name for her cane, and turns away from Pierre to attempt to get the dancing going again. She begins dancing with the sailor from the Tropique and finally admits that she does, indeed, remember him from the year before. She had denied this earlier and this admission indicates her moving away from Pierre. But

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<sup>16</sup>Ibid.

she cannot leave him entirely, for he has brought something new to her life in the bar, the desire to escape with him.

Pierre! Tu sors seul, toutes les nuits. Ce soir, prends-moi avec toi . . . Tant pis pour les autres. Je voudrais ce soir, aller dans le port sur une barque. Pierre, je n'ai jamais été sur l'eau. Je voudrais tremper mes mains dans l'eau, jouer avec l'eau. Sortir d'ici.<sup>17</sup>

Pierre refuses, but feels a moment of tenderness for Catherine. She is suffering from a despair which Pierre knows well. "Violà des années que je vis dans ce bar, et maintenant je m'y ennuie. Tous les pays du monde se sont reposés ici, un jour ou deux . . . mon tour ne doit-il pas venir?"<sup>18</sup> Pierre can only reply "Je t'aime, petite Catherine."<sup>19</sup> He cannot offer her escape. He has experienced that anguish and knows that there is no escape.

It is now time for the radio musical concert to begin and the lights of the loud-speaker begin to warm up. Everyone prepares to dance, but suddenly the music is cut off and a voice comes over the radio.

Assez les violons! Du sang! C'est la vraie vie qui commence. Peuple de France! accroupi dans tes cafés écrasés sous des plafonds et des planchers

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<sup>17</sup>Ibid., p. 66.

<sup>18</sup>Ibid.

<sup>19</sup>Ibid.

et déjà endormi, je veux t'éveiller au nom d'Isabelle  
 . . . C'est pour l'amour d'Isabelle qu'à travers . . .  
 (Coups de revolver dans le poste) . . . dangers ridic-  
 cules . . .<sup>20</sup>

Pierre leaps up and turns off the radio and a short scuffle ensues, for the others are entranced at this turn of events. Unseen by the people in the cafe, two men and a woman had entered and sat down during the radio broadcast. As the two men approach Pierre to attempt to turn the broadcast back on, Pierre recognizes them as followers of Isabelle. The the woman rises and calls to him, with no surprise in her voice, "Pierre! Rallume le haut-parleur."<sup>21</sup> It is, of course, Isabelle herself. Pierre is at first stunned, and then furious. "Sortez-moi cette femme!"<sup>22</sup> But the others are so overcome at having Isabelle in their presence that they do not react to Pierre's cry. Isabelle maintains a perfect calm. "Depuis six mois j'attends de tes nouvelles. J'ai décidé de venir en prendre. Que préparais-tu en mon honneur ici?"<sup>23</sup>

They have apparently been looking for Pierre for

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<sup>20</sup>Ibid., p. 67.

<sup>21</sup>Ibid.

<sup>22</sup>Ibid.

<sup>23</sup>Ibid.

some time, not knowing exactly where to search. Patchouli, one of the two men with Isabelle, says "Ah! que de recherche! En a-t-on visité des villes et des professions!"<sup>24</sup> But the Englishman, Isabelle's other companion, suggests that she might have known where he was all the time. "Heureusement le Préfet de Police a dû indiquer votre adresse à Isabelle, puisque sans nous prévenir elle nous conduit dans ce port et dans ce bar."<sup>25</sup> We also learn from him that Pierre had been a sculptor in Paris. "Depuis votre départ, je collectionne vos sculptures. Je les recherche et les paie fort cher."<sup>26</sup>

As this first act nears its close, Pierre is disoriented. He seems torn between his desire to be free from Isabelle and his memories of glorious things he has done for her in the past. He is building to a moment of almost insane exaltation. She repeatedly asks him what he can do, plans to do, to praise and please her.

Je ne sais pas . . . Je ne sais pas . . .  
 Mais du haut de la Tour, avec le vent et ma voix tombant  
 sur Paris, j'eusse voulu déplacer d'un coup la ville  
 peut-être . . . La porter, sous le regard bleu des

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<sup>24</sup>Ibid., p. 68.

<sup>25</sup>Ibid.

<sup>26</sup>Ibid.

étoiles du jour, en des endroits de ciel inconnus, peut-être . . . Tandis qu'en ce moment, les fumées ne montent même plus aussi haut que les cheminées, et que la ville s'étouffe, peut-être eussé-je fait descendre dans la rue les balcons, les balustrades, les fenêtres, avec les rideaux claquant au vent, et à regarder passer cette cavalcade de persiennes, voici ces cul-de-jattes de réverbères qui se sentent pris dans la cadence et suivent la procession en titubant . . . Ah! Ah! arrêtez-les! ils s'en vont, je les vois . . . (Pierre prend le cornet du phonographe, l'applique à sa bouche) Peuple de France, les allumeurs de réverbères, depaysés ce soir, pleureront des larmes . . . (Pierre s'arrête brusquement de parler. Puis il sanglote, et violent, dit): Mais sortez-moi cette femme! (Il s'évanouit. Catherine s'empresse.)

ISABELLE --- Il n'a pas changé.

#### RIDEAU<sup>27</sup>

Salacrou obviously chose the correct moment for inserting his first "RIDEAU." He has moved Pierre from a position of obscurity at the play's opening, through a crescendo of revelation, and left him again at that existential moment of choice from which he had fled in coming to the port, and eventually to this bar. Isabelle's final line, "He has not changed" is telling. This is Pierre as she had known him, and clearly not the Pierre that we have seen before this moment. This is the Pierre who had also

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<sup>27</sup>Ibid., pp. 68-69.



been a follower of Isabelle, but apparently not an orthodox one. One immediately senses that Isabelle would not have come to the very edge of the continent seeking Pierre, had he been simply one of those who had blindly dedicated their lives to her glory. We are, at the end of this act, left with a very solidly theatrical question: "Why did Pierre flee, and why did this woman who seemingly had everything choose to seek out this one man?" It is this question that holds the attention, that forms the necessary bridge to the second act.

A great deal has been learned about Pierre in this first act. He had been a sculptor in Paris, and apparently a good one. He had been a lover of Isabelle, or had seemed to be. He had not been satisfied with his position in life, for some reason, and had fled, probably unexpectedly. He is rather hamlétique, as had been his forerunners in Salacrou's theater. He seems as unable to make a choice as they. In his last speech he exhibits this characteristic. He is led into a fantasy of what he would have perhaps liked to do for Isabelle. He is moved almost to ecstasy at the thought of what he could have done. Isabelle herself is caught up in his emotion. "J'écoute . . . tandis que l'autre continue de crier, au travers des nuages, mon nom,

c'est toi, Pierre, que j'écoute."<sup>28</sup> But at this moment of exaltation, Pierre, damned with Salacrou's curse of universal vision, cannot avoid contemplating the other possibility, the destructive potential of his desire to give himself wholly to Isabelle and her glory. Rather than carrying the city, and the name of Isabelle, to unknown heights, he might also bring the city down around him in a horrible crashing of balconies, windows and curtains. And this would lead to a complete breakdown of sanity, as he visualizes the streetlamps marching away. For a moment one feels that this, too, would have been valid action for Pierre, that he was seeking violent experience, whether positive or negative. This and the other clearly Dadaïste elements of the play will be discussed at the play's end.

Nothing has changed when the curtain rises on Act II, as indeed it could not, given that Salacrou simply had inserted the word "Curtain." Pierre is still unconscious, surrounded by a group of bar patrons, although the time is a quarter of an hour later. Margot and the sailor from the Bonne-Espérance are apart from the other group, and the sailor is still talking about some of his experiences. Pierre stands up and leaves the group around him. He makes a move toward Isabelle, as though to speak to her, but turns

and sits down on the other side of the bar. Catherine, who had been waiting to see what Pierre would do, turns on Isabelle and orders her out of the bar, because Pierre wanted it. Isabelle, always calm and in control of all around her, treats Catherine as a child, and asks her to serve some beer and start the music so that everyone might dance. Catherine is infuriated but is afraid that if she does force Isabelle to leave Pierre might leave with her. She is simply reduced to impotent rage and Isabelle dominates serenely. Apparently deciding that Pierre has now calmed himself and will be contrite, Isabelle approaches him. "Alors Pierre? Et cette faiblesse?"<sup>29</sup> She again asks what he has been planning to do in praise of her, and he replies "Nothing." In the short sparring bout which follows Isabelle admits that she is quite impressed with Pierre because he has run off from her and taken on his job as dish-washer. "Tu es un garçon que j'aime, parce que tu m'étonnes . . ."<sup>30</sup>

Isabelle notices the figure in wax and asks Patchouli to put a false beard on it to amuse her. He does this and

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<sup>29</sup>Ibid., p. 71.

<sup>30</sup>Ibid.

Catherine cannot understand how the sailors can let her get away with it. They have all loved the wax figure and this should be sacrilege to them. Instead, they add other objects to the statue to make it more ridiculous. They even present things to Isabelle that have been earlier in the play established as being of great value to them. A postcard from a loved one, a scarf given to one of the sailors by his fiancée, and other things of little value beyond the sentimental are accepted by Isabelle and then destroyed with great disdain.

Pierre is all that really interests Isabelle, and she tries to reach him by bringing up memories from their past together, memories which also indicate the degree to which he was under her power.

Nos belles équipées d'autrefois ne t'apparaissent pas . . . Et ce commissariat de police envahi . . . tous les agents que vous enfermiez au violon . . . Et cette grande plume d'autruche piquée dans tes cheveux, ce panache qu'on pouvait déposer aux vestiaires . . . Te souviens-tu?<sup>31</sup>

Pierre remembers all of this only with disgust, and a certain boredom. "Mon départ est clair: un jour je fus las de vous . . ."<sup>32</sup> Isabelle cannot believe that anyone

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<sup>31</sup>Ibid., p. 74.

<sup>32</sup>Ibid.

could become bored with her. Pierre replies with a statement that does not altogether ring true. "Peut-être ai-je compris ce dernier jour où je fus si prodigue de moi-même que je n'avais plus rien à espérer de vous . . ." <sup>33</sup> He is speaking of some prodigious stunt he had planned to celebrate Isabelle's birthday, the day he left, but we do not know what it was to have been. He sounds somewhat like the Young Man of Histoire de cirque at this point, when, becoming so enamored of his own prowess with the Violins, he momentarily lost interest in the écuyère. That Young Man subsequently tried to retrace his steps, and one wonders if Pierre will also regret his bravado.

Isabelle cannot understand Pierre's bitterness. She feels that they were all amusing themselves equally, that no one had reason for complaints. "M'aimais-tu donnant-donnant?" <sup>34</sup> But it was not merely amusement that Pierre had sought. "Ce que j'attendais de vous, c'était de m'avancer dans la connaissance de moi-même . . . je suis avant tout curieux de moi-même . . . ou bien de me donner l'oubli de moi-même . . . Vous n'avez été que l'apparence dont

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<sup>33</sup>Ibid.

<sup>34</sup>Ibid.

s'est recouvert mon désespoir à un certain moment de ma vie."<sup>35</sup>

There is a curious ambiguity in one's feelings for the protagonists of Salacrou's early plays. One is immediately repelled by the dominant female characters and therefore generally in sympathy with the Young Men, the Pierres. The destructive domination of Isabelle, the cynical stardom of the écuyère make them personages whom it is scarcely possible to admire. But one is also bothered by the all-encompassing egocentricity of the male protagonists. Having seen themselves with the eye of God, they can see little more. Their vision of the world is as fragmented as their own self-image. They view life from atop the rubble-heap of their own personality and their despair colors the lives of all around them. Pierre reveals himself here to be no less monstrous than Isabelle. His last statement is particularly damning. It suggests that Pierre's despair is constant and that he will only choose those upon whom to let it fall at various periods of his life. Isabelle happened to be that person for that moment in time. There is something a little delicious in this conception of his life.

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<sup>35</sup>Ibid., p. 75.

One wonders if he is being honest. And it is to find out that one continues.

Pierre does not deny that he had given himself entirely to Isabelle, that his efforts in her behalf had been prodigious. "Tu montrais pourtant un grand enthousiasme, vibrant à tous les bruits du monde."<sup>36</sup> But he insists that he throws himself into everything with equal force. "Quand on joue sa vie à pile ou face, on ne se tolère aucune nuance. C'est pile . . . ou c'est face."<sup>37</sup> He seemingly has only one regret. "Qui ne regrette pas de ne pas aimer?"<sup>38</sup>

Love continually appears in Salacrou's plays as a possible solution to the vagueness of existence. All of his Young Men have felt that if they could love, they might somehow be saved. It is as though the act of loving is the only adequate proof of existence. They never insist that they be loved, but that they experience the emotion of loving others in order to establish their personal existence in a very Cartesian sense: "I love, I feel, therefore I

<sup>36</sup>Ibid.

<sup>37</sup>Ibid.

<sup>38</sup>Ibid., p. 76.

must indeed exist." It will become obvious that Pierre had thrown himself into Isabelle's sphere in an attempt to experience love for someone, in the hope of attaching himself concretely to life as it raced by him. But this effort failed, as it always has, and Pierre is left with only the monotonous emptiness of a life that has been impotent.

"Je suis bien las, aussi, de voir simplement ma vie se réfléchir sur les jours qui passent . . . un reflet . . . Pourtant, je n'ai jamais été aussi malheureux qu'au temps où je ne vous quittais pas. Un manque de foi profonde fit naître mes malheurs."<sup>39</sup>

This loss of faith in his ability to love, to find someone who could engender that love, led him to completely give up the search. He determined to flee, not in order to continue elsewhere this quest, but as a form of suicide. Isabelle tries to ridicule his flight as a childishly romantic stunt. "Vers une île chaude surement. Aucun désespéré ne cacha sa douleur au Groënland. Vous portez vos rêves d'amour aux îles Hawaiï, à cause de la chaleur et de leurs chevelures épaisses, ou dans les récifs de l'Astrolabe à cause du nom . . . "<sup>40</sup>

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<sup>39</sup>Ibid.

<sup>40</sup>Ibid.



But Isabelle has not understood Pierre. He was not seeking adventure, was not a Rimbaud setting out on his Bateau ivre.<sup>41</sup> All he wanted was no longer to be forced to justify his existence. He wanted to abandon himself completely, to abdicate. "Je partais sur un bateau qui me menait, mon Dieu, où il allait et qui m'aurait ramené sans doute, ici, pour repartir."<sup>42</sup> The desire to abdicate also predicated his devotion to Isabelle's glory, as he will soon reveal.

The Englishman is interested in Pierre's cane, carved with the image of Catherine. He tries to buy it and Pierre asks what he can pay.

Avez-vous, pour me payer, dans votre poche, une man-sarde et la gloire un jour de printemps? Et la foi en ces balivernes? Mais, où sont mes erreurs d'enfant? Cependant, Patchouli, il est une autre erreur enfantine, jolie comme une ronde: l'espoir d'animer plus tard une sympathie qui pour moi tarde à naître: la revanche de mon coeur sur ma vie. Cette fois encore, j'ai dispersé la ronde.<sup>43</sup>

He finally offers to give the cane to the Englishman if he will lick the soles of Isabelle's shoes, which he does. Catherine is terribly hurt that he would consent to

<sup>41</sup>Arthur Rimbaud, "Le Bateau ivre," Oeuvres complètes (La Pléiade, Gallimard, Paris: 1945).

<sup>42</sup>Tour à terre, p. 76.

<sup>43</sup>Ibid., p. 77.

give up "her" cane for any price. Then Pierre changes his mind, and gives the cane to the Anglais across his back, breaking it into pieces. Both the Englishman and Isabelle are delighted at this, he because he enjoys being beaten and feels that he will become a monument to Pierre's art, and she because she sees more vestiges of the old Pierre, violent, exalté, perhaps slipping back into her grasp.

Telling Catherine about the wonderfully insane things that Pierre had once done for her, Isabelle begins to be curiously effected by her own stories. Remembering the time he spent every night for an entire week on his knees before a streetlamp, she suddenly falls at Pierre's feet.

Pour moi il s'est ridiculisé! Comment? J'ai oublié. mais il s'y prenait assez bien, sans avoir trop l'air de souffrir. Je l'aidais de mes conseils: une semaine, tenez, toutes les nuits d'une semaine il les a passées agenouillé devant un réverbère qui ne s'éteignait pas, malgré la pluie qui tombait . . . Agenouillé ainsi . . . (Isabelle s'agenouille devant Pierre.)

Des voitures s'éclairaient un instant dans la pluie de la nuit et partaient. Il restait agenouillé les yeux ouverts sur la flamme jaune qui suivait l'éclat du vent.

L'ANGLAIS --- C'est Isabelle qui fait des farces, maintenant?

PIERRE --- Isabelle, relevez . . .

ISABELLE, (peut-être troublée) --- Laisse-moi, il me semble que je vais devenir caressant. Pourquoi ne puis-je supporter la vie qu'inattendue et les hommes

que désespérés? Ces sourires de triomphe me torturent. J'aime qu'on me désire avec une résignation difficilement acquise. Pierre, aucun de ces sentiments ne fut prémédité.

PIERRE --- Ne vous cherchez pas d'excuses et relevez-vous.

. . .

ISABELLE --- Je suis à genoux par surprise et mes yeux se reposent à voir moins de choses, ma tête se courbe. Pierre, je voulais me moquer, et j'ai envie de me blottir.<sup>44</sup>

There is perhaps some question about Isabelle's sincerity here, for when she immediately asks Pierre to leave with her and he refuses, she turns away without a great deal of emotion ("Oh! Patchouli, je te l'abandonne.")<sup>45</sup> and asks the workman to have a drink with her. But this speech does apparently give us some insight into Salacrou's conception of the Isabelle/écuyère type. Her need is as great as Pierre's, and she is equally unable to establish genuine relationships with those around her. Her insistence on being the object of continual adoration is simply the reverse of Pierre's constant search for an object to adore. But neither can accept the other, even though their needs would seem to be perfectly matched, for neither can accept

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<sup>44</sup>Ibid., pp. 78-79.

<sup>45</sup>Ibid., p. 79.

the truth about himself. Pierre, without his despair, would be nothing. He has become so completely dominated by his anguish that there is little left in him. He seems to have fallen in love with his own misery and that love serves much the same function as the "real" love he feels he must give someone else. He must be dominated for his misery to continue, and when it seems that Isabelle also wants to be dominated, to blot herself out in the mastery of Pierre, she loses her value to him. She realizes that she is also on the verge of losing her self image and quickly reverts to form, even though she might have been quite sincere in her confession.

Salacrou has filled out his two principal characters in a carefully controlled series of partial revelations, structured in a pendulum fashion. We have seen Pierre talking to Catherine and uncovering some facets of his make-up, then Isabelle revealing herself to various characters, then Pierre and Isabelle confronting each other for a moment of deeper self discovery, and now they swing apart again and Pierre is engaged in a conversation with Patchouli which will disclose more about Pierre's past.

Patchouli reminds Pierre of his first appearance at Isabelle's "court." Pierre had climbed in a window at a formal reception, covered with mud, "les yeux plus brillants

que le lustre, au milieu de tes gestes d'ange désespéré."<sup>46</sup>  
 Patchouli wonders how Pierre happened to show up there. "Des  
 hommes comme moi ne rencontrent pas Isabelle par hasard."<sup>47</sup>  
 Patchouli remembers all of the details of that night, all  
 of the wild things that Pierre had tried to do -- rip out  
 his fingernails with his teeth, throw himself at Isabelle's  
 feet --- but Pierre feels that he is missing the most impor-  
 tant element. "Mais mon âme --- avais-tu senti la ruine  
 de mon âme? Ma pensée se détruisant elle-même, mes actes  
 vides comme une noix déséchée sous la coque."<sup>48</sup> Of course,  
 those at the dinner had not seen the emptiness of his soul.  
 They had taken his actions as merely more outrageous stunts  
 in honor of Isabelle.

PATCHOULI --- Oui, nous avons tous fremi devant tant  
 d'amour.

PIERRE --- Tant d'amour? Ah! si j'avais pu aimer  
 Isabelle!

PATCHOULI --- Quoi! Tu n'aimais pas Isabelle?

PIERRE --- Isabelle ne fut qu'une tentative dans l'espoir  
 de me sauver.<sup>49</sup>

<sup>46</sup>Ibid., p. 81.

<sup>47</sup>Ibid.

<sup>48</sup>Ibid.

<sup>49</sup>Ibid.

Again there is the theme of the potential of love, but the impossibility of actually finding that love. And the ultimate purpose of that love would be that of self-discovery. Pierre has already told Isabelle that what he had expected from her was "de m'avancer dans la connaissance de moi-même,"<sup>50</sup> and when that statement is equated with "une tentative dans l'espoir de me sauver" we see that salvation and self-knowledge are the same thing. And both of these come from love, for loving someone gives definition to the lover. He becomes concrete, establishes an image, becomes "comme les autres."

Pierre again indicates how important his despair has become to him. He attempts to portray for Patchouli what he means when he speaks of "la ruine de mon âme." His description is strikingly similar in its implications to the dream of the Young Man in Casseur d'assiettes where he saw himself walking along the street with nameless men unable to communicate with each other.

As-tu rêvé d'un assassin-né qui ne croirait pas à la mort, pour plaindre cette tragique existence? La vocation pour un métier dédaigné, jugé parfaitement inutile! Contradiction d'esprit et de tempérament . . . As-tu pensé à la valeur des mots, des paroles, pipés comme des dès de voleurs, avec lesquels nous

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<sup>50</sup>Ibid., p. 75.

jouons? Comme les autres, tu n'as jamais été dénicher la peur qui se cachait sous le commerce que les hommes entretiennent entre eux?

Tu n'as donc jamais vu deux hommes côte à côte marcher dans la rue? Et nous-mêmes ici? Et tu ne t'effraies pas? Ces deux paires d'yeux qui se regardent, allumés après on ne sait quel passage de comète . . . Tu n'as donc jamais collé ton oreille sur la terre pour surprendre le bruit qu'elle fait dans sa course à travers des planètes inaccessibles, bien que je tende, la nuit, les bras vers elles. Patchouli! Patchouli! Tu n'as donc jamais senti la solitude te vider la chair? ni l'effroi de tituber dans une foule ou dans l'histoire . . . notre pauvre vie, coupée aux deux bouts, entre la naissance et la mort, comme un cer-cueil, à la dérive dans le temps . . . les énervés de Jumièges . . . La petite lanterne . . .

PATCHOULI --- Qu'allais-tu faire chez Isabelle? lorsqu'il y a encore des curés dans les églises et des philosophes dans les livres?

PIERRE --- L'histoire de la pensée est trop décon-certant pour espérer se sauver avec ce qu'elle nous apporte. Peu à peu, tous les chemins qui me menaient vers les hommes ou vers le monde se sont fermés. Je restai sans agir, avec des bras impatients d'agir. Mes jambes voulaient marcher: ma tête ne voyait dans les cartes de géographie que de jolis tableaux de maître, ou la relation de notre petitesse. La voilà bien la vocation contrariée, et la source chaude de mes malheurs . . .<sup>51</sup>

This is a truly Pascalian anguish, man terrified at his finiteness before the infinite mystery of the universe. It is impossible to ignore the similarity between this summation of Pierre's despair and that of Salacrou's other

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<sup>51</sup>Ibid., pp. 81-82.

protagonists, and, ultimately, Salacrou's own, personal conception of man's position in the universe. Man is seemingly a divine creation, capable of greatness. But what is perhaps his greatest power, the power to reason, is also his greatest enemy . . . vocation contrariée. For in reasoning, he also questions, and his most important questions, those fundamental questions about the significance of life, cannot be answered. Pierre wanted to act, he wanted to "live" but he was reduced to impotence not by ignorance, but by knowledge. He, also, had seen himself "avec l'oeil de Dieu," had learned the lesson of Boule de verre, that man knows nothing of the universe, although he had tried to map and quarter and conquer it. He has seen his possibilities for meaningful action reduced to nothing by the awareness of man's smallness and insignificance in relation to the universe. He has seen "les cartes de géographie," representing both man's supposed knowledge of the physical world and also man's spiritual and metaphysical guidelines and projects for life, become simply pieces of colored paper . . . worse than meaningless, for they merely serve to underline man's impotence.

He concedes that he had not actually sought love when he became a follower of Isabelle. "Courir après l'amour? Autant courir après son ombre. L'amour, on le surprend,



l'amour, c'est la rencontre inattendue, inespérée, au coin d'une rue."<sup>52</sup> The word "surprendre" plays a large rôle in Salacrou's early plays. It indicates, perhaps, wishful thinking on the playwright's part. He knows that what he is seeking can never be found, but he seemingly cannot completely give up hope. Too sophisticated to expect to find answers, he rather tentatively holds onto the hope that he might slip up on the answers unobserved . . . might be able to "surprendre une imprudence divine." But his characters seldom surprise love, or God, and if they do, it is the love of the divine talking cat of Casseur d'assiettes, a love that is so ephemeral as to make life even more unbearable after its experience than it had been before.

If Pierre was not after love in the arms of Isabelle, what, then, was his purpose in becoming so devoted a follower? "Abdiquer! lui remettre la direction de mes gestes, et de ma vie. Et substituer à ma volonté dévorée par la solitude, sa volonté."<sup>53</sup> In this one sees a possible reflection of Salacrou's early, though temporary, devotion to the Socialist movement. "Le socialisme militant m'offrait une

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<sup>52</sup>Ibid., p. 83.

<sup>53</sup>Ibid.

possibilité de vivre dans le monde, de m'accrocher à l'existence."<sup>54</sup> But just as Salacrou could not long continue in the Socialist movement of which he did not truly feel a part, Pierre soon found that his attempt to abdicate responsibility for his life did not really relieve his anguish. But for a time he was relatively happy.

Au milieu de nos désordres je retrouvai un ordre --- l'ordre d'Isabelle, que je supportai pour l'imprévu de ses catastrophes: désintéressées. Voilà comment, près d'elle je reconquis un bon sens ordinaire; et pendant quelques mois, ma vie se dispersa avec innocence.

J'ai essayé de surprendre dans des rencontres de mots, dans des catastrophes de mots ce que je ne trouvais plus dans les mots eux-mêmes.<sup>55</sup>

The fascinating temptation momentarily arises to see in this entire play an allegory on the various movements with which Salacrou was temporarily enamored: Socialism, Communism, Dadaism and Surrealism. Although he had never actually become a member of the literary movements, he was clearly influenced by them. If one substitutes the name "Isabelle" for any of these four, it is rather easy to see Salacrou in the rôle of Pierre, searching for a means to "attach" himself to life, and ultimately finding that he

<sup>54</sup>"Mes Certitudes et mes incertitudes," Théâtre VI, 199.

<sup>55</sup>Tour à terre, p. 83.

must move on. The destructive, nihilistic aspect of Dadaism particularly is evident in the actions of the frenzied lovers of Isabelle. It would be fruitless to pursue this line much further, but the parallel is interesting to note, and it is not impossible that Salacrou might also have been aware of this similarity.

Patchouli cannot understand Pierre's blind devotion to Isabelle if he did not love her, as the other followers did. Pierre explains that even those nights he spent kneeling before the lamp post were wonderful for him. "Trop heureux d'avoir un prétexte à passer quelques heures avec un but précis . . ."<sup>56</sup> The street lamp seems to have considerable significance for Pierre, and also elsewhere in Salacrou's early plays. It can, of course, be seen as simply the ridiculous object involved in one of Pierre's acts of homage, but it also appeared in his last speech of Act I, in which he spoke of the street lamps being caught up in the fall of windows and balconies, and walking off into the night in a row. Pierre was quite upset at this thought, and the street lamps obviously had some meaning for him. His mentioning them in his fantasy in Act I is probably a reflection of his having used a street lamp to

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<sup>56</sup>Ibid., p. 84.

kneel before in Paris. But why had he picked a street lamp, rather than some other object? One can only make some suppositions. A street lamp might represent hope, a goal. It is light in the night, a beacon. It is a vain hope, however, for it is not natural light. It goes off in the daytime, and is only man-made, like equators and glass balls. It is, in fact, made up of glass balls. Pierre, in paying homage to Isabelle through the street lamp, was both mortifying himself, as he wished, but also perhaps perpetrating a supreme joke on the world. He was mocking man's worship of himself, and his artifacts. One might also see the rather obvious phallic symbolism of the lamp post, and its use as an object of worship. Elements of homosexuality are not rare in Salacrou's early protagonists.

The lamp post was, then, the illusion of life, the illusion of hope. And Pierre's frenzied displays of love for Isabelle were only the illusion of a real love which he did not feel.

Il m'était si doux d'agir en amoureux échevelé, de m'entourer des manifestations extérieures de l'amour, pour me donner l'illusion d'aimer, et rattacher ainsi ma vie à quelque chose qui me soit extérieur. Perdus, nous le sommes tous, mais de façons différentes. Et se perdre les yeux ouverts en est une effroyable.<sup>57</sup>

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<sup>57</sup>Ibid.

This was not enough. Eventually he simply became bored with this new attempt to deceive himself, and was again in that position which he describes eloquently and simply: "Si ma situation au milieu de tout peut être indiqué par un mot, c'est celui-ci: 'DESACCORD.' Je vis en désaccord avec mon propre désaccord."<sup>58</sup> But he cannot return to Paris with Isabelle. One cannot simply recommence something that has already been tried and has failed. And, perhaps, it is in this bar, with Catherine, that he is going to find his "surprise." "Je ne sais plus . . . D'ailleurs, toutes ces histoires ne sont que des collections de mots, et je ne parle que par habitude."<sup>59</sup>

Patchouli's questions over, Isabelle asks him if he has helped solve Pierre's problems, whether he is now ready to return to Paris with them. When she is told that Pierre's despair is worse than ever, she hands him a revolver. "C'est trop simple. Je n'aime pas les chemins de raccourci."<sup>60</sup> She laughs at him. "Avoue que la mort t'effraie."<sup>61</sup> Pierre

<sup>58</sup>Ibid., p. 85.

<sup>59</sup>Ibid.

<sup>60</sup>Ibid.

<sup>61</sup>Ibid.

denies this and then questions the very possibility of suicide. His language is that of the dream he had recounted earlier to Catherine.

Les balles arrivent-elles vraiment jusqu'à nous? jusqu'à nous toucher? J'ai des lumières sur leur vie de boutons de roses. Les balles savent-elles éclore dans nos têtes ou nous poursuivent-elles sans nous achever, à travers des purgatoires qui n'en finissent pas? . . . Réponds!

ISABELLE --- Tu tiens à la vie.

PIERRE --- Si je tiens à la vie, je lui demande des comptes. La déception est si grande que je monte me pendre à cette poutre. La seule manière de faire un saut dans l'éternité.

ISABELLE --- Je te regarde. Et tu ne le fais pas? Pourquoi?

PIERRE, revenant s'asseoir --- Par un détachement de la vie si grand qu'il me permet, sans les justifier, toutes les curiosités.<sup>62</sup>

Given the opportunity to take his life with a revolver, Pierre remembers his dream, in which he tried to wipe out life around him. He could not do it because the bullets were like boutons de roses and they could never reach their targets. He seems to fear that the same thing might happen to himself, if he tried suicide by that method. When Isabelle correctly accuses him of wanting to live, in spite of what he feels about life, he is forced to take the next

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<sup>62</sup>Ibid., pp. 85-86.

step. When she accepts his threat to hang himself, he must simply back down and try to save face as best he can. We can see that Salacrou has come some distance since Boule de verre and his earlier plays, where the only possible solution for his young man was death, either literally or symbolically. "La seule manière de faire un saut dans l'éternité" is the very reason for which the Young Man of Boule de verre had to kill himself. It was his only means of coming to terms with life. Pierre does not kill himself, and neither did Armand Salacrou. His protagonists are moving toward their creator. In the next play, le Pont de l'Europe, they will merge.

The play suddenly takes a dangerous turn when Catherine begins to berate the sailor present for allowing Isabelle to attack Pierre and continue to bait him. They become angry and the tension mounts. Pierre, in response to Catherine's plea that they leave together, pulls down a world map and asks her to see if she can visualize them somewhere on that surface of the earth. As the noise grows louder and people begin to dance, someone pulls out a knife. Pierre shouts to the crowd "Parce qu'une femme dont les journaux racontent l'extravagance de ses amants vient ici, voilà que les couteaux sortent comme des griffes?"<sup>63</sup>

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<sup>63</sup>Ibid., p. 87.

Just as a fight is about to break out between Pierre and the sailors, a policeman enters carrying a railroad signal post. He is looking for Pierre.

Pierre admits that he is guilty of having taken the railroad signal from the side of a railroad track, six months ago. It was because of that that the express train had been derailed and many people killed. Pierre does not try to hide his guilt and is not ashamed of his crime. "Mon Dieu, je l'ai pris, cela va de soi, où il se trouvait, le long de la voie . . . Sans mauvaises intentions. Comprenez . . . A ce moment, j'en avais besoin pour offrir à Madame, un bouquet qu'elle daignât accepter le jour de sa fête."<sup>64</sup>

Catherine cannot believe that Pierre had derailed the train. He did not really do it. "Pas exactement. J'ai cueilli cette fleur qui se trouvait sur mon chemin . . . Ah! dans l'exaltation des promenades, mon coeur ce jour-là portait son ombre sur les nuages . . . Alors, j'élevai jusqu'à mon regard cette fleur inconnue dont Madame devait respirer les couleurs si rouges et si blanches."<sup>65</sup>

The gendarme is overjoyed at having his man admit his crime, but there is considerable consternation among the

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<sup>64</sup>Ibid., p. 88.

<sup>65</sup>Ibid., p. 89.



others present. The sailors are both happy at seeing Pierre in trouble and angry that he had taken them in, had lived there among them as though he had done nothing. One of the men recalls a man he used to know, a mad-man, who could only live wandering the roads. But Pierre is not that simple in his "madness."

Moi, c'est dans mon âme que j'erre, éperdu sur les routes d'une intelligence en faillite, sans feu ni passion, à la recherche d'une idée qui ne serait pas truquée, et qui vaille ce que je vaux. Ah! Isabelle, tu m'as tout de même aidé à connaître des désespoirs de dieux. J'ai connu l'angoisse de la solitude comme un dieu.<sup>66</sup>

Pierre paraphrases the speech of the Young Man in Boule de verre when he said "Seul ce qui dure toujours peut ne pas me lasser."<sup>67</sup> And it was Salacrou himself who had collected stamps, because "cette collection va durer, c'est quelque chose . . . la collection, c'est anti-éphémère, vous comprenez, et le côté glissant de la vie, le côté fleuve de la vie, le côté fleuve qui s'écoule, m'a toujours angoissé."<sup>68</sup> This is the anxiety which Pierre had felt before finding Isabelle. As he has said, he then gave himself completely to her and found "order," but this did not last.

<sup>66</sup>Ibid., p. 90.

<sup>67</sup>Impromptu délibéré, p. 18.

<sup>68</sup>Tour à terre, p. 90.

Jeté à vingt ans dans le monde avec quelques vagues souvenirs d'enfance trop heureuse, et moi-même à découvrir parmi un tohubohu d'hommes et de pensées, vous m'avez tous surpris dans une trop grande jeunesse . . . Les gestes ne sont pas à la mesure des hommes. Tuer un oiseau peut prendre une plus grande importance que de dépeupler trois villes. Chacun de nous vit à une échelle différente. La mienne a manqué de stabilité . . . Le jour où vous m'êtes devenue indifférente, l'apparence de mon petit passé, que vous sembliez avoir unifié, reprit un sens nettement désordonné. Je me suis enfui, j'ai traversé des villes . . . Oui, des villes, des pays entiers . . . j'ai côtoyé des hommes et leur détresse, des océans et leur bave blanche, j'ai vu des maisons avec des cheminées échevelées dans le brouillard . . .<sup>69</sup>

Pierre is clearly another manifestation of the Young Man of Casseur d'assiettes of whom Salacrou was speaking when he said: "Prisonnier du ciel, l'homme traîne la littérature à sa remorque. Avec l'utilité de sa vie à défendre, perdu dans le bazar des siècles, il regarde l'étagage de toutes les morales possibles."<sup>70</sup> In his empty despair, Pierre had thought he had found a solution in renouncing himself completely to the domination of Isabelle, just as one submits completely to a movement or a religion, and then finds that it is either false or insufficient. One must again recall Salacrou's own involvement with the Socialist movement, an event in his life which closely parallels

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<sup>69</sup>La Boule de verre, p. 9.

<sup>70</sup>Théâtre I, 35. Italics mine.

Pierre's temporary enchantment with Isabelle.

Act II closes with Pierre sensing the total isolation of man at the end of centuries of propagation, as the final rejeton of a line of ancestors which must have begun at the very genesis of humanity. "Perdu dans le bazar des siècles," he feels somehow betrayed by his ancestors who do not now leap forward to direct him. It is rather the reverse of the idea of the Young Man of Boule de verre who saw himself in exactly the same position but felt exaltation at the thought that he might break a chain of development of a "courant de vie créé avec le premier monde."<sup>71</sup> For Pierre it is again the fundamental question, "How does one become a man like the others?" In this case the "others" are his ancestors, who must have defined themselves in a way he cannot. Are their self-definitions somewhere in him, and if so, why does he not know who he is?

Moi, que n'ai-je pu interroger chaque trait de mes ancêtres. Pourquoi ne se sont-ils pas levés, à chaque coin de ma vie, pour me montrer ma route. Qu'étaient-ils, eux, qui revivent peut-être en moi? Aventuriers? Amoureux? Assassins? Philosophes? ou paysans courbés.<sup>72</sup>

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<sup>71</sup>Casseur d'assiettes, p. 24.

<sup>72</sup>Tour à terre, p. 91.

The break between the second and third acts of this play is not as logical as that between the first two. Salacrou had to put IRDEAU somewhere, however, in order to get his three act play to Lugné-Poé, and there is simply no better place in the second half of the play to break it. The curtain rises on the third act with the rather illogical situation of most of the bar's patrons having followed Isabelle out into the street, with the gendarme still waiting to take Pierre away to jail. There is no reason for his waiting. One must simply take into account Salacrou's predicament and not look too closely for enchaînement. Catherine is serving food and drink to Pierre as the acordeon player describes the scene outside the bar.

Deux! En voici encore deux qui se jettent à l'eau.  
Et encore un! C'est le cinquième. En un rien de temps, old boys! Ils ne peuvent pas laisser la lune tranquille? Ils nagent en plein dedans. Encore un! Et tout habillé. Attendez! Oui, Isabelle se penche et les regarde . . . Toute cette dégringolade? pour un mouchoir qu'il lui a plu de jeter dans le port!<sup>73</sup>

The gendarme finally decides that it is time to take Pierre to prison and a play of wits between the two begins. At the outset, it is difficult to determine whether Pierre is simply trying to talk the gendarme out of arresting him,

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<sup>73</sup>Ibid., p. 92.

or whether what he is saying is a genuine revelation of his self-concept and his expectations for the future. He tells him of having lain in bed when he was a child and how he had dreamed of being arrested one day, but that he had never dreamt of being arrested by so noble a policeman as the gendarme. This is seemingly open flattery, and the gendarme does not accept it. But then Pierre continues his discussion, becomes more abstract, and brings up a problem which is quite like the modern controversy over the guilt of someone who has committed a crime when not in full control of his faculties, in a state of temporary insanity. He tells the gendarme that if he truly wants to arrest the man guilty of having stolen the railroad signal he must allow him time to change himself back into his former self. For he is now a simple laveur de vaisselle, and the man who had caused the train to wreck was one of those mad followers of Isabelle. Can Pierre as he is now, harmless and simple, be tried for a crime committed by a Pierre who was vastly different, a Pierre who, indeed, no longer exists?

Je tiens à ce que vous fassiez correctement tout votre devoir. Actuellement je ne suis pas encore tout à fait celui qui cueillit ce signal. Vous voyez: je n'ai pas dit fleur! Je vous mets en garde. En cet instant précis où l'heure juste passe, vous arrêtez encore un peu du laveur de vaisselle, qui, lui, n'a rien fait, convenez-en! Ne dois-je pas me remettre entièrement dans ce curieux état d'esprit où j'étais lorsque je

choisissais des fleurs pour Isabelle! Ainsi vous arrêterez le vrai coupable. Mais laissez-moi le temps de me transformer . . .<sup>74</sup>

This is a very interesting point, particularly valid in Salacrou's conception of an all-consuming passage of time in which the past is genuinely non-existent. Pierre takes it one step further, so that the blame will be actually on the gendarme, if he is arrested. For the gendarme will thus be changing an innocent man, the laveur de vaisselle, into a criminal man, and thereby perpetrating an even larger crime himself. It is much like Salacrou's more abstract concept of a supremely guilty God who, in creating man, created guilt, or sin, and is therefore the very prototype of the sinner. Had the gendarme not found Pierre, there would have been one less criminal in the world.

Ainsi considérez bien votre geste: un laveur de vaisselle innocent --- le laveur de vaisselle est innocent --- tranquille, vit quelque part. On ouvre la porte; c'est un gendarme, vous. Vos exigences contraignent l'innocent à redevenir un amoureux trop exclusif, et de ce fait peut-être inquiétant. O justice, voilà bien de tes coups! Quelle responsabilité vous prenez! Mon pauvre ami! Disloquer une innocence difficilement retrouvée pour reconstituer un coupable.<sup>75</sup>

Perhaps in order to suggest that Pierre is not unique,

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<sup>74</sup>Ibid., p. 95.

<sup>75</sup>Ibid., p. 96.

but that his life and adventures are symptomatic of existence, Salacrou at this point has the accordéoniste, who has played a rather secondary role in the play, reveal his past. It is almost a parallel to Pierre's. He has not always been an accordian-player in a cheap bar.

Accordéoniste? J'ai pas toujours été employé. Tu entends! Autrefois . . . à Paris . . . J'ai été ouvrier de portières, j'étais mon maître. Un jour, de voiture, je vois descendre . . . Une femme! Ah! d'une beauté! Isabelle, peuh . . . ça ne compte pas. C'est la première fois que je la voyais, la seule fois que je l'ai vue. Et ce fut une grande passion tout de suite. Je lui dis: "Mademoiselle, il faut que je vous parle, je vous aime." Oui, je lui ai dit: je vous aime. Elle entendit: je vous aime. Elle se plaignit, comme de juste, au gérant du palace. Car je travaillais devant un palace. Je fus chassé. Adieu, mes amis les grooms, et tous les jours mes poulets et les restes de champagne. Chassé. J'ai dû me résigner; devenir accordéoniste en province. Voilà, camarades.<sup>76</sup>

Pierre had resigned himself to becoming a laveur de vaisselle in much the same way, although it was for Pierre almost a victory, rather than a defeat. He had become something, had given himself definition, even if the rôle was a very small one. Even though he had found some respite as a "follower of Isabelle" and had been able to an extent to give body to his psychological chaos in submitting completely to her will, this was still a rather ambiguous, abstract

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<sup>76</sup>Ibid., p. 97.

rôle. As dish-washer, he had moved into limits which were well defined and comfortable. He had put himself into a rôle which he might actually come to understand. But now all was lost, for he was being forced to resume his original, nebulous posture.

This latest turn of events has put Pierre into an almost whimsical mood. The complete absurdity of his situation makes it amusing, rather than tragic. While Catherine, who does not have the universal vision of Salacrou's young men, tries to convince the gendarme that he cannot arrest Pierre, Pierre himself creates an imitation railroad signal from a broom handle and a beer sign which he finds over the bar. He marches around with this signal held aloft like the cross in a religious procession and sings a marching song. No one understands the humor of his plight. They are astounded that he can take his arrest so lightly. He seems almost to have completely left reality. He speaks ecstatically of the time he will spend in his cell. For him the cell will be an even greater degree of definition. As the real world is trimmed away, narrowed down, the possibility for comprehending one's situation is greater. When Catherine tries to impress upon him the fact that he will actually be behind bars, he replies:

Les grilles? En! bien? Tu oublies le soleil.



L'ombre des grilles sur le mur blanc, quelle délicate portée musicale. J'inscrirai un air sur ces portées-là qui changera de don à chaque heure du jour, pour accompagner le voyage du soleil: triste le matin, gai le soir. DO ME RE SOL FA . . . le SOL deviendra MI . . . la grille se déplace, RE . . . DO . . .<sup>77</sup>

This attempt at controlling one's environment is no more possible than drawing real equators on a world of flux, however, for the gendarme points out that there is no window in the cell. Not to be beaten, Pierre says that merely the sun coming through the key-hole will be enough reality for him. He can place his head in its light as it shines on the wall. "Ne serais-je pas libre ainsi? La voilà bien la clef des champs."<sup>78</sup> His universe would thus be reduced to a size that he might actually be able to accept. His liberty, the freedom to place his head in a small area of light, could be utilized to its fullest. He might then be as free as possible, and perhaps escape the necessity of coping with choice.

Through a strange transformation, Pierre, the character of a play, seems to dissolve, as though through a continual diminution of his point of view, he simply ceases to exist. His place is taken by the author himself. This does not, of course, actually happen in the play, and it is still

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<sup>78</sup>Ibid., p. 99.

Pierre who speaks. But he now views the play as over, in a sense. He talks of what has been and analyzes his life and the events which have just taken place from a position well outside the events themselves. Catherine has again mentioned Isabelle.

Existe-t-elle seulement? Ah! oui, je me souviens de l'avoir vue, sur un grand cheval vert, caracoler parmi les hommes au poil ras, dans un ciel tacheté de jour et de nuit. Tenais-je le cheval par le mors? Ah! Catherine, quelle belle fin d'histoire . . . Saluons le courage mélancolique des hommes. (Il salue le marin du Tropic.) La douceur féminine. (Il salue Catherine.) L'esprit de famille. (Il salue le gendarme.) La terre qui me regarde de son oeil tout rond, pour une fois sans orbite. (Il montre la mappe-monde.) La forme silencieuse de la voix de Dieu. (Il montre le haut-parleur.) La plus grande fleur qu'on ait offerte au monde, à une femme, et qui se met à pousser de tous côtés . . . comme cette enseigne qui devient marine . . . (Il montre la caissière.) Je n'espérais pas si bien finir . . .<sup>79</sup>

Is this not the author himself explaining the symbols in his play? He even speaks in dramatic, theater terms. Catherine suddenly decides to clear the bar of all but Pierre and he is horrified. He needs an audience.

"Tu ne pouvais donc pas attendre mon départ? J'avais tout de même besoin d'une certaine mise en scène. Mes amis, vous aurez été, pour la dernière heure passé avec vous, bien maladroits."<sup>80</sup> This is a play suddenly become very aware of

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<sup>79</sup>Ibid.

<sup>80</sup>Ibid., p. 100.

itself as a play. But Salacrou is not fooled into believing that his words, once on the stage, became significant in a world he otherwise found meaningless. Pierre continues.

Les mots que je disais ne changeaient pas la face du monde ni la forme de mon nez. Ils ne contenaient rien que je puisse considérer avec sérieux, mais le bruit qu'ils faisaient, résonnait dans les petites avenues de mon inconscient; sans savoir pourquoi je me sentais mieux.<sup>81</sup>

Salacrou has, in effect walked onto his stage to thank the audience for their attention, and to point out that he realizes that what he has presented this evening is not, perhaps, terribly important. Nothing is. But he feels better for having talked about it, for having been allowed to work out some of his problems on their stage. The sailor from the Tropique replies, more to the playwright than to Pierre, "Des mots! Ah! vous savez les tresser, les mots, en faire des paniers, des paniers vides."<sup>82</sup> It is as though his characters have come to life around him and are speaking to him about their own personal creation. (This is used later by Salacrou in Interview de l'auteur,<sup>83</sup> an unusual dialogue in which the playwright does, indeed, talk

<sup>81</sup>Ibid.

<sup>82</sup>Ibid.

<sup>83</sup>Interview de l'auteur, Théâtre I, 41-45.

to his people and answer their questions about their genesis.)

Pierre/Salacrou almost seems to lose control of his interlocutors for a moment. He is pressed for more explanation, which he does not want to give. The play is over but the characters refuse to stop acting! The playwright seems to recognize his predicament. The sailor has mentioned that he puts words together like baskets. Pierre sees a rather bitter irony in this metaphor. "Comme un saint de mon pays, j'aurais posé quelquefois, dans ces paniers vides, ma tête."<sup>84</sup> This reference to St. Denis might also imply a playwright who had let his play get away from him. Even Catherine's tone seems to change, as though she were no longer talking only to Pierre. "Parle,"<sup>85</sup> she says brusquely.

L'inutilité de ce que nous allons faire, tous les deux! (Il montre le gendarme et lui-même.) Me réclamer des comptes d'une comptabilité que j'ai depuis longtemps arrêtée, moi. Oh! Je sais bien, que je sois ici . . . (Il montre la caissière) où là . . . (Il montre le gendarme). Mais tout de même: cette contrainte extérieure! Car, monsieur l'accordéoniste, une chose essentielle à mon désespoir c'est que j'en suis seul responsable. J'ai été déchiré, mais avec mes ongles. Allons, je suis sans fantaisie et sans défense.<sup>86</sup>

Catherine continues to press Pierre for answers to

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<sup>84</sup>Tour à terre, p. 100.

<sup>85</sup>Ibid.

<sup>86</sup>Ibid., pp. 100-101.

questions about their life together, and their future. Was he not happy with her, did she mean nothing, could they not run away together now? She does not understand that the play is over, that Pierre has accepted his dénouement, that it is no longer either necessary nor possible to flee. He does not want to escape, and there is no need for further discussion. "J'ai vécu près de toi. Tu m'as vu vivre sans mensonges. Un oui ou non ne changera pas notre vie passée. La vie n'a plus besoin de commentaires."<sup>87</sup> Pierre wants simply to disentangle himself from the cumbersome remains of a former existence which is no longer valid for him. Salacrou has said what he wanted to say, has caused Pierre to play out his role, and now wants to stop. But it is no easier on the stage than in real life. The personnages to whom he has given life will not let him off so easily. Pierre will not be allowed to find escape in his prison cell, and Salacrou will not be allowed to bury his anguish there with his protagonist.

The gendarme, who had been asleep during the last minutes, awakens and prepares to take Pierre away. Pierre is quite willing, but Catherine cannot let him go. At this point there seems to be an almost classically tragic force

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<sup>87</sup>Ibid., p. 101.

driving her to not let things end simply and, for Pierre, happily. She continues to complicate the situation. Pierre feels that he is losing. "Quelle séparation manquée; inutilement encombrée de mots sérieux!"<sup>88</sup> One can see Catherine moving inexorably toward what she must do. She reasons that had Pierre left with Isabelle he would not have been caught. From that she moves to condemning herself for his capture, then to feeling compelled to free him, when the one thing he wants the least is freedom.

As the tension of the closing scene mounts, the accordion-player leaves "Et quand les femmes se mêlent de notre vie . . ."<sup>89</sup> The stage is clearing for the final tragedy. The gendarme starts to put handcuffs on Pierre but Pierre says that he will cause no trouble. It is Catherine who becomes menacing, and because of her threatening words that the handcuffs are finally put on Pierre. Pierre tries to calm Catherine, telling her that there will be other lovers, that she will soon forget him. But for several moments Catherine has not taken notice of Pierre; it is only the gendarme who interests her. One can feel

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<sup>88</sup>Ibid., p. 102.

<sup>89</sup>Ibid., p. 103.

her attention being fixed on the policeman, and nothing Pierre says can now reach her.

Then, as the gendarme starts to lead Pierre out of the bar, Catherine lunges forward and stabs him with Pierre's carving knife, left lying on a nearby table. Pierre's reaction is one of horror, then resignation. "Tu n'as donc rien compris."<sup>90</sup> What she had not understood was that Pierre was not operating on the same level of consciousness as she. She speaks of love and duty, and these things are meaningless for Pierre. Nor could she have understood that he desired nothing more than to lose his apparent freedom in order to gain that freedom from necessity of choice which he would have found in prison. Prison was another Isabelle for Pierre, another dominant order in which he could have lost himself. She did not understand that she played no real fundamental rôle in Pierre's life. When she falls at his feet crying "I love you" he is only disgusted.

Ah! non! assez! Qu'attend-on de moi? Toujours des larmes et du sang où je pose mes regards? (Il butte contre le signal.) Ah! au moins de vraies fleurs . . . (Les mains toujours enchaînées, il va prendre le bouquet de la caissière, le respire, le jette à terre.) A quoi bon résister? Et ne pas prendre l'habitude du malheur et des catastrophes?<sup>91</sup>

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<sup>90</sup>Ibid., p. 105.

<sup>91</sup>Ibid.

He now accepts the fact that he must leave the bar and disappear again into the world. His life can never change. But why had they not left him alone? Again he speaks in purely theatrical terms. "Je t'ai pourtant offert en spectacle ma vie pendant trois heures . . . Et tu n'es pas déjà lasse? Et la tête ne te tourne pas encore de dégoût? Tu riais, tu pleures, et ne veux pas me quitter?"<sup>92</sup> He is saying, in effect, the play is over, why do you not let me go? But Salacrou has created characters who have come to life, and they will not easily cease to exist. It is Pierre's play, however, Salacrou's play, and the other characters have not understood that they were to have been mere foils for Pierre's emotional masturbation. Catherine has acted as though she were real. "Mais cette histoire où tu entres de force, n'est pas une histoire d'amour, ni de femmes."<sup>93</sup> One hears almost a whining tone in Pierre's voice.

He will not leave with Catherine. She tried to plan their escape, but he refuses. She suggests that he had said that he wanted to love, perhaps if they left together he might come to love her. "J'ai trop l'expérience de ma vie pour espérer attraper le bonheur en la poursuivant sur des

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<sup>92</sup>Ibid.

<sup>93</sup>Ibid.



bateaux ou dans des trains . . . L'amour on le surprend . . .  
c'est la rencontre inattendue au coin d'une rue."<sup>94</sup>

For a moment the play almost starts over again at the beginning. The sailor from the Tropique calls Pierre lâche for wanting to leave Catherine when she has killed for him. Pierre admits that he is, indeed, a coward, "mais pas comme vous l'entendez. A un certain moment de ma vie, j'ai voulu . . . c'est inutile."<sup>95</sup> Catherine glimpses a moment's hope. "Tu me connais mal, essaie . . . Pourquoi es-tu venu ici?"<sup>96</sup> Pierre is past falling into this trap which would put him back at the beginning of their relationship: "Ne commence pas la série des pourquoi, où nous mènerait-elle?"<sup>97</sup>

Pierre turns to the gendarme, lying dead on the floor, and says, almost wistfully

Il est devenu encore plus patient. Il rêvait accroché au signal. Contre quelles choses oubliées ou nouvelles s'endort-il maintenant? Peut-être voyage-t-il dans l'entourage d'un Dieu. Il nous regarde! Non, ne ferme pas ses yeux. Ces yeux-là sont comme du bois mort où ne poussent plus les fleurs. Quoi? Il rôde autour de son grand sabre? Oui, et il ne sent pas

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<sup>94</sup>Ibid., p. 106.

<sup>95</sup>Ibid.

<sup>96</sup>Ibid.

<sup>97</sup>Ibid.

l'odeur de son sang. Il ne voit plus sa moustache, --- c'est une moustache de cadavre. Il rôde ici et nous traverse sans nous voir . . . Mains et menottes sont pour lui transparentes comme du beau verre bien lavé. Il revient se chercher et ne se trouve plus. Il est délivré de cette réalité que les hommes soutiennent de leur vie difficile.<sup>98</sup>

In death the gendarme has found perhaps what Pierre has been seeking. But Salacrou's young heroes are developed beyond the necessity of killing themselves, as had the Young Man of Boule de verre. There is still little hope of finding a solution to life, but the terrible search must go on, for that is all there is. It is a frightening prospect for Pierre.

Je pense à l'émoi de retrouver encore les rues, la vie du dehors, à ce premier contact avec . . . (Il se trouve entre le signal et le couteau.) Ce signal et ce couteau! et moi, entre ces deux larrons. (Il rit.) Mais je vous dis que j'ai peur du premier réverbère que je vais rencontrer. De quel oeil borgne me regardera-t-il? Il me semble que je ne sais plus même marcher. (Il sort, les mains enchaînées.)<sup>99</sup>

The sailor from the Tropique speaks the final tragic line of the play: "Ma pauvre Catherine. Cachons ce cadavre inutile."<sup>100</sup> Useless to them now, and also a useless murder, since Catherine has still lost Pierre. The play ends on a note of utter desolation.

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<sup>98</sup>Ibid., p. 107-108.

<sup>100</sup>Ibid.

<sup>99</sup>Ibid.

The play was, of course, doomed to critical defeat. When it was first produced by Lugné-Poé on the 24th of December, 1925, it was a disaster. Salacrou describes it in military terms:

Les grands généraux napoléoniens disent qu'on n'est pas certain de la victoire que le lendemain, en apprenant la fuite de l'ennemi. Eh! bien, moi, le soir de ma générale, j'étais heureux, parce qu'on applaudissait. Mais le lendemain, avec les journaux et la recette, je compris le désastre, --- l'ennemi n'avait pas fui . . . J'ai eu depuis d'autres "presses" mauvaises ou bonnes, --- et j'ai veilli. Mais je plaindrai toujours le jeune auteur sans amis, --- et qui se fera éreinter la première fois comme je l'ai été --- quand les journaux vous arrivent d'heure en heure, à midi, à quatre heures, à six heures, à sept heures, le lendemain, et le surlendemain, --- tous, avec une légèreté compréhensible, mais cruelle, riant de ce que vous avez aimé.<sup>101</sup>

It is not difficult to see why Tour à terre is not a viable piece of dramatic literature. Its value comes not from action and words on the stage, visible to an audience, but from the implications it allows one to draw about the playwright and his craft. The would not have been possible to an audience viewing the play, nor indeed should it have been. A play must ultimately stand alone on the stage and succeed on its own merits. The audience does not have the leisure to reflect, to weigh, to compare and analyze. Its reactions are immediate and irreversible. In fact, to read

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<sup>101</sup>Ibid., p. 197.

a play and to see one are two entirely different things, and must be treated in entirely different manners. As an immediate event, Tour à terre simply does not hold together. It is neither surrealistic enough to astound the senses and become pure spectacle, nor realistic enough to convince the audience that it is dealing with reality, with important human problems, if, indeed, it is.

There can be no question about the play's personal significance for Salacrou, however. It is a play in which Salacrou takes another step toward becoming God. It is as God that he functions as a playwright, as God that he creates his characters. He is not yet a perfect God, not yet completely in control, as we have seen in this play, but he is creating a universe of his people, a universe in which his word is law. Not being able to explain man's world and the mystery of human life, he is beginning to create a microcosm of his own in which he can answer the questions of his creations. This is clear in a number of places in these first few plays.

In the "Interview de l'auteur par lui-même" which Salacrou added to the collected works, and which had been published prior to the production of Tour à terre, he speaks with the characters of his first four plays as though they were real people. This "Interview" will be discussed in

detail after the chapter dealing with le Pont de l'Europe, since it concerns characters of that play which had already been written, but there are several aspects of it which are of interest at this point.

The Young Man of Casseur d'assiettes had seen himself as the creation of God's nightmares: "Nous ne sommes que les créations d'un cauchemar divin."<sup>102</sup> The Young Man of Boule de verre had repeated this summation of man's origin: "Nous ne sommes que le frémissement d'une grande chose qui nous est étrangère."<sup>103</sup> All of Salacrou's protagonists have viewed themselves as the wretched creations of some incomprehensible god, and we have seen that as a metaphor on Salacrou's conception of the creation of man, or the creation of God by man. Now in this dialogue between Salacrou and his people, the circle is closed, and the equation of Salacrou-becoming-God is formulated. Pierre, of Tour à terre, argues momentarily with the playwright and then, when he is told that the characters of the plays are not really very important after all, stumbles into a revelation. He says "Comment: Moi, dont le sang n'est fait que de ta

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<sup>102</sup>Le Casseur d'assiettes, Theatre I, 33.

<sup>103</sup>la Boule de verre, p. 26.

détresse . . ."<sup>104</sup> He uses almost exactly the same terms to describe his relationship to Salacrou that Salacrou's other characters had used to speak of their relationship with God. Salacrou is, indeed, the God of his own theatrical universe, the theater being perhaps the only literary genre wherein the artist would be able to watch his creations live as though they were real people living in a real world, and thereby making the playwright a real God.

It is in Tour à terre that we first see Salacrou the creator, the first time that he actively seems to become a man using the theater as a vehicle for self-discovery. But we also have seen that the imitation life of the theater can be as risky as the "reality" of human existence, for Salacrou-as-God lost control of his universe. The people he created became real people and when the playwright had tried to end his play happily for his protagonist, himself, he could not do it. His characters rebelled, just as do those around "real" man. One feels that he would have liked for Pierre to go to jail, to find his solitude and his definition. But the complexities of his life refused to unravel themselves. Catherine refused to react rationally. The pleadings

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<sup>104</sup>"Interview de l'auteur par lui-même," Théâtre I, 41. Italics mine.

of Pierre were to no avail and he was forced to continue his wandering, for what he was seeking is impossible to find in life, and is therefore impossible to find in the theater if the playwright is honest.

Pierre's attempt to find escape from himself was a self-defeating circle and, to an extent, Salacrou's escape into the theater will work in the same manner. Pierre attached himself to Isabelle for the avowed purpose of losing himself in his devotion to her glory. He has said the he hoped to "substituer à ma volonté dévorée par la solitude, sa volonté."<sup>105</sup> Like Salacrou's other young protagonists he has involved himself in order to come to know himself, to uncover his definition. But for Pierre the act began to out-weigh the goal. He became enamoured of his efforts in Isabelle's behalf and was in spite of himself turned once again inward upon his own personality. This is clear in the incident with the railroad signal. "Peut-être ai-je compris ce dernier jour où je fus si prodigue de moi-même que je n'avais plus rien à espérer de vous . . ."<sup>106</sup> The escape into Isabelle's domination had gone full circle and Pierre was not performing such splendid stunts that he

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<sup>105</sup>Tour à terre, p. 83.

<sup>106</sup>Ibid., p. 74.

could no longer ignore himself. His very brilliance had forced him to again accept the responsibility for his life.

Salacrou has perhaps turned to the theater in much the same way that Pierre submitted his life to the domination of Isabelle, and he has also found problems there. He has created additional persons with whom he must deal, and he has forced himself to look even more closely at his life. But Pierre is not a perfect representation of the playwright in this sense, for Salacrou also found in the theater a chance for existence. Where Pierre's submission was rather passive, Salacrou's was active, positive and, on the whole, fruitful.



## CHAPTER V

### LE PONT DE L'EUROPE: THE DISCOVERY

It has been evident that Salacrou was going through a period of genesis during which he established the main themes and directions of his theatrical orientation. He was discovering both himself and the potential of his craft. In his earliest plays he was probing, questioning, suggesting solutions which were all perhaps rather immature and romantic. He had investigated the mysteries of life, death, time, the possibility of salvation through love, and, ultimately, the difficulties of living authentically, of becoming, or defining oneself. It was only in Tour à terre that he seemed to become aware of his rôle as a playwright, to begin to manipulate his characters as God, and to construct more complex situations which were the reflections of reality. It is in Tour à terre that he became more confident, and competent, as a craftsman.

Le Pont de l'Europe, Salacrou's next play, is the culminating event in this formative period, and will be the

principal play in the present study. It is the play in which all the themes established individually in the earlier plays are brought together and woven into the single, central theme, "Comment serai-je un homme comme les autres?" It is the play in which Salacrou manifests himself to an absolute degree. There can be no doubt about the identity of the central character, King Jérôme I<sup>er</sup>. It is Salacrou, the man and the playwright, for this is a play about a play. Its theme is the very function of playwriting, and in it Salacrou is clearly visible, pulling the strings and making his characters act out his own life for his own edification. It is in this play that the function of art in the life of the artist is of prime importance.

Le Pont de l'Europe was written during the Spring of 1925 in Normandy. Salacrou had left Tour à terre with Lugné-Poé and was determined to write a genuine three act play. He was twenty-five years old and none of his plays had ever been performed.

Even the stage directions at the opening of Pont de l'Europe suggest the degree to which Salacrou was coming to see himself as a writer of plays, as a theatrical person. Although the directions themselves are quite insignificant, it is the first time that Salacrou seems to conceive of his play as being produced in a real theater before a real

audience. In the earlier plays he had simply sketched in the directions for scenery, and the play began. In this play, however, he indicates:

Frapper les trois coups.  
La salle, la scène: tout au noir  
Lever le rideau.<sup>1</sup>

Except for the note that the stage should be dark, these directions are completely superfluous. It is obviously unnecessary to point out that the curtain should be raised at the opening of the play, or that the traditional three blows should be struck, or the auditorium darkened. This is Salacrou, at last a genuine playwright, directing the operations, all the operations, in his theater. One senses his delight.

For a moment the stage remains dark, and the silence is an absolute contrast to the frantic scenes which typify the opening moments of Salacrou's earlier plays. This does not necessarily indicate increased skill on the part of the dramatist, but it is a departure from the pattern that had dominated le Casseur d'assiettes, the pieces à lire, and to an extent Tour à terre. One continually feels in this play that Salacrou no longer is forced to rely on stage effect

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<sup>1</sup>Le Pont de l'Europe, Théâtre I, 113.

and an almost obsessive amount of physical action to sustain his ideas. It is a mark of maturity that in this play Salacrou no longer seems driven to self-consciously smother his ideas in outbursts of poetic lyricism and surrealistic stage business.

In the darkness of the stage, one hears someone enter and walk around. A candle is lit and le Ministre stands alone, furtively looking around him. The decor is obviously that of a large room in an old castle. Around the walls one can see leaning backdrops for a theater, and on a chair, a king's crown and mantle. The Ministre picks up the crown and tries it on. It is a real crown. "Je te touche, douce couronne: Ah! une couronne véritable, lourde, que des rois portèrent avec des peuples assemblés autour! . . . Ah! misère! la traîner dans ce théâtre . . ."<sup>2</sup>

This is the first of a series of references to the theater. Since the room represented on stage is itself a stage for a play within a play, and since most of the actors in this play are indeed actors, there is a continuing confusion between reality, that apparent in Salacrou's play, and the unreality of the play which is presented by the King

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<sup>2</sup>Ibid.

on his stage. The play combines several levels of reality, then, and there is an extremely complex interweaving of these levels of reality so that one is never absolutely certain on which level Salacrou is operating. In this simple opening speech, for example, it has not yet been established that the room in which the Ministre is standing is to be a theater, although the scenery standing around the walls might suggest this, and one cannot be certain that he is not speaking to the audience of the Odéon, where Salacrou's play was produced. He might be saying that it is a shame that kings must be brought into a theater in order to serve as characters in a common play. As the play progresses, however, it becomes clear that he is so covetous of the crown that he finds it disgraceful that it be left lying around as he has found it.

As the Ministre is admiring himself in a mirror, now wearing both the crown and the king's robes, two others enter the stage: le Sous-Préfet and l'Académicien. A short argument about their honor is interrupted by the Concierge, who climbs out of the prompter's box and announces that he has something important to tell them. The three immediately reveal a great deal about their motivations:

LE MINISTRE, à part --- Il m'espionnait?

L'ACADEMICIEN --- La Reine t'a parlé de moi?

LE SOUS-PREFET --- On nous renvoie?<sup>3</sup>

The Ministre is afraid that the Concierge has seen him parading around in the crown and cloak and that he is going to betray him; the Académicien suggests that there is something between himself and the Queen, or at the least that he would like for there to be something; and the Sous-Préfet is interested simply in holding onto his position. These are rôles which they will maintain throughout the play.

The news that the Concierge has uncovered is that the King has invited a group of actors and actresses from Paris to present a play before him. And even more astonishingly, the King himself has written the play that they are going to present. It is the play of his life, and no one will attend the presentation but himself. The ministers discuss the implications of this, and its potential effect on their positions. They fear that the King might be planning to send them away. They speak of the "predictions" and begin a gradual revelation of the King's past, of how he happened to become King.

Il est possible que le roi, pour frapper un grand coup sur l'esprit de son peuple naïf, s'ingénie à lui rappeler avec des gestes d'images, cette invention très politique des prédictions de son arrivée.

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<sup>3</sup>Ibid., p. 114.

Il est plus malin que je ne pensais.<sup>4</sup>

We learn that the King, like the Ministers, was originally French, and that his ascent to the throne was rather unusual. He had come unexpectedly to this small, Eastern European country and the Ministers were somehow involved in his being chosen King.

Sa Majesté est folle. Et nous sommes des fous de laisser ce roi de hasard sur son trône. Réfléchissez, mes frères: il vient d'où nous venons, de France; pays où il vécu aussi mal que nous. S'il a réussi ici, à l'ombre des Karpathes, c'est que sa qualité de Français étonna ces populations ignorantes. Du courage, nous sommes Français, que diable!<sup>5</sup>

They decide that something must be done and the four crouch in a corner of the stage to plot the overthrow of the king. After some moments of indecision, during which the Académicien admits that he loves the Queen, the Ministre takes charge and announces his plan.

J'arrange tout; voici mon plan; il est simple: du calme, avant tout, du calme! Ensuite, des réalisations! Toi (A l'Académicien) tu séduis la reine! Toi (au Sous-Préfet) tu maîtrises l'armée! Toi (au Concierge) tu t'empares du palais! Et moi du pouvoir; voilà. Qu'en dites-vous mes poussins?<sup>6</sup>

They each agree that it is a marvelous plan, since each will

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<sup>4</sup>Ibid., p. 115.

<sup>5</sup>Ibid., p. 116.

<sup>6</sup>Ibid., p. 117.

get that particular slice of the cake that he most wants.

Only the Concierge is a little nervous. He knows that they are being overheard. "Oh! (Il montre le public.) Que penseraient de moi tous ces gens-là qui nous écoutent?"<sup>7</sup>

It is very strange that the four Ministers are at this particular point aware of themselves as actors in a play to which the audience, the real audience, is witness. There seems to be no reason for Salacrou to have done this. It is possible that he wanted to involve the audience in the action of the play, to set the King's play off, or perhaps to further confuse the relationships between stage reality and absolute reality. In any event it passes almost unnoticed here and the play continues as though it were not aware of itself as a play, at least for the moment.

The plotting stops suddenly when the King is heard approaching and the Ministers have to flee, crawling off the stage on all fours. This opening scene might have been taken from comic opera. All the Ministers are comic characters, and, indeed, in the cast of Personnages Salacrou describes each as Bouffon bédonnant, Bouffon efflanqué, Bouffon gras, Bouffon goutteux. Their plot to overthrow

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<sup>7</sup>Ibid., p. 116.



the King is magnificently simplistic. They even know that they are only clowns. The Concierge, during this opening scene, suggests that perhaps the best thing for them to do would be to flee, since things are getting complicated, and in fact he has an alternate plan. They could all return to Paris and get a job in a music hall. He even has a title in mind for their act: "LES QUATRE CLOWNS DU ROI PREDIT."<sup>8</sup> The first scene does, however, begin the play's exposition and the buffonery of the Ministers is a clear contrast to the King when he enters.

The King is not an old man. Salacrou describes him in the stage directions as simple "Jerome I<sup>er</sup>, Le Roi, Légèrement boiteux, 27 ans."<sup>9</sup> One familiar with Salacrou's earlier plays is immediately struck, however, by the comparative maturity of this protagonist. He is, indeed, the King, and he uses his power. He is perhaps awed by this newly acquired state, and also not unaware of the fact that his ascension to the throne has been less than realistic. Turning on the spotlights of his theater he proclaims:

Frolez ces routes de lumière! jaillissement de ma volonté! clartés luxueuses, indépendantes de l'étalage du ciel et de son jeu de boules. Enfin, artificielle dans ce pays dont vous me fîtes roi,

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<sup>8</sup>Ibid.

<sup>9</sup>Ibid., p. 112.

madame! mais assez rude, où les mouches sautent  
des fleurs au fumier, puis sur nos personnes royales.  
Une lumière qui ne se pose pas sur les arbres, à moins  
que je n'y consente. Créateur . . . Puissance divine  
. . . Oui, je sais, l'apparence? Mais la réalité de  
l'apparence, c'est tout de même une réalité de l'apparence, c'est tout de même une réalité. Autrefois . . .<sup>10</sup>

It is evident that Salacrou is again employing the images and objects which have already been used by his earlier protagonists to describe the world and their actions in it. Glass balls, lights, butterflies now become flies, all have appeared before. But now the protagonist is the master of these things, he is himself the creator. The lights shine only if he orders it. And what if this light is only artificial? Even the appearance of reality is a reality, and is it any less real than reality? This is a question which will obsess the King, and Salacrou, as the play unfolds, for when the King is involved in the play concerning his past, he is constantly forced to choose his reality from the present and from the past as it is re-enacted by the players, who, to make the situation even more confused, are the actual people from the King's past, acting their own roles.

This is also an interesting question for a playwright, for Salacrou. If appearance is, indeed, as real as

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<sup>10</sup>Ibid., p. 117.

reality, then the play is life. The playwright can produce genuine reality on the stage. This is what the King will attempt to do in his play, and what Salacrou has tried to do in all of his. It will be interesting to see how successful each is.

The Queen and Korça, the King's confidential secretary, have entered with the King. When the King seemingly begins to talk about his past, "Autrefois . . .," the Queen stops him. "Sire, les prédictions exigeaient qu'après le Sacre, vous n'eussiez plus d'autre passé que le passe de nos rois."<sup>11</sup> Having arrived unknown in this country and having been made king, as the result of predictions of his arrival by the High Priest, the King has had to renounce his past, which has remained a secret to his people. This will continually plague the King, for he knows that his rôle as King is almost a fantasy, and that his real life is the life of the past. If he is forced to renounce this reality of the past, he will cease to exist, except in the fantasy life of his present state. This will be another choice which the King will be forced to face during the development of this play.

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<sup>11</sup>Ibid.

Enfin, Korça, n'ai-je pas le droit de dire que cette lumière électrique, rassemblée en faisceau, qui, la nuit, sur la terrasse, joue à la lune, m'est ici un luxe, comme le serait sous les voûtes du métro de Paris une petite fleur parfumée qui pousserait tout à coup, sur la tache verte d'une affiche et qu'on pourrait cueillir en passant?<sup>12</sup>

Korça, who is always sympathetic to the King's problems, asks him to continue what he had been about to say about his past.

Précisément, si cette petite fleur miraculeuse me touche, c'est parce qu'autrefois, j'ai eu envie de la cueillir, autrefois au temps de ma vie misérable, sous les arceaux du métro, poussé comme une boule mal faite et qui roulait en boitant, dans des suspensions de poussières. Sais-tu bien que dans le métro, à Paris, tout est artificiel? Les murs qui sont en fer, la lumière qui n'est pas du ciel, les voitures qui marchent sans chevaux et même sans vapeur. L'air qu'on respire est retouché des produits chimiques. Les escaliers sont truqués, marchent tout seuls; et dans les couloirs, on rencontre des épiciers automatiques. Imagines-tu le miracle de ma petite fleur des champs tendant ses couleurs parfumées dans cette ferraille enfouie? Evidemment, autour du château, une fleur dans l'herbe, c'est insignifiant, c'est même un peu agaçant!<sup>13</sup>

The contrast between reality and appearance is again the question in this speech. The King is equating the light which he has turned on for his pleasure with the flower growing unexpectedly in the Métro in Paris. Both are elements existing in an unusual environment. But the

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<sup>12</sup>Ibid., p. 118.

<sup>13</sup>Ibid.

significance of this equation is unclear. The flower is obviously a natural, real thing, in a milieu of appearance, of the unreality of the man-made Métro. Is the spotlight, then, the opposite, a man-made thing in the reality of the King's situation? This does not seem particularly logical, since he realizes that his situation is highly improbable, although it is real. It is, rather, the King's ability to turn on the light which pleases him here, and not the light itself. He is now in a position to cause things to happen, to create light, for example. He has also reached a period in his life in which he wants to function, to accept the challenges and opportunities which life presents. This was not always the case, for he had not picked the unexpected flower when he found it in the Métro, just as he had not taken advantage of many situations in which he had found himself, as his play will illustrate. One of the major themes of this play is, in fact, the attempt to retrace the steps of life and not avoid situations and actions which had been avoided when the originally confronted the King. And, on a higher level, it can be seen that this is one of the central reasons why Salacrou wrote plays, the desire to re-evaluate the past and to grasp events, to function where timidity or fear had denied action. And these

comments on the rose/spotlight analogy are the King's preface to this theme.

There is noise in the courtyard and the King hopes that it indicates the arrival of the actors from Paris. He is afraid that they will have been attacked by rebellious subjects, but Korça assures him that they have a strong escort and that the part of the country through which they will pass is under control. But he does point out to the King that something must be done about the family of rebels who lives in the Blue Forest, for they have refused to abandon their homes as they have been ordered to do. It is especially important that decisive action be taken quickly, for the French government is on the verge of recognizing the King's rule and this recognition would be less likely if there were to be an uprising of the people against the King.

The King suggests that one might simply burn the houses of the recalcitrant subjects and the matter would be solved. Both Korça and the Queen are surprised at the cruelty of this decision and beg him not to order it done. The King is clearly interested only in his forthcoming play and chooses the simplest solution to his problems. He is almost afraid not to give in to this first idea, for fear that it will be another situation in which he hesitated to

act and then lost the opportunity to act forever. He feels that he must give in to every whim for fear of becoming impotent. "Mais je ne veux pas résister à mes désirs. Trop de regrets d'un passé que je n'ai pas su épuiser au jour le jour, m'obsèdent."<sup>14</sup>

Even the grotesque results of his decision will not change his mind. The Queen tells him "Pensez-vous à l'odeur de la chair brûlée?"<sup>15</sup> but the thought does not bother the King "J'y penserai cette nuit, en cherchant une foi qui puisse faire mourir."<sup>16</sup> Several times in the play the King repeats this idea. Similar to Salacrou's young men who wanted to find something or someone which could engender love within themselves, the King often regrets his inability to find a cause for which he could die. He cannot become involved in anything violently enough to be willing to die for it.

Several officers enter to bring messages to the King on various topics. An officer has been killed in a minor skirmish near the frontier, the Romanian government would like to discuss trade relations, a number of telegrams have

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<sup>14</sup>Ibid., p. 120.

<sup>15</sup>Ibid.

<sup>16</sup>Ibid.

arrived congratulating the King on the third birthday of his son. None of these interest the King, and, in fact, the telegrams make him a little sad. He has lost interest in being King, although there is no indication that he would be willing to give it up, and he is lonely in his powerful rôle.

Oui, et je donne des ordres à des généraux; je n'oublie pas le grade; autrement, l'émotion ne serait pas absolument nouvelle. Et pourtant . . . quelque part, sous un toit, tranquille autant qu'un autre homme, je puis entendre bondir, rouler s'éparpiller dans le monde, les phrases qu'il me plaît de penser. Vingt-cinq lettres d'alphabet, légères, bariolées comme des drapeaux, sautent dans ma bouche, s'y mettent en rang, se saluent, se reconnaissent, s'accrochent et vont, petites folles, faire des miracles dans le monde, ici mettre le feu, et là, tirer des révérences.<sup>17</sup>

The complications of his position have also become overwhelming for the King. He is seeking both the power to handle his affairs and also the simplicity of purpose of his peasants. "Si seulement je pouvais être un homme dans mes chaussures. Ah! qu'on me donne l'âme d'un partisan, celle du dernier de mes soldats, qui est prêt à se faire tuer pour moi."<sup>18</sup> It is this same attitude which causes the King several times during the play to have a greater respect for those enraged rebels who are trying to bring down his regime than he has for his own cause.

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<sup>17</sup>Ibid., p. 121.

<sup>18</sup>Ibid., p. 122.



Korga is quite different from the King. He is the perfect confidant, calm, admiring, careful and balanced.

Votre Majesté sait que je me contente de mon sort. Je me fais une raison de ne pas connaître ce que je ne peux pas connaître. On m'a dit qu'aux Français, il n'est rien d'impossible; je constate l'impossibilité, moi, et m'en arrange. Je mange bien, je dors bien, et je mourrai comme je suis né, sans demander à Dieu pourquoi, et avec la même tranquillité, du moins je l'espère. C'est tout ce que je souhaite.<sup>19</sup>

This is the first time that there has appeared in a play of Salacrou's a character who is so obviously the opposite of the basic Salacrou protagonist, the first time that there has been someone to balance the bitter anguish of the central character. Korga will constantly represent normality, common sense, in short, good solid bourgeois values. He is by no means an ignorant man. He has simply not been cursed with Salacrou's restless, questioning, universal vision. But he does have considerable insight into what goes on around him. He has sensed that there is something in the King's almost obsessive interest in the players and the play they are to perform which goes beyond the bounds of simple amusement. When he asks the King if the players are coming for something more than to distract the court, the King replies "Je tente une aventure plus dangereuse qu'une

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<sup>19</sup> Ibid.

guerre folle."<sup>20</sup>

He is, indeed, going to attempt something dangerous. He has written a play in which the actors will ritually re-enact the King's past. There are several dangers inherent in such an undertaking. The principal danger seems to be that he might well find out more about himself than he would like to know. He is, in effect, throwing himself into the open. He will see the events of his past re-lived and will be forced to judge himself in an almost dispassionate manner. He is afraid of what he will see, but he is also tempted by the possibility for beginning again, for re-working his past and perhaps operating differently than he had. There is also an obvious danger in this potential. When he begins his attempt to re-work the past, he will necessarily lose his perspective on the present. If he is successful in re-entering his past, what of the present? Again the question of reality arises. The King knows that his present rôle borders on fantasy, that the reality of his life as a man is his past. But the past, in Salacrou's system, is not real, and therefore it is only the present, the rôle as King, which is concrete. And the ultimate

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<sup>20</sup>Ibid.

complication, can the past, as played by the actors, become as real as the present? It is only if this happens that the King can profit from his play, and it is clear that if it does happen, the King might be destroyed.

It is fascinating to notice the similarity between the role of the King in le Pont de l'Europe and Salacrou's own youth up to the moment of choosing a career in the theater. This similarity will become more and more striking as we learn more of the King, and he can be seen as the final stage in a development through which Salacrou has himself become his own central character. Salacrou is writing le Pont de l'Europe for exactly the same reasons that the King insists on having his play presented, by the very people who had been active in his own life. Both want to watch themselves live, to reconstruct the past and attempt to understand themselves. It might well be the King, rather than Salacrou, speaking of his first encounter with the theater: "Je fus ébloui par l'amour, par la mort, par cette possibilité mystérieuse de recommencer sa vie quand on s'était trompé."<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>21</sup>Cited by Rene Clair, Comédies et Commentaires (Paris: Gallimard, 1959) and quoted in Mignon, op. cit., p. 22. Italics mine.

Once again there is noise in the court, again the King believes that his comédiens have arrived, and he is suddenly frightened at the thought that he is soon to be an author. He intends to have the play performed that very evening. The Queen is surprised at the swiftness and disturbed that the King seems upset. He points out that anguish is his natural state.

N'ayez aucun regret, Madame. Quand j'arrivai, voilà quatre ans déjà, je fuyais le monde en boitant; j'ai naturellement l'âme désolée. Sachez que partout où je marche, je voudrais que le ciel tonnât pour m'assurer de mon existence. Ai-je sur la terre plus de poids que le parfum d'une fleur qu'on jette?<sup>22</sup>

It is perhaps redundant to point out the degree to which this last speech is like those of all the previous Salacrou heroes . . . "pour m'assurer de mon existence."

The King is again disappointed, for it is still not the comédiens who are arriving. But this time it is someone significant who enters, someone, like the actors, from the King's past. The Minister Plenipotentiary of France is introduced and much to the King's surprise an old friend appears. The King had sent most of his retenue away so that he might receive the Minister in a somewhat off-handed manner, to indicate both his superiority and his lack of

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<sup>22</sup>le Pont de l'Europe, p. 124.

interest in the whole business. Now, when he discovers that he knows the Minister, he wants to impress him with his position.

Gabriel Nérac! Ma cour! Allons, Korça, je veux ma cour! La reine, mes gardes, mes bouffons, mes musiciens, mes officiers. Allons! Ne doit-on pas recevoir Monsieur avec les honneurs dûs à son rang d'Excellence plénipotentiaire de la République française.<sup>23</sup>

He is a little less impressed when he learns that Nérac was actually no more than a petty clerk in the Ministry of Agriculture who had been chosen Ambassador to the King's country because they had been friends in the past. France, it seems, is quite interested in establishing relations with the King and it was felt that Nérac would have a better chance of influencing the King's decision. It is Nérac, however, who finally describes for the audience the King's arrival in this country and his strange ascent to the throne. The King asks what they are saying about him in the papers of Paris.

Figure-toi, bon de bon, qu'ils ont raconté qu'au moment où tes amis ne te virent plus à Paris, c'est que tu étais parti . . . Eh! oui, mais parti à l'aveuglette sur les routes, comme un mendiant, que tu as marché seul, que tu as traversé toute l'Europe, même centrale, enfin tous les chemins que je viens de faire aussi, moi, mais toi avec tes pieds.

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<sup>23</sup>Ibid., p. 125.

Evidemment, ça t'a bien réussi, mais pourquoi es-tu parti sans donner signe de vie à tes amis? . . .

Je reviens: Et un soir, au détour de la route qui mène en cette ville, voilà que tu serais tombé tout de go dans une assemblée de peuple qui poussait des cris: "Le voici! Le voici!" On n'attendait que toi, pardi! Le Roi était mort et le pays divisé. La Fille du Roi, isolée dans la guerre civile, gémissait et le Grand-Prêtre venait de prédire qu'un Etranger, quelque chose comme un Messie, arriverait ce jour-là, par la route, en mendiant, qui épouserait la fille et ceindrait la couronne! Ah! Ah! Crois-tu que les journalistes exagèrent? Dis-moi, comment es-tu devenu roi?<sup>24</sup>

As bizarre as this story is, the King cannot deny it, for it is, indeed, how he came to be King. It is easy to see how the King might have some doubts about the validity of his kingship and about the reality of his present existence. As he and Nérac begin to talk about old friends in Paris the King's neurotic feelings about his past are obvious.

Mes amis? Des amis? et tu es venu me renifler jusqu'ici? Mais, oui, moi! Regarde, me voici, tête-moi, palpe-moi. Tiens, ma chair est là qui bouge: elle respire. C'est toujours moi. Ah! Ah! Tu recules, lâche! Mon corps était couvert de vos oreilles qui m'écoutaient vivre comme des sangsues. M'avez-vous assez torturé avec vos ricanements? Ah! ça, je suis fou? Mais oui, j'étouffe! De l'air . . . Je veux de l'air du ciel! . . .<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>24</sup>Ibid., pp. 126-127.

<sup>25</sup>Ibid., p. 127.

This initial bravado is not quite convincing. One must feel that the King is protesting too much. When he insists that Nérac look at him closely to be convinced that he is in fact his old friend, the King seems to be trying to prove to himself, rather than to Nérac, that he is the same. Suddenly he becomes frightened, for he is not certain who he is, and pushes the ambassador away. Close inspection always forces the King into a frenzied retreat from knowledge of himself.

When the Ministers enter to be introduced to Nérac the King presents them as his buffoons and Nérac replies: "Votre Majesté a fait beaucoup parler d'Elle, à Paris, avec ses bouffons modernes . . ." <sup>26</sup> Frequently throughout this play Salacrou will make apparently gratuitous remarks about social conventions or institutions which do not seem to play an integral part in the play's structure, but which are amusing and often quite clever. This might be seen as an increasing freedom on the author's part to play with his craft, to amuse himself, to relax in his métier.

After a short scene in which the Ministers again discuss their plot, the King is left alone on the stage and

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<sup>26</sup>Ibid., p. 128.

Salacrou offers his first soliloquy, for the first time his protagonist stands alone on the stage speaking his words, unsupported by the noise of a music hall, country fair or sailor's bar. It is a greater step than might at first be thought . . . and Salacrou does not waste the occasion on a trivial subject. The King speaks of his past and his impotence, of the theater and its potential, and no one can doubt that he is speaking for Salacrou.

Ah! comme j'ai mal su vivre! Mon passé! mon passé!  
 Ah! et toutes les ombres de moi-même qui s'y promènent  
 vivantes encore . . . J'ai semé à travers le monde  
 des regrets d'un bonheur que je vois fleurir de loin  
 . . . Je vis épars dans le monde. Des fragments de  
 rires possibles, des douceurs de lèvres, des lumières  
 de regards traînent derrière moi. Il faut les rejoindre,  
 les faire entrer dans ma chair et vivre aujourd'hui  
 avec ces comédiens le passé que je n'ai pas su vivre  
 au jour le jour. Gabriel Nérac . . . (Il regarde une  
pendule fausse, accessoire de théâtre.) Ah! Qu'attends-  
 tu pour tourner, toi? Plaisante pendule peinte!  
 Le passage de l'heure juste? Au moins marques-tu  
 un moment de la journée et tu t'y accroches. Moi?  
 Moi? Je m'accroche à moi-même pour me retenir de  
 glisser dans le vide. Et voilà, parmi les comédiens,  
 Mercédès Carcinta. Comme j'aurais pu l'aimer quand  
 j'étais un pauvre étudiant. Pourquoi me suis-je  
 laissé flotter à la surface de la vie? Aujourd'hui,  
 ce serait un beau souvenir, au lieu de ce regret parmi  
 les autres regrets. C'est alors que j'aurais pu être  
 heureux. Ah! mais dès à présent, si j'ai envie de  
 pleurer, je pleurerai et même plus fort encore, pour  
 être certain d'avoir pleuré autant que je voulais.  
 Si mes jambes veulent sauter, je sauterai avec la  
 volonté de sauter autant qu'il me plaira. Est-ce  
 bien cela? Non. C'est quand je pleure, de bien  
 sentir couler mes larmes et m'en souvenir. Et si  
 je ris, de me mettre les mains autour de la gorge  
 pour mieux me sentir rire. Je tourne! Je tourne!



Allons Jérôme, tu fatigues ta jambe. Joue au petit roi. Assieds-toi et rends la justice, pauvre âme.<sup>27</sup>

This is a beautiful speech, and one in which the King sets forth his problem very clearly. Although still quite young, he has reached a moment in his life at which he must analyze his past, and he has come to realize that he has no past. He has not lived authentically, in an existential sense. He has lived like the Young Man of Casseur d'assiettes, "par petits morceaux."<sup>28</sup> Each of these moments of existence has been lived individually and in each instance the image of the King has been different. There is no King, in fact. There is simply a collection of different momentary definitions which remain uncollected. It is to collect these images, to pull the moments of his past into a recognizable unity, that the King has invited the comédiens to perform his play. In Casseur d'assiettes the Young Man had found no solution. He wanted to find the thread which would link all these isolated moments, but he could not do it. He was reduced to impotent rage against the order of the universe at the play's end. The Young Man of Boule de verre was no more successful. He perhaps found the answer,

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<sup>27</sup>Ibid., pp. 129-120.

<sup>28</sup>le Casseur d'assiettes, Théâtre I, 21.

as he thought, in suicide, by becoming one with the universe. But this was obviously a self-defeating solution. Salacrou's other protagonists have simply been left with no solution to this problem of discovering their being, left to continue wandering aimlessly through life.

King Jérôme has found a weapon, if not a solution. And his weapon is also Salacrou's. He has found the theater. He does not know whether the play will succeed, whether he can, indeed, recapture the past and form it into some sort of meaningful whole. But he has the means at hand to try it. He is not falsely optimistic about his abilities, and he realizes that what he is doing will perhaps not be reality, will not be living. He seems quite willing to suspend his present existence, however, in order to have the opportunity to rework his past. He seems almost pathetically boastful for a moment. Perhaps in the past he was incapable of actually grasping life, but now he can cry as much as he wants, and will, too, if he feels like it. And he can jump all he wants to, except that it makes his leg hurt a bit. Then, suddenly, he realizes that this is not reality. He is not genuinely living, but simply watching himself live. Pierre had said, in Tour à terre, "J'ai vécu à tâtons . . .

J'ai toujours marché à côté de ma vie."<sup>29</sup> This is exactly what the King is now doing. When he cries, it is not from emotion, not real tears, but simply to feel the tears flowing, to feel himself living. When he laughs it is not from pure joy, but with his hands around his throat so that he can feel himself laugh, so that he can say "Look! I'm doing what other people do, laughing, crying, dancing!" But he knows that this is only appearance. "Je m'accroche à moi-même pour me retenir de glisser dans le vide."<sup>30</sup> It is the knowledge that this vide exists which makes him different from those who cry, and sing, and dance. It is Salacrou's terrible plague, having seen oneself "avec l'oeil de Dieu." The tragedy lies not in the fact that life is as it is, but in the knowledge of that fact . . .and it is that knowledge which haunts Salacrou, whether he calls himself Young Man, Pierre, or King Jérôme.

The King's soliloquy is ended when the Queen rushes in to announce that the actors have finally arrived. There are three of them, two women and a man. The Ministers and Korça all enter to announce the same thing, and then the comédiens present themselves: Armand Duval --- Comédien;

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<sup>29</sup>Tour à terre, Théâtre I, 63.

<sup>30</sup>le Pont de l'Europe, p. 130.

Mercédès Carcinta --- Danseuse; Pierrette Oudin --- Comédienne.

None seem to recognize the King, although we already know that at least Mercédès Carcinta has some reason to remember him. The King is quite pleased that they have arrived, and excitedly shows them his theater. Then all but the Ministers and the Queen leave to show the actors their dressing-rooms. The King's infatuation with the theater is obvious. He even mentions that in the dressing-rooms the actors may sign their names on the walls, as though this would lend more authenticity to his production.

The Ministers push the Académicien over to the Queen and he begins to speak to her of his love. She is at first confused and then angry. She tells the man to leave her or she will have him whipped. He is in turn enraged and reveals his plan for attacking the King. "Et ferez-vous fouetter le Roi qui, à dix mètres de vous, roucoule avec sa maîtresse retrouvée?"<sup>31</sup> He has found out about the King's infatuation with Mercédès Carcinta and he will use it to gain the Queen. He has only limited success, however. She is stunned by this discovery, and saddened by it, but she does not turn to the Académicien for solace. He still disgusts her and

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<sup>31</sup>Ibid., p. 133.

she continues to refuse his advances, but now she questions the King's love for her, and the future of their life together. She feels that in this one moment of revelation all hope of future communication has fled. She describes it in terms which recall Salacrou's early discovery that Ali Baba would never again say "Ouvre-toi sésame!" "Voilà bien des mots que je ne dirai plus. Ce ne sont pas des mots magiques . . . Ils n'ouvrent que des portes ouvertes."<sup>32</sup>

When the King returns with the actors and Korça, the Queen does not betray her feelings and soon the stage is again almost empty. Only the King and Mercédès have remained behind. Jérôme momentarily loses control of himself in a flood of emotion. He spells out her name, enraptured at the sound of the letters, then makes her spell it again. She does not remember the King from the past, but he tells how he never missed a performance, and could not even applaud, so great was his wonder at her face in the spotlight. She is quite impressed, but a little confused. Was he really so interested in her? "Tous les jours, j'attendais au promenoir. Tu passais après un chanteur comique assommant. Un

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<sup>32</sup>Ibid., p. 134.

jour, ma montre retardait et je t'ai manquée. Si je t'ai admirée?"<sup>33</sup> She wonders why he had not come to see her, why he had remained silent if his love had been so great. She has struck the King in a very painful place, for this is indeed what he has been wondering. It is to probe the reasons for his having not acted that he is arranging this new encounter with Mercédès, and with his past.

The King offers a number of apparently logical reasons for his silence, and each one is unfounded. He had feared her lover, but she had none. He had assumed that she, a beautiful and famous dancer, would never be free for a simple student. She was always free. He finally is forced to face the real reason: "Pourquoi ne t'ai-je pas attendue à la sortie des artistes? Mon âme exaltée à peur des contrôles de la vie: je suis timide."<sup>34</sup> This confession is a step in the direction of self-understanding, for both the King and for Salacrou himself.

Mercédès tries to console the King by pointing out that the life of an actress is not as glamorous as it looks, that the King did not really miss what he thinks he did by

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<sup>33</sup>Ibid., p. 136.

<sup>34</sup>Ibid., p. 135.

being unable to act. But he cannot accept this, for he has already formed a romantic conception of what his life could have been, a dream in which he takes masochistic pleasure in flagellating himself for his weakness in the past.

Oh! ç'a été magnifique! Imbécile. Oh! je me serais jeté à vos genoux, sur le trottoir (il s'agenouille) devant les ombres, déjà ma Cour, puis vous enlevant sur le bruit des syllabes de votre nom: Mercédès Carcinta, nous eussions passé nos dernières heures à nous chercher nous-mêmes, nos têtes dans nos yeux . . . Mais non. Après les lumières de la scène que vous emportiez dans vos bras comme une gerbe, moi je cherchais d'autres rues désertes et je marchais à grandes enjambées, de réverbère en réverbère, un pour le pied gauche, un pour le pied droit, criant votre nom aux balcons des maisons, qui se refugiaient dans l'ombre, effrayées . . .<sup>35</sup>

It is not difficult to see in this speech reflections of Pierre's dream in Tour à terre, and again there is the appearance of the importance of the réverbère as an image of the isolation of Pierre, King Jérôme, and Salacrou, in a world they could not control and in which they could not function. Doubtless, the King's romantic fantasy of what could have been, had he had the force to impose himself on existence, is no more than that, a fantasy. But he is convinced that his life could have been passionate and vital, had he not been frightened of it.

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<sup>35</sup>Ibid., p. 137.

In an attempt to bring the past back to life, a life it had never had, the King forces Mercédès to dance for him. He has had a copy of her old costume made and, although she is reluctant to take part in this charade, she puts it on, going behind a screen which he has provided. As she is changing into her costume the King adjusts the stage lights and sets up a screen on which a projector throws a poem announcing La Carcinta's dance. It is a strange poem, and a rather poor one. It tells of a Spanish singer, La Carcinta, who sings of her love under the hot Spanish sun. Then her lover forgets her and she leaps to her death, all the young girls of Spain then kill themselves with daggers, while singing "la chanson de la Carcinta."<sup>36</sup> There seems to be little real significance in the poem, except to point up the highly romanticised feeling the King has for Mercédès and to express the passion that has been lying dormant since his student days. Even Salacrou seems to be uncertain about the value of this poem, for as a stage direction he says "Ces strophes apparaitront sur l'écran de cinq minutes en cinq minutes. Ne pas leur attacher autant d'importance que le Roi."<sup>37</sup>

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<sup>36</sup>Ibid., p. 139.

<sup>37</sup>Ibid.



Mercédès comes from behind the screen, the King starts a record player, and the scene is exactly as he had remembered it from years before. He is in ecstasy.

Ecoutez . . . vous êtes là-bas un peu plus loin que l'ombre de la salle, en pleine source de lumière . . . Tout renaît! Ah! que le ciel en résonne! (Il tourne le pavillon du phonographe vers la fenêtre qu'il ouvre; la nuit est venue.) La nuit . . . accourez vite . . . tenez, la nuit s'enroule autour du château. Regarde: une, deux, trois, voici déjà trois étoiles . . . quatre, cinq . . . mais je ne compte plus; elles naissent plus vite dans le ciel que les chiffres dans ma bouche. Tous les deux, étrangers et seuls, accoudés au bord de la nuit . . . Moi! Et voici que je suis devenu roi pour te recevoir et que je peux caresser ta robe, une couronne au front. (Va-t-il embrasser la danseuse?) Non! Pas encore! Ah! je voudrais que tu marches sur moi, je voudrais que tu me chasses de la loge, que tu te moques de l'étudiant pauvre, malheureux et sale . . . Carcinta . . . (Se reprennant, il arrête le phonographe.) Mais que penses-tu de tout cela?<sup>38</sup>

It is obvious that the King is even now playing a rôle, that this new attempt at reality is no more real than his fantasies of the past. When he says "Pas encore," apparently about to kiss Mercédès, there is the suggestion that he has already mapped out his actions, that the kiss is not yet due. Then he falls into his masochist mode. He wants to be beaten for his past impotence. Perhaps he has indeed arranged his play and the actors in order to recapture

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<sup>38</sup>Ibid., p. 140.

the past, but there is also a very real sense of self-torture in his actions. This has appeared often in Salacrou's earlier heroes, and it is quite evident here. The King is ashamed of his inability to grasp life and one solution to this sense of shame is to cause himself to be beaten. If he can become a victim, then he will not be forced to judge himself. The judgment will be performed by others. One can become a saint in debasing oneself, for this self-debasement gives the impression of selflessness. The exact opposite is, in fact, the case.

The King assumes that Mercédès will be caught up in his passion, that she, too, is burning with the desire to involve herself in life. Instead, she is quite understandably confused. The King is disconcerted. "C'est tout? Tu n'as pas déjà hâte de mourir."<sup>39</sup> One wonders if the King is at that moment, after his exaltation, ready to die, like the Young Man of la Boule de verre who is consumed at the instant of his poetic frenzy. In any event, Mercédès understands none of this and the King is quickly brought down from his ecstasy, only to fall into reverie which will lead to another crescendo of emotion.

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<sup>39</sup>Ibid.

Mercédès takes up her castanettes and begins to dance again, more to placate the King than to follow his wishes. He suddenly stops her.

Non, reste immobile! Immobile! Dans la nuit du monde, la terre tourne. Paris! Paris! Quelle heure est-il à Paris? Ils sortent peut-être des bars, ivres, et moi, je suis là en face de moi-même. Eh bien! la voici, cette femme, belle, sonore . . . les regards de la salle brillent sur ses diamants. C'est entouré de tous les poignards de l'Espagne, qu'elle danse. Tu hésites? Tu hésites toujours . . . Saute dans la salle, écrase les craines chauves et enserre la robe; déchire-toi à tous ses éclats. Les hommes continuent leur petit train-train de vie, ils applaudissent, tranquilles, sans voir des corps rouler, rouges, sous les pieds de la danse. Ils vivent, mais toi, tu attends . . . tu attends . . . (Il prend un poignard qui traîne.) La Carcinta est là; et tu es ton maître, ce soir, pour l'éternité. (A la danseuse.) Ah! appelle-moi et danse, Carcinta. Appelle-moi! Que les lettres de mon nom, elles aussi, dansent parmi cette poussière de feu. Crie mon nom.

LA DANSEUSE --- Jérôme!

LE ROI --- La salle entière entend; par dessus tous les yeux levés vers elle, la Carcinta danse, t'appelle. Cours . . .

LA DANSEUSE --- Jérôme . . .

LE ROI --- Et aime! (Le Roi saute avec le poignard sur la danseuse.)

LA DANSEUSE --- Jérôme! Quoi? Un poignard? Mais je ne veux pas mourir. Fou! Au fou! Au secours! (Le Roi s'arrête. La danseuse arrache le poignard des mains du Roi.) Il est de carton! C'est un poignard de théâtre. Quelle est cette plaisanterie?

LE ROI --- Plaisanterie? (Il prend le poignard, le regarde, le jette.) Oui, fou! Ah! Seul! j'essuie

mon front aux nauges, seul, j'enjambe des montagnes;  
seul, je sors de leur lit les fleuves comme des  
couleuvres . . . Jérôme! Jérôme! (Il pleure.)<sup>40</sup>

Here the King has made another attempt to turn this recreation of the past into reality itself. It is with a sort of self-hypnotism that he convinces himself that he is again in the past and can now take advantage of his opportunity to act. In the middle of his first speech, he suddenly begins talking to himself. The "tu" is not now Mercédès, but the King himself. After having re-established the scene of Carcinta dancing before an audience, he feels that he must leap into that audience and attack the bald-headed men watching the dance. This desire to destroy these men is not predicated on jealousy, as might be supposed. In fact Mercédès Carcinta is entirely secondary to the emotion the King expresses in this speech. She is necessary for evoking the scene from the past, she is a catalyst, at best. He is scarcely aware of her presence when he betrays the real reason for his furor. " . . . déchire-toi à tous ses éclats. Les hommes continuent leur petit train-train de vie, ils applaudissent, tranquilles, sans voir des corps rouler, rouges, sous les pieds de la

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<sup>40</sup>Ibid., pp. 139-140.

danse. Ils vivent, mais toi, tu attends . . . tu attends  
 . . ."<sup>41</sup> He wants to destroy himself, as has already been  
 noted, but he also wants to destroy those who are continuing  
 to exist in the little train-train of their lives. For it  
 is exactly this little train-train which makes them "hommes  
 comme les autres." They are living, but the King hesitates,  
 as always. His attack against Carcinta's audience, then,  
 is a frenzied act of vengeance against life itself, against  
 the order of existence and those who seem to live so com-  
 fortably in it. Interestingly, it is another destructive  
 act. It is the opposite of the King's positive intention  
 to have his play presented, an act in which he will attempt  
 to come to terms with his past. One can perhaps see a  
 parallel between the King's development in this play, from  
 a position of pure nihilism to a positive posture as play-  
 wright, and the development of Salacrou's protagonists  
 through the previous plays and again culminating in the  
 creativity, or at least positivity, of King Jérôme. The  
 parallel might well be extended to Salacrou's own develop-  
 ment as a playwright. This play then becomes a microcosm  
 in which the evolution of Salacrou, both as writer of plays

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<sup>41</sup>Ibid. Italics mine.

and as character in those plays, is re-enacted, from the questioning desperation of the Young Man of Casseur d'assiettes, through the self-destruction and violence of Boule de verre and Histoire de cirque, the relatively more mature posture of Pierre in Tour à terre, to, finally, the positive, if hopeless, position of writer of plays.

The King has not yet reached this period of positive action, however, when he grabs a knife lying nearby, and orders Carcinta to dance and call out his name. This is a rather pitiful attempt to impose himself upon life. He cannot be a part of life, as are those men in the audience, but he can force life to take notice of him, if only through outrageous acts. It is particularly ironic that the final command which the King gives Carcinta, at the moment he pounces on her with the obvious intent to kill her is "aime!" Love is strangely linked with destruction, both perhaps indications of the effect made upon life by one who is loved and also by one who destroys.

Destruction does not work for King Jérôme. He cannot destroy what he knows to be real. He has found no solution. He had leaped on Carcinta apparently because she simply happened to be present. It was the world that he wanted to kill, and she was the world's only representative within reach. Had the knife been real he would,

indeed, have killed the dancer. He did not know that it was simply a stage knife, made of cardboard, for he takes the knife from Mercédès, looks at it carefully, surprised that it is not real, and then casts it aside with disgust at his failure. This supreme moment had only been a joke, at least for everyone except the King. It is simply another moment of disillusionment. He alone reaches peaks of emotional intensity, existence cannot keep pace.

With the King again reduced to calmness, Mercédès attempts to console him. She will be nice to him, will dance for him again, and they can have a pleasant, light affair. She has completely misunderstood the King. "Mais croyez-vous que j'ai besoin simplement de maîtresse?"<sup>42</sup> Wounded in her pride, Mercédès feigns anger. "Allez-vous me violer?"<sup>43</sup> The King is hardly capable of such an existentially positive action. "Ah! si j'en avais envie."<sup>44</sup> What he did expect from her was "un grand amour."<sup>45</sup> But one immediately senses that it was not that he needed to be loved, but for her to re-kindle the love which he thinks he

<sup>42</sup>Ibid., p. 142.

<sup>43</sup>Ibid., p. 143.

<sup>44</sup>Ibid.

<sup>45</sup>Ibid.

once felt for Mercédès. "Ressusciter le grand amour dont j'aurais pu mourir au temps où j'ai failli t'aimer . . . voir rouge . . . et qu'espérais-je tirer d'un poignard de carton?"<sup>46</sup> This desire is very much in keeping with what we already know of Salacrou's protagonists. They do not care to be loved, but to love. To be loved proves nothing, but to love, to feel, proves that one exists, and this is the great proof continually demanded by Salacrou and his heroes. The King here also casts some doubt on the efficacy of his upcoming play. He has hoped to find something real and meaningful in his play, but can he expect much from un poignard de carton, which obviously represents the unreality of the theater?

Perhaps the theater can be of some use to the King, and to Salacrou, for the King has made a genuine discovery during this last scene.

J'avais passé près de toi, dans ma vie, sans m'arrêter . . . Alors je viens de retourner à cet endroit de mes regrets et je t'ai fait signe. C'était un vieux compte que je voulais régler. J'ai compris que je ne t'avais pas aimée, autrefois, comme je le pensais.<sup>47</sup>

This is the purpose to which he had hoped to use his play,

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<sup>46</sup>Ibid.

<sup>47</sup>Ibid. Italics mine.



to analyze his past and perhaps to put his past into some sort of order. He is making progress, although it is not the progress he had hoped to make. He must, however, accept whatever he uncovers in his past, whether it is as he had thought it or not.

Although she had never known of the King's supposed lover for her, Mercédès is now rather upset to learn that that love had not been real, and she is also angry about the King's remark that he did not feel like raping her. She spitefully reveals that she has brought along her own lover, Armand Duval, and she sarcastically compares his love-making ability with the King's evident lack of interest. The King calls for Armand to join them to explain himself, and then says a strange thing, "J'ai bien fait d'écrire le reste: les improvisations ne sont pas brillantes."<sup>48</sup> This might be a comment on a rather clumsy and childish line Mercédès has just spoken in her anger ("Il vous le dira lui-même si bon lui semble."<sup>49</sup>), for it is said à part and might represent the playwright's fears about his actors' ability to improvise. But they have not yet begun the play,

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<sup>48</sup>Ibid., p. 145.

<sup>49</sup>Ibid.

and the expression "le reste" leaves one to wonder whether this might not be Salacrou, inexplicably, discussing his control over his characters.

Armand Duval enters and admits that he is, indeed, Mercédès' lover, and has been for eight years. In fact it is Armand who wrote the poem with which the King had introduced Mercédès' dance earlier in this act. The King, disillusioned about a past in which he had visualized only himself and Mercédès, is compelled to attack this love of which he was ignorant.

Et dire que je l'enviais . . . Tous les deux nichés dans leur amour comme des chiens dans la paille. Monsieur accompagnant Madame chez ses amants de choix, avec toute la délicatesse désirable dans les éclipses nécessaires . . . C'est ça, belle danseuse, que vous m'offriez! L'étudiant a bien fait d'attendre. Non, j'eusse fini autrement. A chaque nature, sa destinée.<sup>50</sup>

This is gratuitous slander, for the King has no real reason to suspect that Mercédès had given herself to a number of lovers, conveyed to the rendezvous by her genuine love. Even if this were true, the King's cynicism springs more from the fact that he had misjudged Mercédès, than from a genuine condemnation of her promiscuity. The figure of Marie Madeleine in les Trente tombes de Judas is another example

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<sup>50</sup>Ibid., pp. 145-146.

of Salacrou's considerable puritanism when dealing with his "chosen woman." His protagonists impose their image of perfect and all-consuming love on those whom they want to love, or whose love they seek, and then are crushed when they discover that the object of their love had not in fact been what they had imagined. As in Tour à terre, and to an extent all of Salacrou's plays to this point, the protagonist's love is absolutely egocentric. The loved woman is important only for the emotion which she arouses. In le Pont de l'Europe Mercédès was not even aware of the King's love, and can therefore scarcely be held responsible for not living up to his image of her. His was a one-way love affair, with himself.

Armand Duval is insensed at this insinuation and he throws himself upon the King, who is quite impressed at this display of force. "En tout cas, vous êtes violent, et peut-être courageux . . ." <sup>51</sup> When Armand realizes what he had done he quickly regains control of himself and the King dismisses both him and Mercédès.

Allex-vous-en, tous les deux, partez avec votre amour en confiture . . . A ce soir, oui, à ce soir. Fermons la boutique . . . J'en finirai ce soir avec les regrets de mon passé . . . et demain, demain je

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<sup>51</sup>Ibid., p. 146.

pourrai commencer de vivre. (Une cloche sonne.)  
 Entendez . . . voici l'air qui danse, et que le  
 vent chante . . . Je le respirerai au passage . . .  
 Je lui demanderai d'où il vient, et où il va . . .  
 Non! c'est la cloche du dîner et je ne veux pas  
 faire attendre la Reine.<sup>52</sup>

The King seems to have been left disenchanted by the lack of success he had had in his dealings with Mercédès and his play has become an effort at exorcism rather than an attempt to recapture the past. He now simply wants to vomit up the past in order to be free of it, so that he might begin to live in the present. Once he has reviewed the past and come to know it better, he will no longer be dominated by its mystery. He has already discovered that he had not really loved Mercédès and has freed himself perhaps from that regret. Will this evening's rehearsal complete the liberation? Armand has already read the play, but seems somewhat uncertain about his reaction to it. It has no title. "Oui, je lui en donne un. Elle s'intitule: 'Les trente tombes de Judas.' Passez, Madame. (Le Roi prend le Comédien par les épaules.) Huit ans?"<sup>53</sup> Armand replies that he has truly loved Mercédès for eight years, and that his love has completely dominated his life. The King cannot

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<sup>52</sup>Ibid.

<sup>53</sup>Ibid.

understand that sort of love. "Allons donc! L'amour, mais c'est un éclair qui vous tue!"<sup>54</sup>

The curtain falls on Act I with this final, ironic summation of King Jérôme's conception of love. As he has already exhibited in his attack on Mercédès, his love must destroy. Love cannot simply continue for eight years. If it is genuine, it is so overwhelming that the lovers are consumed in their own passion. This is, of course, ironic in that Jérôme did not kill himself, even when, as a student in Paris, he had felt that his love for Mercédès was incredibly immense. He is in this speech attempting to degrade the force of Armand's love for Mercédès by using an argument which might well be used against himself. He also has been consumed by his love for Mercédès for eight years, and has done nothing about it, has remained impotent. Again it is a question of fantasy and reality. The King has supposed that love must be so marvelous that one must die from it, just as he (and Salacrou's other young heroes) had created an image of perfect woman to be the object of this divine love. Both the love and the perfect woman were fantasy, however. Love is obviously not a brilliant flame

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<sup>54</sup>Ibid.

which consumes the participants, for Jérôme was not consumed, did not kill himself, nor did Armand, nor did Salacrou. The King's play, then, will serve as a vehicle for "disillusionment," in the real sense of the word. It will be through his play that he will come to see life as it really is, not as he had poetically dreamed it should be. And this play, le Pont de l'Europe, the theater, will play the same rôle in Armand Salacrou's coming to terms with existence.

Act II opens in the middle of the first rehearsal of les Trente tombes de Judas. It is somewhat changed from the original text of the play, which has already been discussed. The King's stage sets represent the corner of a street, the lower floors of a house with one window, closed, a partly open door, and a street light. All the actors and the King are on stage and there is the feeling that the rehearsal has not been going well. As the actors speak, it is often difficult to follow the constant changes from the King's play to Salacrou's play, for there is a great deal of stream-of-conscious speech. Frequently a line in the King's play will lead an actor, usually the King himself, to leave his rôle and continue to speak as himself, that is as an actor in Salacrou's, rather than the King's play. To lessen this problem, the speeches of the actors reading the

King's lines are printed in bold-face type, and in the actual production of le Pont de l'Europe there was a conscious effort made to speak the lines of les Trente tombes de Judas in obvious "stage" voices, so that the audience might be aware of the shifts back and forth between the play's text and the "impromptu" speeches of the actors as they rehearsed.

The presentation of a play within a play offers fascinating possibilities to the playwright, for there are now several levels of fantasy, several degrees of unreality, on which to operate. The King, who has been created by Salacrou, now has creations of his own who speak his lines. In a sense the circle is completed. Salacrou can present himself in his characters, and through the second-level play, can in fact hold discussions with himself about these ideas. It is as though the initial creations of the playwright, Salacrou, have become real, for they have now also become creators. Jérôme is no longer simply the creation of Salacrou's imagination, but has become himself a manipulator of his own characters. This will engender a number of rather complex situations which, though difficult to explicate, will give considerable insight into both the psyche and creative processes of Armand Salacrou.

The King is reading the part of Jérôme, obviously himself, and Pierrette Oudin is reading the part of Monine,

apparently his lover, as the curtain rises. What they are saying is not part of the original Trente tombes, but, as we soon discover, the re-enactment of an actual scene from Jérôme's past. There is, however, a reference to the symbolism of the faces on Judas' thirty pieces of silver. Jérôme and Pierrette, in the King's play, make a rather meaningless wager, about whether a man or woman will answer if they tap on the nearby window, and Jérôme flips a coin. When he picks it up he sees what the Young Man of the real Trente tombes de Judas saw at the play's end, when the thirty pieces fell from Judas' pocket. He tells Pierrette: "Oh! regarde donc comme l'effigie de cette pièce te ressemble. C'est frappant!"<sup>55</sup> This remark passes relatively unnoticed here, however, as Pierrette tells him that it is time for her to leave, and they separate, making a date for the next evening.

The King is quiet for a moment and, leaving his rôle as Jérôme, speaks in his own voice.

Vous ressemblez un peu à cette petite Monine.  
Eh bien, je ne l'ai jamais revue. J'ai négligé le rendez-vous du lendemain, je la fuyais, je fuyais, qui sait, le regret de ne pas l'aimer davantage?<sup>56</sup>

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<sup>55</sup>Ibid., p. 148.

<sup>56</sup>Ibid., p. 149.



This is the second time that the King had fled from involvement in his past. It is these flights which have forced him to become a playwright. He could not force himself to act in his own life, so he has written a play in which actors perform for him these same acts, but under his control. The King has himself been created for the same reason.

But he feels that Pierrette must have skipped a line. Now that he is again in the event, even though it is only a representation of it, he remembers it more clearly, can add more details.

Comment? Je n'ai pas parlé de notre premier dîner. Un soir de printemps? J'étais heureux, elle aussi. Etais-je heureux? Et tous les deux si timides. Dans ce petit restaurant, à la carte . . . Elle n'osait pas manger autant qu'elle avait faim parce que j'étais pauvre . . . Qu'est-elle devenue?<sup>57</sup>

The heightened memory of this moment in his past that had been so meaningful at the time leads the King to question the very possibility of actually living one's life, in a concrete sense. It is one of Salacrou's unanswerable questions. "Dites-moi, puisque vous êtes acteur . . . avec de l'habitude, peut-on vraiment un jour VIVRE son rôle?"<sup>58</sup>

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<sup>57</sup>Ibid.

<sup>58</sup>Ibid.

This is a monstrous question. It implies all of the questions Salacrou and his heroes have asked themselves up to this point. Can one actually grasp something from the rush of life and events as it races past? Can one collect moments and then review them and take them apart for analysis? Or must one continually and eternally live à tâtons, never do more than walk alongside one's life and see it only as a spectator might?

Si je pouvais vivre toute ma vie passée, dont je n'ai eu que l'idée . . . la vivre avec ma chair . . . et ainsi, user mes regrets. Vous comprenez, cette après-midi, avec cette danseuse, j'ai voulu brûler les étapes, je me suis laissé emporter. Maintenant, je veux être beaucoup plus méthodique.<sup>59</sup>

Then they begin to rehearse a new scene, a different event in the King's past. Again it involves Jérôme and Pierrette, now playing the role of another young girl. The scene is quite similar to that just presented. Jérôme has met the girl on the street, is infatuated with her, and tries to walk along at her side. She is at first offended, but then gives in. She laughingly suggests a reason for his interest in her. "D'abord, pourquoi m'avez-vous arrêtée? Parce que le crépuscule allume les réverbères et que vous n'aime pas être seul à cette heure louche?"<sup>60</sup> He admits that

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<sup>59</sup>Ibid.

<sup>60</sup>Ibid., p. 150.

he is, in fact, afraid but that if they have each other their lives might become beautiful. His conception of love, however, is again the egocentric, fantasy-ridden emotional masturbation which has been so apparent in Salacrou's early plays. He seems to not want to succeed in establishing a continuing relationship with the young women he meets. He did not speak to Mercédès, did not keep his date with the girl whose face he had seen on the coin, and he will not see this girl again. He wants the emotion, but not the girl. In each case, the young lady has been most willing to see Jérôme again, but it is he who has refused the liaison.

LE ROI --- Nous serons, si vous le voulez bien, des amis de la rue. Vous ne savez pas mon nom, je ne saurai pas le vôtre. Chaque soir, nous nous quitterons vite pour entretenir le regret de se quitter, A demain, c'est promis, petite passante?

LA COMEDIENNE --- Ne partez pas déjà.

LE ROI --- C'est une aventure très réussie. A demain.<sup>61</sup>

It is indeed "une aventure très réussie" for Jérôme, for he has succeeded in emotionally arousing himself, in finding a stimulus for his fantasy of ethereal love, without having to give anything of himself, even his name. He remains whole and pure. He does not seek consummation, but the "regret de nous quitter."

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<sup>61</sup>Ibid., pp. 150-151.

At this point the prompter for the play being rehearsed closes his playbook, indicating that this particular scene is finished. But the King and Pierrette continue talking, and their conversation strangely follows the context of the King's play. This time, however, it is not the King, but Pierrette, who keeps up the dialogue, now speaking in her own voice. The King does not realize that she is no longer following the text of his play, for what she says is so familiar to him that he has no trouble reciting his part of the conversation.

The comédienne does not want Jérôme to leave her.

Ne partez pas . . . non. Je suis seule et triste.  
C'est moi qui ai peur des allumeurs de réverbères  
. . . et puis le temps est orageux, je vous jure  
que j'ai peur de l'orage. J'aimerais vous . . . me  
promener avec vous . . . Je n'allais nulle part;  
maintenant je vais à l'Etoile. M'accompagnerez-  
vous?<sup>62</sup>

The King, not yet aware that she is now "improvising," wonders why she has chosen the Place de l'Etoile. She gives the right answer: "N'aurons-nous pas, alors, tout un choix d'avenues à suivre pour continuer?"<sup>63</sup> Stars have appeared a number of times in Salacrou's earlier works, usually with same significance. The Young Man of Boule de verre saw in

<sup>62</sup>Ibid., p. 151.

<sup>63</sup>Ibid.

the stars the infinite possibilities of universality, and, in fact, killed himself in order to join the stars. This same idea of potential choice is present in Pierrette's desire to walk to the Place de l'Etoile, whose many intersecting avenues offer multiple opportunities for them to continue their life together. Naturally, this idea pleases Jérôme.

Petite passante adorable, rencontre qui me sauve.  
 Tu vas être l'équilibre de mes journées. J'attendrai  
 notre rendez-vous crépusculaire et quand je te  
 quitterai, dans l'attente du lendemain, je pourrai  
 m'endormir heureux. Mais il faudra toujours tout  
 ignorer de nous-mêmes . . . c'est très important.<sup>64</sup>

This is only a partial submission by Jérôme. He is willing to continue their evening together for a few moments, for the idea of the Etoile fits into his fantasy, but he still insists that they know nothing of each other. He is still unwilling to give anything of himself. It is still the idea, and not the reality of their potential love which attracts him.

The King suddenly realizes that he had not written this scene into his play.

L'Etoile? Tu as bien dit l'Etoile? Toutes les  
 avenues de l'Etoile aboutissant au salut de mon  
 chapeau? Pourquoi as-tu dit l'Etoile? Je n'ai

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<sup>64</sup>Ibid.

pas écrit ce mot . . . et pourtant . . . je le reconnais tout à coup, au passage. Je l'avais oublié. (Au souffleur.) Souffle-moi la réplique suivante!<sup>65</sup>

But the prompter cannot help. "C'est que depuis longtemps il n'y a plus rien . . ."<sup>66</sup> They have not been following the text, but the King cannot believe that the scene has been improvised, because it was exactly as he now remembers it. How could the comédienne have know this part which had never been written? The answer is obvious. "Il y a quatre ans, nous les avons déjà dites ensemble avant de prendre un rendez-vous où vous n'êtes pas venu."<sup>67</sup> It was Pierrette Oudin, whose name he had never learned and whom he has not recognized, who was the young girl whom he had met and walked with to the Etoile. He admits that he has often regretted missing their next date, and she has also. She had gone to the rendez-vous the next day and had waited for him. He had assumed she would not, and therefore had justified his not coming, just as he had assumed that Mercédès Carcinta would not see him because of her boy-friend. "Tu m'attendais! Bien sur! Tu m'attendais! Bête! Bête!

<sup>65</sup>Ibid., p. 152.

<sup>66</sup>Ibid.

<sup>67</sup>Ibid.

Bête que je suis! Comme je te quittais étourdi d'espoir, heureux d'ignorer jusqu'à ton nom . . ."<sup>68</sup>

In an interesting and effective shift of levels, the King has fallen inadvertently back into his prepared text, for the souffleur has begun to follow his script again and, after the King's last speech, points to the comédien to indicate that it is time for him to come in. Reading his script, the comédien asks the King if he knows . . . obviously indicating to Pierrette. The King tells her that "he," referring to the comédien, was a friend who had seen them together. Armand continues to read his part and the King explains to Pierrette what it means.

LE COMEDIEN --- Elle habite une maison carrée, aux Batignolles, avec un balcon . . .

LE ROI --- Et j'écoutais . . . confiant dans la malchance de ma vie . . .

LE COMEDIEN --- . . . les murs du boudoir sont verts, et elle joue du piano. Elle est seule depuis quinze jours . . . avant, c'était un officier de cavalerie qui la visitait toutes les après-midi. Avant, c'était un marchand de drap, celui qui acheta le piano. Mais il ne venait qu'à cinq heures, et tous les deux jours.

LE ROI --- Ah! il parla! il parla! de la place de l'Etoile au Point-du-Jour . . . Il m'apprenait en une seule fois ce que j'eusse mis deux mois à savoir. Il simplifiait les choses. Peut-être

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<sup>68</sup>Ibid., p. 153.

quelques sentiments eussent-ils donné un tour  
particulier aux actions de cette vie qu'on me révé-  
lait?<sup>69</sup>

Jérôme is, of course, making comments hors de texte here, while the actor is repeating exactly what Jérôme had been told by his friend. Pierrette feels that the friend's description of her had been unfair. "Mais cet ami d'alors avait plus d'imagination que de renseignements."<sup>70</sup> Jérôme explains his having accepted the friend's comments in a way that gives a clue to the evolution which Salacrou's protagonists have undergone from the naïve, puritanical Young Man of Casseur d'assiettes to King Jérôme. He had believed the friend because "Je n'avais pas encore découvert la difficulté de vivre et l'ivresse de cette lutte avec notre vie."<sup>71</sup> He had simply not yet experienced the pain of life, and therefore was intolerant of those others who were not as pure as he. He realizes now that he had been foolish, that he had expected more of life than life could give. This is perhaps the first moment that Salacrou's heroes become aware of life as it is. They have always seen the disorder and injustice of existence, but they have never admitted that their own vision was faulty. Jérôme's admission here

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<sup>69</sup>Ibid., pp. 153-154.

<sup>71</sup>Ibid.

<sup>70</sup>Ibid., p. 154.



marks another major step in self-discovery, perhaps for Salacrou as well. But he continues to react irrationally to these discoveries, or to overreact. "Sot! Sot!

Rencontrés, perdus et retrouvés, ce n'est pas pour nous perdre encore. Nous ne nous quitterons plus . . ."72

Pierrette's surprised reaction to this is the obvious question "Et la Reine, Sire?"73

Jérôme still has difficulty separating his present reality, his crown and family, from the rediscovered reality of the past. He cannot simply renounce the present and become once again the lonely student in Paris, now capable of choosing one of these avenues which lead away from the Place de l'Etoile. But he does not understand this.

La Reine? Es-tu folle? Que vient faire la Reine dans cette histoire? N'ai-je pas une dette à me payer? J'ai oublié de t'aimer autrefois. Je ne prends que mon dû. Et puis, mon bonheur est en jeu. Quand on joue, il faut jouer jusqu'au dernier sou. Il faut jouer son âme. Pourquoi es-tu venue?74

Pierrette sounds very much like Jérôme in her reply, "J'aime tant qu'on m'interroge! Je suis paresseuse d'esprit avec un certain goût de me connaître."75 She has made the trip to the King's country for the same reason that he has

72 Ibid.

74 Ibid.

73 Ibid.

75 Ibid., p. 155.

written his play. She had recognized Jérôme as the young man whom she had met in Paris and, when the announcement went out for actresses to perform the King's play, she had applied for the job. She had apparently not known why the young man had not kept their date, but now she realizes that Jérôme had been afraid to come, after hearing his friend's tales of her promiscuity. "Je voulais aimer, mais j'avais peur de me forcer à l'amour, d'être la dupe de moi-même. Toi, tu étais la première femme venue . . . je ne m'étais donc pas monté la tête."<sup>76</sup> Again he wanted to love, but could not. Pierrette thinks that he was perhaps afraid that she would not love him. "Et si vous aviez été seul à aimer . . ."<sup>77</sup> This is, of course, not a factor in Salacrou's protagonists' love. They must love, and if they receive love in return it is a bonus. "Mais c'est déjà le principal . . . Attacher ma vie à quelque chose qui ne soit pas une création arbitraire de mon esprit dont je connais trop les ficelles. . ."<sup>78</sup>

In Tour à terre, Pierre had said that his life was dedicated to seeking "une idée qui ne serait pas truquée,

<sup>76</sup>Ibid.

<sup>77</sup>Ibid.

<sup>78</sup>Ibid.

et qui vaille ce que je vaux . . . ,"<sup>79</sup> that he had become a follower of Isabelle "pour me donner l'illusion d'aimer, et rattacher ainsi ma vie à quelque chose qui me soit extérieur."<sup>80</sup> All of Salacrou's Young Men have sought something permanent in life, just as Salacrou himself dreamed of stemming the tide of that "côté éphémère de la vie."

This desire to find permanence is quite understandable to Pierrette, but she cannot understand why Jérôme did not make an effort to find it with her. He replies that he would have only been like the other lovers, and would have left her soon enough. At least the other lovers had acted, she replies. "Mais vous êtes parti avant que de commencer!"<sup>81</sup> This has, of course, been a major problem with Salacrou's heroes, and Jérôme explains it in typical Salacrou fashion. "A quoi bon commencer ce qui pourrait être fini?"<sup>82</sup> It had been "A quoi bon commencer ce dont on sait la fin?"<sup>83</sup> in Casseur d'assiettes. This explanation does not satisfy

<sup>79</sup>Tour à terre, Théâtre I, 90.

<sup>80</sup>Ibid., p. 84.

<sup>81</sup>le Pont de l'Europe, p. 156.

<sup>82</sup>Ibid.

<sup>83</sup>le Casseur d'assiettes, p. 28.

Pierrette, however, for she is much more realistic about love that Salacrou's King. She feels that if the liaison did, indeed, come to an end, they would have at least have had something of love. But, like the Jeune Homme in Casseur d'assiettes who said "Seul ce qui dure toujours peut ne pas me lasser,"<sup>84</sup> Jérôme must have permanence. "Tu ne peux pas comprendre. Je veux teinter ma vie d'émotions éternelles."<sup>85</sup> The verb teinter is rather telling. It reinforces the feeling of egocentric artificiality which one has about all of Jérôme's dealing in love.

When one recalls the King's closing speech in Act I ("L'amour, mais c'est un éclair qui vous tue!"<sup>86</sup>), it is difficult to understand his hesitations in taking the step toward consumation of what has seemed in each case to be genuine love. At least he has thought it to be love. In fact, Pierrette's conception of a passionate love seems more in the context of that closing speech than Jérôme's own actions when the situations actually presented themselves.

Dussé-je ne vous aimer que huit jours, que je  
n'hésiterais pas devant la courte aventure. L'amour?

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<sup>84</sup>la Boule de verre, p. 9.

<sup>85</sup>le Pont de l'Europe, p. 156.

<sup>86</sup>Ibid., p. 146.

Mais vous le mesurez donc au mètre? Vous croyez donc que l'amour se compte à la semaine? On peut n'aimer qu'une heure et en marquer toute sa vie. L'amour, n'est-ce pas comme Dieu?<sup>87</sup>

This is a very damaging argument against Jérôme, for it is, of course, right. The equation of God and Love and the possibility of love meaning escape and salvation from the nebulousness of life has been a constant theme in Salacrou's plays since the appearance of the divine speaking cat in Casseur d'assiettes. The King seems to be aware of this equation, and it is clear that his abstract ideas of love are very much the same thing as God for him. But it is on the physical, concrete level that he is impotent. Knowing that love might save him, he is still impotent to act, to accept this human, physical love which Pierrette offered before and is now offering again. He is constantly compelled to question, and questions destroy the sponaniety, the magic of love. It is the curse of universal vision, "l'oeil de Dieu."

He wants Pierrette: "Mes bras sont ouverts! mes bras sont ouverts! Mais donnez-moi la force de les refermer sur vous. Pourquoi t'aimerais-je, toi, plutôt qu'une autre? Tu es belle? Ce n'est pas une raison suffisante, ou alors,

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<sup>87</sup>Ibid., p. 156.

il faudrait aimer toutes les belles femmes du monde."<sup>88</sup>  
 Pierrette gives him a better reason, "Je vous aime."<sup>89</sup> But  
 Jérôme cannot trust that love. "Je sais, depuis peu, ce  
 que valent ces amours. Durant des années, on amasse de la  
 paille et c'est flambé en un coup de vent."<sup>90</sup> If only  
 Pierrette could make Jérôme say that he loves her, but no  
 one has yet managed that with one of Salacrou's Young Men.  
 There is nothing to do but return to the King's play and try  
 to continue the exorcism. "Continuons . . . Peut-être  
 trouverai-je mon salut en cours de route."<sup>91</sup>

He again takes up the account of that evening in  
 Paris with Pierrette, and its aftermath. "Quinze jours après  
 t'avoir rencontrée, j'avais envie de partir . . . J'ai beau-  
 coup marché, malgré ma jambe. Je cherche . . . Je cherche  
 . . . je me lasse vite, d'autant plus vite que je n'aspire  
 qu'à me fixer . . ."<sup>92</sup> At this moment the prompter cries  
 to the stage hands "Le Pont de l'Europe!"<sup>93</sup> and the new

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<sup>88</sup>Ibid.

<sup>89</sup>Ibid.

<sup>90</sup>Ibid., p. 157.

<sup>91</sup>Ibid.

<sup>92</sup>Ibid.

<sup>93</sup>Ibid.

backdrop comes down into place.

Une nouvelle toile de fond représentant le pont de l'Europe de la gare Saint-Lazare, à Paris. Une arche de pont dont les deux extrémités partent du sol. Au delà du pont, des paires de rails en éventails, un signal de chemin de fer. Deux machinistes déroulent devant le décor une bande qui représente le garde-fou du pont.<sup>94</sup>

This is, of course, the "bridge" from which the play takes its title, and it obviously represents the possibilities of escape, the multitude of choices open to one who would take flight, as the King, or soon-to-be-King, was doing. It also, of course, represents a sort of death, for it marks the end of life as he was living it. It is another incarnation of the port in Tour à terre, both symbolizing the final point of contemporary reality, and the gate to the unknown potential of the future. Pierre did not manage to move beyond this gate, but Jérôme has made it, has crossed into his potential. He continues to speak, now reading his script.

Le pont de l'Europe! Le passage vers tous les vents de la terre. Des trains partent ensemble et s'écartertent déjà. Se retrouveront-ils face à face de l'autre côté de cette boule, plus bas? Ah! aux antipodes, si les trains se détachaient de leurs rails et continuaient une marche en hélice vers une éternité de voyage, dans le ciel, chaque jour avec son soleil nouveau et son coucher définitif, chaque nuit avec un nouveau jeu

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<sup>94</sup>Ibid.

d'étoiles. Si je me laissais glisser sur un des trains qui partent, sans aucun nom de pays dans ma poche, allongé sur le rampement des wagons, partir . . . avec vous, je rejette l'air que je respire, ailleurs que je l'ai pris, tandis que pour chaque bruit de mon coeur, un village passe qui le recueille, où il se calmera . . . Je veux enchâsser ainsi, dans la traînée des pulsations de mon coeur, tous les villages qu'on regarde des portières. Partir! Partir! non pas comme on achète une longue-vue, mais partir comme on meurt.<sup>95</sup>

This is an important speech, for it sums up Jérôme's desire to flee that world in which he could not seem to function. It was indeed a desire for suicide. He wants to completely reject his rôle in a world peopled by "les hommes comme les autres" and to become, as he says in his next line "un passant du monde."<sup>96</sup> This would be an extremely comfortable rôle, for it is free of responsibilities. He need no longer seek to find a definition of himself, for in each village, at each moment, he would be in transit, and therefore required to play no part. Rather than struggle against the feeling that his life has been spread out in tiny moments over his years, that he has lived only "à tâtons," he will simply submit, accept his destiny, make no further attempt to order his life as it was. This submission is that of Pierre to Isabelle, or of Salacrou temporarily to the

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<sup>95</sup>Ibid., pp. 157-158. Italics mine.

<sup>96</sup>Ibid., p. 158.



socialist movement. But this does not work, for any of them, for life does not allow such facile escape.

The King continues, not now reading from his play, "Voilà ce que j'ai voulu être. J'ai marché. C'est ainsi qu'un soir, je suis arrivé en mendiant dans cette ville . . ."<sup>97</sup> Life would not let him continue not to exist, to be a "passant du monde," and had seemingly reserved for him this mysterious surprise, he was to become a king. And, as though he is not even allowed this moment of escape into memories, a new backdrop suddenly crashes out of the left and covers that of the pont de l'Europe. This stage hand's carelessness jerks the King onto another plane of meditation, and responsibility.

Paris! Paris! Et ma vie accrochée à ces maisons!  
La vie que je devais vivre . . . Ici . . . tiens . . .  
et là . . . dans ce jardin, un matin . . . Ah! l'esprit  
de l'escalier! Je l'ai dans la vie! C'est toujours  
trop tard que je vois ce que je pouvais prendre.  
J'ai vécu comme d'autres écrivent, du bout des doigts.  
Je voulais retourner dans cette vie si mal vécue, et  
c'est inutile. Laissez-moi! Laissez-moi!<sup>98</sup>

It is, of course, a large map of Paris which has fallen down to block the view of the pont and on the map the King is recalling places and moments in his past. It

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<sup>97</sup>Ibid., p. 159.

<sup>98</sup>Ibid.

is perhaps here that the distinction between his past life and his present rôle as King is most clearly drawn. He is throughout the play balancing between past and present, but here he indicates that it is now the past which is real to him. The life which he "should have lived" is in Paris. He had begun to realize this when he found that he could, in fact, have had an affair with Mercédès, had he acted . . . that Pierrette had shown up for their rendez-vous, the one he had missed out of timidity and fear of rejection. He has always realized his opportunities only when it was too late to take advantage of them. He has never trusted, has only accepted what is known, and that is never the future, the potential. He has not been involved in life, but has only palpitated it after the fact, with the tips of his fingers, à tâtons. And, finally, he seems to accept the fact that his play has been a failure, at least in what he had hoped to accomplish. The rôles are shortly taken up again, but when they are, the play has become les Trente tombes de Judas, very much as we have already seen it. It will still bear on Jérôme's life, but in a much more abstract way. His effort to return into his so badly lived life is a failure.

At this point Salacrou's play takes a different turn. The companion plot of King Jérôme operating within his new

rôle as monarch, having to deal with an apparent uprising among his subjects, reappears with Korça, who tells the King that his order to burn out the rebel family in the Blue Forest has been very badly received among the people, and that the hour is grave for the monarchy. It is time for the King to give orders, to take command and bring his people under control. This news comes at a very inappropriate time for the King. He is at this moment interested only in his past and is simply bored by Korça's anxious entreaties. He wants to put the decisions off until the next day. "C'est l'ombre de la nuit. Va dormir. Nous aviserons demain."<sup>99</sup>

As Korça tries to convince the King that the crisis is much greater than he seems to think, the Queen comes in to speak to her husband. She has heard that the rehearsals have upset him.

Que me dit-on? Votre Majesté souffrante s'afflige de la représentation de sa pièce? Les comédiens s'étonnent et assurent que vous jouez avec trop de feu. Pour un peu, ils oseraient vous juger . . . Tremblant et pâle? Le front mouillé? Vous pleurez? Seigneur? Seigneur? Quel mal vous savez vous faire. Ne vous reposerez-vous jamais? Ces comédiens, j'étais heureuse de leur arrivée en pensant aux récréations qu'ils vous apportaient . . . vous avez donc su retourner leur art contre vous-même et vous atteindre? Les comédiens

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<sup>99</sup>Ibid.

ont-ils été maladroits? N'hésitez pas, appelez-  
en d'autres, de Paris ou d'ailleurs . . .<sup>100</sup>

She is, of course, baiting the King here, but there is considerable truth in what she says. He has indeed been able to turn the theater against himself, to use it almost as a weapon of self-torture, as well as self-knowledge. But she knows that the actors have been skillful enough, and that actors other than these would be useless to the King, for she has believed what the Académicien told her in the first act about the King and one of the actresses. Even this suspicion cannot completely efface her love for the King, however, a love that is apparently quite genuine. Her love is positive, living, optimistic. Even if the King completely ignores her, she admits "Je vous aime assez pour vous aimer toute seule."<sup>101</sup> The avowal of absolute love and devotion elicits the King's corresponding ultimate expression of his particular form of love. "Comme j'aurais voulu mourir d'amour!"<sup>102</sup> Love again equals destruction. It is again love turned in upon itself, cancerous. The Queen, in her relative naïvete, understands the King quite

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<sup>100</sup>Ibid., p. 160.

<sup>101</sup>Ibid., p. 161.

<sup>102</sup>Ibid.

well. Her reply is devastating, or should be, if the King really knew himself. "Ainsi prémédité, Sire, ç'a été un suicide."<sup>103</sup> That is exactly the point. The King wants to plan to die of love. His love has nothing spontaneous, is merely tacked onto his life from the outside. It is merely something else upon which to accrocher his life. Even at the moments in his past during which he was apparently in love with Mercédès, and then Pierrette, he was seeking suicide rather than fulfilment. His regret is not that he failed to accomplish a liaison, but that he failed to die! He does not now understand what the Queen has told him.

Oh! cesse de me voir entouré de rois et d'ancêtres, de vaillances et de chants. Je ne suis qu'une pauvre petite âme de rien du tout, et très agitée. Si je croyais seulement à ma destinée . . . Tu m'as vu apparaître par dessus l'exaltation de ton peuple, annoncé par le grand-prêtre, venant de l'étranger. Mais nul n'est prophète en son pays et je suis de mon pays.<sup>104</sup>

The Queen cannot convince him that the prediction might have well been true, that he had arrived at the moment chosen by God, that he was truly le Roi prédit.

The discussion is interrupted by the Nurse who enters to tell the King and Queen that their son is ready for bed.

<sup>103</sup>Ibid.

<sup>104</sup>Ibid.

She is bubbling over because the child has been so good.

"Dois-je l'avancer ici pour qu'il embrasse, avant de dormir, Leurs Majestés?"<sup>105</sup> Everyone is astounded at the King's reply "Qu'on le fesse!"<sup>106</sup> All protest that the child has done nothing wrong, has in fact been exemplary. He will not understand. That is exactly why the King wants to have him whipped.

Parfait. Il ne comprendra pas. Le laisser en repos sous ce prétexte qu'il est bien sage? Et après? Dans quinze ans, s'il venait vous dire, en larmes: "Je continue d'être bien sage et personne ne me récompense?" Qu'on le fesse et qu'on le couche! Moi je fus bien soigné jusqu'à quinze ans; on m'avait même caché que je boitais. Puis je fus livré, avec cette malheureuse habitude du bonheur, à des hommes, à des femmes, à des livres qui ne me gatèrent point. Lui à quinze ans, il ne s'étonnera pas.<sup>107</sup>

The King has had enough of reality, however, and wants to begin again his probing of the past. He asks the Queen to leave and calls the comedians and, this time, his ministers. He sets the stage for les Trente tombes de Judas, explaining why he has chosen a "dancing" as his setting, and by implication, why Salacrou chose a music hall for le Casseur d'assiettes, a circus for Boule de verre and

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<sup>105</sup>Ibid., p. 162.

<sup>106</sup>Ibid.

<sup>107</sup>Ibid.

a port bar for Tour à terre.

Comme vous le savez, cette dernière scène se passe dans un dancing. Pourquoi un dancing? Eh bien! parce que toutes sortes de choses peuvent coexister dans un dancing: on y danse, on y chante . . . l'amour . . . la nostalgie . . . la musique n'arrête jamais et toute l'agitation humaine est ainsi résumée dans les mouvements des danseurs . . .<sup>108</sup>

He appoints the ministers as musicians, giving each of them an instrument which they do not know how to play ("Que fais-tu de l'illusion au théâtre? Joue comme un tzigane, debout!"<sup>109</sup>). A new backdrop descends, and the scene is similar to that described in the original version of les Trente tombes. He orders the actors to put on their costumes. The comédien is somewhat upset that he must play with a rope around his neck, but the King passes off this hesitation. "Quelle étrange volonté de ne se rien avouer! Il y a huit ans que tu devrais porter ce genre de cravate. Moi, je ne m'abuse pas. C'est la seule puissance qui me tente: comprendre."<sup>110</sup>

The play begins, with the King, of course, playing the rôle of Le Jeune Homme in the original, and the actor playing Judas. In the opening moments of the play the

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<sup>108</sup>Ibid., p. 163.

<sup>109</sup>Ibid.

<sup>110</sup>Ibid., p. 164.

speeches are exactly the same as those in Salacrou's earlier play, but the stage effects cannot be produced without considerable changes. The surrealistic elements of the original are impossible in an actual production, and must be compromised, which detracts considerably from the play's effectiveness. When Judas tries to hang himself for the first time, from the neck of a violin, he obviously does not turn into a limp rag before the eyes of the audience, and slip into a pile on the floor, but simply sits down, the cord around his neck having given way.

An interesting concession to Pont de l'Europe appears when, rather than simply mounting the platform and beginning his first speech to the assembled dancers as the Young Man had done, the King must symbolically defeat Mercédès Carcinta for the right to be in the spotlight. The Prompter announces "La vedette Mercédès Carcinta dans ses danses espagnoles."<sup>111</sup> The King leaps up on the platform, however, and shouts "Non! c'est moi qui monterai sur l'estrade. N'est-ce pas toujours moi qui ai joué son rôle?"<sup>112</sup> This speech must have been rather meaningless for the audience, who had not read the original text of the play. But in the

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<sup>111</sup>Ibid., p. 165.

<sup>112</sup>Ibid.



context of Salacrou's theater, its meaning is rather clear, and startlingly candid. It was indeed the King who had always played that rôle, and all the other rôles, for there is really only one protagonist in all of these plays, and that protagonist is Salacrou himself.- This becomes more and more evident in le Pont de l'Europe where we see the King having written a play which we know Salacrou to have written. Then the King equates himself with the Young Man of les Trente tombes de Judas in the passage just mentioned. In the relation of the protagonist to his intended love, Mercédès, Mary Madeleine, Isabelle, the écuyère there are so many similarities that it becomes undeniable that all of these young men are one and the same . . . and the only person who could be common among them is the playwright himself.

The play continues along the lines of the original, with the crowd of dancers asking the King why he does not sing ("Ne m'entendez-vous pas respirer?"<sup>113</sup>) and the King then descends into a spotlight and begins to play on a piano with the shadow of his fingers, which he manipulates in the light. In the stage directions for the King's play, however, he has named the song which he is playing, while in the

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<sup>113</sup>Ibid., p. 116.

original it had been called simply "une romance ancienne."<sup>114</sup>  
 The song is "Un poète m'a dit qu'il était une étoile . . ."<sup>115</sup>  
 which, in the context of what we have seen of Salacrou's  
 Young Men and their intense interest in the stars, is appar-  
 ently of significance. One might attribute the fact that  
 it is named in this play and had not been in the earlier  
 version to the possibility that Salacrou has come to know  
 himself better in the interim, although this is certainly a  
 tenuous supposition.

The rôle of the song in the life of the Young Man/  
 King/Salacrou remains great, however, whatever its title.  
 Not only does he repeat from the original, but he expands  
 the next speech, in which he talks of the song.

Oh, Je me souviens, ma mère, tandis que vous me  
 chantiez cette romance pour la première fois, j'ai  
 sangloté! C'était comme une éclipse de votre  
 coeur. Votre coeur se recouvrait d'un masque noir.  
 J'ai sangloté inexplicablement. Vous n'avez pas  
 su les raisons de cet effondrement d'enfance. Mon  
 ami (à Judas) ce fut mon premier chagrin.<sup>116</sup>

This moment in his youth at which he first felt the  
 anguish of existence strongly marked the King, and the Young  
 Man of les Trente tombes, since he had already said these

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<sup>114</sup>Les Trente tombes de Judas, Idées de la nuit,  
 p. 54.

<sup>115</sup>le Pont de l'Europe, p. 166.

<sup>116</sup>Ibid.

words some years earlier. It must also be at this moment, or a similar one, that Salacrou first recognized the existence of death, as has been mentioned in an earlier chapter. It is impossible to know, of course, whether this actual event took place in the playwright's life, the singing of this particular song by his mother, but its repetition in several of his plays indicates that something of the sort must have occurred, and that its influence over his youth and even adult life has been great.

As in the original play, the King's speech is followed by the cry of Judas "Jésus, Dieu Jésus! Pourquoi deviez-vous mourir?"<sup>117</sup> If one might be allowed pure conjecture, perhaps untenable and at best fragile, an interesting possible interpretation of the last two speeches appears in their juxtaposition. It has been apparent throughout all of the plays studied that the stars, heavenly bodies, the moon and the sun, have played a tremendous role in Salacrou's conception of man's relationship with universality. Even the interest in streetlamps, as artificial moons, and glass balls, might be seen as a part of this fascination. The title, or at least first line, of the song which lead to his bursting into tears, evidently tears of anguish, also speaks of stars,

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<sup>117</sup>Ibid., p. 167.

and of poets. It is not perhaps completely absurd to see in this a reflection of the young Salacrou's indoctrination with the Catechism républicain,<sup>118</sup> which explains life and the stars in an absolutely mechanistic manner. Salacrou had readily admitted the influence of this book in the formation of his philosophy of life, and, to a great extent, on his inability to believe in God. When Judas cries out "Oh Jesus, why did you have to die?," might this not be an extension of Salacrou's own anguish at the necessary destruction of Christ in the mechanistic concept of existence? Is it not Salacrou, through his protagonists, recounting the agony of his first realization that, for him, God could not exist, and might not the song sung by his mother (the catechisme républicain which was the "mother" of his philosophical formation???) be that mechanistic explanation of the universe?

Now leaving his rôle as protagonist in les Trente tombes, the King continues to speak of his youth, and what he says might also be equated to each of Salacrou's previous plays. He talks of Mary Magdelene. But he is now talking of his own life, as Jérôme living in Paris.

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<sup>118</sup>Cf. note 16, Chapter II.

Ensuite, des années heureuses et calmes, jusqu'à quinze ans. Et le retour au malheur. Qui sait? Toute ma vie n'est-elle pas construite sur ce chagrin d'enfant inexplicable. Ecoutez! Ecoutez tous! (Au piano: Le dernier tango.) C'est une petite chanson comme les autres, et qui n'a l'air de rien du tout, n'est-ce pas. Oui, mais oui, j'étais de cet avis, avant que je n'aie passé des heures devant la mer à chercher Marie-Madeleine, sur cette terrasse d'hôtel . . . J'avais quinze ans . . . Voilà: et je l'ai aimée, cette petite fille! Elle aussi, pendant un temps . . . puis elle ne m'aima plus! Elle essayait encore, mais ne pouvait plus. Mais bientôt elle se lassa de son impuissance et me delaisa pour sa tristesse. Alors, moi . . . écoutez! Pour ne pas mourir, je me suis efforcé de m'apprendre à ne plus aimer . . . je me suis appris à l'aimer moins, de moins en moins chaque jour. Je me regardais semer cet amour à tous les vents . . . j'en donnais un peu à une image, un peu à une chanson, un peu à un ami, un peu au ciel de nuit, au ciel de jour. Je devais être doué pour cette dispersion! J'ai très bien réussi! Trop! Je connais depuis cette chanson-la, tous les moyens d'agir sur mes sentiments . . . Pour ne pas mourir, vous dis-je! . . . Jeune gargon timide . . . ne reste pas si seul devant les vagues de la mer festonnée à l'image de ton coeur, les soirs . . .<sup>119</sup>

It is impossible to know whether this is in fact Salacrou talking about an actual event which took place when he was fifteen years old. But its continual reappearance in his early works would suggest that this is the case, and it is certain that the age of fifteen was critical for Salacrou's development. It was the year, 1914, during which he fell in love with Flaubert, and he marks his youth with

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<sup>119</sup>Ibid., p. 167.

that date.<sup>120</sup> It is also the date of the beginning of World War I, as well as the year of the death of Jaurès, whose picture alone Salacrou had on his wall. The "affaire Durand" was still unsettled, although it had begun four years earlier, and Salacrou's intense interest in its outcome might figure in the significance of his fifteenth year.

The age of fifteen was also a crucial one for the King in le Pont de l'Europe, as is evident in this last speech. But he has already mentioned that age when commanding that his son be whipped. "By the time he's fifteen, he won't be astounded by the injustice of life." When the Queen tells him that she would like to be able to erase the lines which mark his forehead, he replies: "Ce front, entre mes doigts, je l'ai plissé pour y allonger ma première ride. Imbécile. J'avais hâte! C'était avant mes quinze ans, naturellement. Depuis, j'ai essayé de les effacer."<sup>121</sup> Until the age of fifteen he had lived in happy anticipation of growing up. He had even tried to make wrinkles in his brow in order to sooner taste age. Whatever happened in 1914, or whatever year it might have been for the King, changed his life in a drastic manner. It seems to mark the

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<sup>120</sup>Cf. note 25, Chapter II.

<sup>121</sup>le Pont de l'Europe, p. 162.

beginning of his adult life, for it is the point after which he again wishes to be young. It is the fall from youthful innocence into the adult knowledge of the bitterness of existence.

The King's last speech certainly indicates that in his life, if not Salacrou's, this fifteenth year was marked by a first, great disappointment in love. The Young Man of the original version of les Trente tombes de Judas had spoken of his tragic love for Marie-Madeleine, and the King, playing a rôle, had repeated this story in his own play. But the King playing his rôle in Salacrou's play continues to talk of his fatal affair with Marie-Madeleine. When we consider the King is merely the re-enactment of Salacrou writing les Trente tombes, it seems likely that it was a love affair which also scarred Salacrou's fifteenth year.

In any event, the King's present inability to love can be traced back to that event. He recounts how he, in his anger and disappointment, dissipated his love and spread it over all he saw. In that way he ceased to love, but also ceased to live authentically. In fragmenting his lost love, he also fragmented his life. The terms are quite familiar. "Je devais être doué pour cette dispersion!"<sup>122</sup> All of

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<sup>122</sup>Ibid., p. 167.

Salacrou's young protagonists have lived "by little pieces," or "dispersed," or "gropingly," "a sparse life." And, although their despair was the result of disenchantment with love and life, they, in their pride, insist that they are the sole author of their particular anguish. "Une chose essentielle à mon désespoir c'est que j'en suis seul responsable. J'ai été déchire, mais avec mes ongles."<sup>123</sup>

The King has made some changes in Salacrou's Trente tombes as the play continues. Marie-Madeleine does not actually reappear, as she had in a very surrealistic sequence which ends with her head falling to the floor and turning into an orange. But the speeches prior to her arrival in the original play are kept relatively the same in the King's version. A young man is given a pistol with which he kills himself and the King faces the same consternation as the original Young Man. "Why did he kill himself, I only cried?" The orchestra bursts out with a chord as Judas again says, "Je n'ai même pas attiré sur moi tout le malheur du monde?"<sup>124</sup> This is almost a direct quote from the first Trente tombes, except for the important fact that it was originally stated as a negative, rhetorical question, "N'ai-je pas attiré sur

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<sup>123</sup>Tour à terre, p. 100.

<sup>124</sup>le Pont de l'Europe, p. 168.



moi tout le malheur du monde?"<sup>125</sup> Salacrou has reversed the meaning of this speech apparently to stress, for the King's benefit, the failure of Judas' "sacrifice" in taking upon himself the pain of the world, if indeed he did. He has gained nothing by it. That is the implication in the first play, for Judas was suggesting that his efforts should have been better repaid, that he should perhaps have been given Marie-Madeleine. Now the emphasis is on the fact that he acted in vain, and the King understands what he is trying to say, for he feels that he has done much the same thing.

Oui! l'orchestre, t'as beau hurler, j'ai compris:  
j'ai été lâche. Judas! J'ai cédé à tous les  
chantages de ma vie. Je me suis compromis avec  
la vie. J'ai accepté d'oublier cet amour. C'est  
alors qu'il me fallait mourir.<sup>126</sup>

Marie-Madeleine now appears in theory, at least, as the King draws a long white cloth from the jacket of a commis voyageur who happens to be standing by, and under this cloth, now a sheet spread on the floor, he evidently sees the image of Marie-Madeleine. There follows a completely new speech which surprises the other actors because it apparently is not in their scripts.

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<sup>125</sup>les Trente Tombes de Judas, p. 58.

<sup>126</sup>le Pont de l'Europe, p. 168.

Mes amis! mes amis! La voici revenue! Toi!  
 Toi! petite fille qui se mirait dans mon sang  
 tranquille. . . O mes paroles! encadrez-la . . .  
 Viens . . . maintenant que j'ai vieilli, je te  
 bercerai en père, approche . . . assieds-toi . . .  
 non, pas sur la couronne . . . Qu'es-tu devenue,  
 toi? Tu pris de l'âge, aussi? et te voici  
 méchante? Mais non, tu es morte puisque tu  
 reviens avec cette légèreté. Pose tes petits pieds  
 morts dans mes mains. Je rechaufferai leur marbre.  
 Petite fille. Petite fille . . . Judas! C'est  
 mon bon ange qui vient me visiter. La voici!  
 regarde . . . <sup>127</sup>

There is considerable confusion. The King has seemingly lost contact with the reality of the moment. The stage lighting brusquely returns to normal to break off this strange speech, which is indeed rather difficult to explicate. The King is obviously talking about Marie-Madeleine at the beginning of the speech, and it is known that she represents a disastrous love affair at the age of fifteen. But in the course of the speech she becomes younger, apparently a child, and she metamorphoses from the hated object of the King's vengeance, to his good angel. He seems to completely lose his mind for a moment. Unfortunately, we are not allowed to see where this might have led, to understand it more fully at this point, for the change in the lights has startled the King into consciousness and he does not continue his train of thought.

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<sup>127</sup>Ibid., p. 169.

Hélas! J'essaie, dans mon rêve, de se faire lever  
 autour de ce rond de lumière, les collines, bleues  
 comme les robes des anges d'église, les plaines  
 humides et le fleuve courbé où repose ma jeunesse  
 . . . Mais aucun paysage ne s'organise dans le  
 poussière de ce plancher . . . Pierrette . . .  
 Carcinta . . . prenez-moi par la main . . . 128

Korça again enters to bring fresh news of the uprising,  
 and les Trente tombes ceases for a moment. The situation is  
 worsening, growing into a genuine revolution. The King is  
 still disinterested, until he hears that the rebel family  
 in the Blue Forest, the family which had sworn to remain in  
 their houses and be burned alive, has broken its oath, fled  
 their homes, and is leading the populace against the King.  
 He is not upset that they are the leaders of the coup, but  
 rather disappointed that they have gone back on their word.  
 He had had considerable pride in their decision to sacrifice  
 themselves, for it was an act that he felt himself incapable  
 of carrying out. Now they are no better than he and all  
 those others throughout the history of the world who have  
 not had the strength to sacrifice themselves with honor.

Ah! Bravo! Eux aussi, ils ont manqué de foi?  
 Quelle époque de détresse! Toi, tu es un nigaud.  
 (Korça sort.) Insister? Quand ces hommes dont  
 j'enviais l'exaltation, eux-mêmes se trahissent?  
 Allons, petite passante. Nous sommes trop intelli-  
 gents pour ne pas détraquer toutes les idoles, mais

le serons-nous assez pour comprendre le monde et nous-mêmes, qu'elles n'animent plus? Allons contempler l'incendie des rebelles. Ah! Ah! Ah!<sup>129</sup>

The apparent answer to this question is "No." Or at least it has been for Salacrou and his people. His world has been cleared of idoles, religion, God, orthodox explanations or existence, and he does not understand it. Nor does the King. He has just lost another "idol," the belief that there were people in the world who believed in something strongly enough to give their lives for their principles. He had counted on the deaths of the rebel family, not for political reasons, not for reasons of vengeance, but for the genuinely positive reason that their deaths would represent something noble and valuable for him. They have held too dearly to life, not recognizing as does the King, in his universal vision, that physical life is meaningless and not worth hanging onto at the expense of the abstract value of honor. He feels that their deaths would have been significant, for them, and that their lives are not, for they, like the King so often, had missed a chance for heroically poetic action.

The King leaves the stage to watch the fires of the rebellion burning near his castle, and the others have an

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<sup>129</sup>Ibid., p. 170.

opportunity to discuss his strange behavior. The Ministers want to enlist the actors' aid in their coup, but manage to arouse only mild interest. Mercédès especially thinks that they are as insane as the King, but she becomes more interested in their plot when they tell her that the King intends to pay her with money which he has created for his country and which will be worthless when she returns to France. She seems interested in little besides her salary and is beginning to turn to their cause when the King returns and the subject must be changed. Salacrou has apparently made use of this little interlude to take a few gratuitous swipes at contemporary European politics and economics.

Jérôme I<sup>er</sup>, après le sacre, constata le vide des caisses royales. Pas d'argent. "Qu'a cela ne tienne! dit le roi, nous en ferons." Ce qui fut dit, fut fait. Il imprima de petits bouts de papier: "Aidons-nous à croire les uns les autres que nous avons beaucoup d'argent," dit Jérôme.<sup>130</sup>

This has no real significance in the play, however.

The King hears the end of this discussion as he returns and, assuring Mercédès that she will be paid in any currency she desires, orders the play to begin again.

"Toutes ces interruptions imprévues brisent mon émotion et me brisent moi-même."<sup>131</sup> It is Pierrette who recalls

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<sup>130</sup>Ibid., p. 171.

<sup>131</sup>Ibid.

the last lines that were spoken, "Sire, cette petite fille . . ."132 But the King does not take up this cue. He mixes his present reality with the reality of his play again, and speaks to Judas, the character in the play, about his present situation with the rebels. "Judas! ils ont fui leur maison et leur serment, leur foi. Parle, Judas, suis-je perdu?"133 The first sentence of this speech obviously refers to the rebels, since there have been no house, no flights, in the play to this point. But the second sentence, printed in bold face type, is to the Judas of the King's play. Throughout the play there has been this sort of confusion between the several levels of reality and it makes the play more difficult to understand, especially from the point of view of an audience, and also makes it stronger, for it is this very confusion of reality and fantasy in life which is one of the central themes of the play.

Judas himself is drawn into this confusion of rôles and there is a strange separation of character in which he continues to speak the lines given by the King, and, earlier Salacrou, to the Judas of the play, but speaks them as the actor Armand Duval. To the King's question he replies "Il

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132 Ibid.

133 Ibid.

n'est de salut possible que dans la recherche de ton salut impossible."<sup>134</sup> This is the same sort of enigmatic solution to the problems of existence that we have already seen in Salacrou's earlier plays. The Young Man of le Casseur d'assiettes, breaking plates to awaken God, represents this search after an impossible goal. The Young Man of Boule de verre feeling that the clown had a possible solution when he covered his face with mud and roamed among the jeering crowd. Perhaps Judas has been doing this in his attempts to hang himself, always unsuccessfully. He knows he will not succeed, but he must continue to try. Perhaps one can see here a reflection of Salacrou himself, forced to write his plays knowing that he will not succeed in finding answers to his unanswerable questions, but knowing that he must write to exist.

The Comédienne breaks in, reading from her script, if one can trust the typography of the printed text, as though the King had written lines which were to attempt to console himself. "On peut avoir aimé et aimer encore . . ."<sup>135</sup> These words, apparently from his own hand, must ring false to the King, and he pushes them aside, to continue talking

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<sup>134</sup>Ibid., p. 172.

<sup>135</sup>Ibid.

to Judas. The lines he speaks were in the original, said by the Young Man to Judas, but here the King reads them in his own voice. It is as though he has unconsciously combined his character, Judas, and Armand Duval as he knows him. He speaks to both, and both answer.

Il va répondre. Parle. Toi qui te pends à tous les arbres de nos désespoirs, toi qui te balances accroché à nos désirs, dérisoire ami de notre faiblesse, toi qui erres sur tous les sentiers de nos passions, abandonné de tous et de Dieu, sans légends d'amour, sans grâce d'enfants, sans même un chien ou un baton, en chemise, la corde au cou . . . Comme un niais vierge de village qui viole un soir d'été une toute petite fille sans pantalon et qu'on jette au baigne, n'aurais-tu connu de l'amour que le seul baiser de cette nuit-la? Ah! si je revoyais la forme de tes lèvres sur la joue divine, y lire la détresse de ce baiser que tu savais d'adieu . . .<sup>136</sup>

Spoken to Judas, the character, these lines have a considerable effect on Armand, the actor. He hears them not in character, but as though they were spoken to him personally. For a time he seems to be replying within the limits of his rôle, but it is soon apparent that he is speaking of himself, Armand, and not reading the lines which the King has given him, although what he says suggests that he has come to think of himself as Judas. He tries to make the King stop reciting, but he will not. "Tu as donné toi-même d'autres baisers que tu savais d'adieu, tiens ta

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<sup>136</sup>Ibid.



monnaie . . ."<sup>137</sup> the King continues. Armand suddenly turns on Mercédès, who has been talking to the Sous-Préfet. He is clearly jealous. "Marions-nous!"<sup>138</sup> Her reply, obviously outside the King's play, is brutal. "Nous marier? Je te l'ai proposé autrefois, au temps de ta vie mondaine. Mais épouse-t-on une danseuse? Aujourd'hui je ne veux pas épouser un comédien."<sup>139</sup>

The King continues to hammer away at Judas, who is more and more on the defensive.

Tu as beaucoup de souvenirs, Judas, plus tous les mauvais et les louches qui baignent en nous comme des noyés. Mon désir de mourir d'amour, aujourd'hui, n'est qu'un remords, n'est-ce pas? Non, c'est cette chanson qui m'abuse. Il faut danser sur cet air-la. Allez, dansez! Prends un accordéon, Judas, et mène la ronde!<sup>140</sup>

This is essentially the end of the original Trente tombes as it is employed by the King in his play. The action continues much along the same lines, and the dénouement is the same, but the speeches are now all exclusively the King's, although he continues to call the actor "Judas."

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<sup>137</sup>Ibid.

<sup>138</sup>Ibid.

<sup>139</sup>Ibid.

<sup>140</sup>Ibid.

As they begin a wild dance, the King makes reference to Salacrou's already established idea of having seen himself "avec l'oeil de Dieu." He feels that he, too, suffers from this malady which has haunted Salacrou's protagonists.

Dieu! Dieu! Voici que tes pieds dansent. Mais tu es si grand que tes yeux les regardent sans les reconnaître. Pourquoi ne m'as-tu donné que tes yeux? Comme ils sont sages! les hommes et les femmes ne se perdront donc pas, un jour, tous fous? Ils ne sentent donc pas, à certaines minutes qu'ils sont prêts d'exploser? Si l'on entendait Dieu rire! Ah! Ah!<sup>141</sup>

The implication is that God, in his universal wisdom, cannot actually see the reality of human life. He cannot see his feet, human beings dancing, because his eyes are oriented toward infinity. It is this terrible ability to see the end as well as the beginning which has made it impossible for Salacrou's young men simply to accept the fantasy of a happy and fruitful life. They know what the future holds, that happiness will not last, and they cannot accept anything less than permanence.

Pierrette seems offended that the King would speak in that manner to and about God, but he ignores her and turns again on Judas/Armand.

Judas, tes trahisons, tes faux serments, ta femme abandonnée, tes enfants, les Romains, tes embrassades

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<sup>141</sup>Ibid., p. 173. Italics mine.

pour oublier depuis huit ans et ce besoin éperdu  
de te pendre, ne t'ont donc rien appris? C'est donc  
inutile de vivre?<sup>142</sup>

Here the King is intermixing all the play's levels of reality. He does not know that Armand has left his wife, so that remark is addressed to the Judas of the play. The "Romains" can only refer to the historical Judas, but the next part of his speech, "pour oublier depuis huit ans" refers clearly to the actor, Armand, and not to the Judas of the play. It has been established that Armand has been in love with Mercédès for eight years, and it is probably eight years ago that she had asked him to marry her and he had refused.

Judas/Armand tries to escape this attack, "Laissez-moi, par pitié, oublier . . .,"<sup>143</sup> but the King will not let up. "Oublier? Voilà ce qui nous perd. Dieu oublie-t-il? Il est justement Dieu parce qu'il a toute la mémoire du monde. Souviens-toi, pour m'expliquer et me libérer, Judas. De quelle couleur étaient ses yeux?"<sup>144</sup> He is apparently speaking about Christ's eyes when he asks this question, but Judas' reply startles him. "Bleus, et quand elle s'est

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<sup>142</sup>Ibid.

<sup>143</sup>Ibid.

<sup>144</sup>Ibid.

tuée, ses yeux ne se sont pas fermés."<sup>145</sup> The change of gender makes it obvious that he is no longer talking about Christ, and, of course, the mention of suicide enforces this. "Mais de quels yeux parles-tu, Judas?"<sup>146</sup>

Armand Duval has been caught up in the King's play, and his rôle as Judas, to such a degree that he can no longer suppress the Judas-like events of his own past life. Unwittingly, the King has drawn a terrible admission from Armand, an admission with which he will not be able to live. Whose eyes? "Ma femme abandonnée! Elle était douce et j'avais aussi des petits enfants, que je n'ai revus qu'une fois, et qui ont pleuré, la tête de côté . . ."<sup>147</sup> The King had know nothing about Armand's wife, and it is by sheer chance, if such a thing exists, that Armand's own private past coincided with his rôle as Judas. This also allows Salacrou to bring this act to a close with a scene taken almost directly from the original Trente tombes, although this final action had been indicated in that version only by stage directions. None of this scene of admission is

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<sup>145</sup>Ibid., p. 174.

<sup>146</sup>Ibid.

<sup>147</sup>Ibid.

found in the earlier play, since it is obviously germane only to le Pont de l'Europe.

Armand is completely broken, "Ma femme! Ma femme! vendu pour ce néant . . . (Il montre la danseuse.)"<sup>148</sup> and begins to make preparations to hang himself. There are no directions at this point to indicate how this suicide might be carried out on stage, but he does, indeed, kill himself. The King is the only one who is aware of his intentions, for he senses that Armand has become Judas. He tries to warn the others to stop Armand, but they do not understand the reality of his action. With interesting irony Mercédès suggests that they cut Judas' rope with the carboard knife, the one with which Jérôme had wanted to kill her in the first act. This knife is, of course, no more useful for saving a life than it had been for taking one. The King had in the previous act attempted to force himself upon reality using this stage knife, and had failed. One might see in this suggestion by Mercédès a cynical comment on Jérôme's entire attempt to analyze his past through his play. He has been able to set up situations, but has not been able to control them. He had obviously not counted on Armand to actually kill himself, and seems genuinely

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<sup>148</sup>Ibid.

frightened by this turn of events. But the very stage which he set up in the hope of recapturing a past reality is useless in stopping the present. His play has been, as will Salacrou's be, invaluable in coming to terms with his past. He has already learned a great deal about himself. But it cannot become reality.

The King falls back into the Trente tombes description of Judas' death, but it is apparent that Armand is simply hanging himself, probably from a rafter on stage. The King, as though in a trance, visualizes Armand being borne away by a huge, black bird, as in the original play. The others on stage have now become aware of the reality of what Armand is doing, but it is too late to stop him. As he dies, his hand opens and the thirty pieces of silver fall to the floor, just as they had in the earlier version of the play. Although Salacrou's play, le Pont de l'Europe, has been highly improbable, it has not been surrealistic, and in order to maintain the feeling of reality, it might be supposed that Armand, in preparation for his stage death as Judas, actually had taken the thirty pieces of silver in his hand. There is not, then, necessarily any confusion in the fact that Armand, killing himself and not Judas, might have had Judas' coins in his hand. But there is also the suggestion that Armand indeed was Judas, that every man is

Judas, that every man has taken his thirty pieces of silver and holds them, ready to let them fall at his death, for, as Jérôme understands now, these pieces of silver are simply the past, accumulated throughout life as each moment becomes the next.

When the King bends down to examine the coins, he sees, as the Young Man had before him, the faces of real people struck on them.

Il y a trente morts, les pièces dissemblables . . .  
Examine les têtes . . . Tiens voilà ta pièce, Pierrette,  
et voici celle de Marie-Madeleine, et ma danseuse  
perdue . . . Mais ces trente deniers, ce sont trente  
tombes . . . Oui, quel est ce cimetière, où ma vie  
traîne? Mon passé, Pierrette! Mon passé . . . Ma  
vie éparse.<sup>149</sup>

The curtain falls on the second act as the Comédienne runs from the stage, crying for help, and the King falls among the coins.

It is obvious that his play has not brought the results the King had expected. It has ended with a genuine death, in which he cannot be completely disinterested, although death, as such, is not particularly important to him. He has increased his knowledge of himself, which was one of his major goals, but he has not been pleased with

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<sup>149</sup>Ibid., p. 175.

what he has learned. He has found that one can, indeed, evoke the past and perhaps manipulate it to understand it better, but one cannot change it. Perhaps the most important thing he has learned from his play is that his memories of his past had been faulty. He had misunderstood the events of his past, and had indeed only remembered those elements which fitted into his poetic conception of his personal tragedy.

The greatest good which his play might serve is that of catharsis. We must wait until the next act to see whether his life has, in fact, been changed by his experiences of that evening on stage with his past, but one might assume that he has at least got it now behind him. He has tried this method of analysis, has seen his past, and is perhaps now free of it. Perhaps seeing the past concretely acted out before him, he can now deal with it more effectively. As though he had vomited up these defeats of his youth, can he now begin to live in the present, to function in his rôle as King, and husband, and father? One must be very skeptical, for without this past which has so dominated his present, what would be left of Jérôme? He cannot escape his past, for he is his past. We all live in our own personal cemetery, surrounded by the events of our past, now dead, but exerting a profound influence on our present state. At least



Jérôme has come to discover this fact and, knowing it, he might be better equipped to cope with the future.

The last act of le Pont de l'Europe, somewhat shorter than the first two, is for the most part a long dialogue between King Jérôme and his Queen. He has to a great extent exorcised his past, and this act is given to the present, his life with the Queen and his son.

The curtain rises on a dark stage. A dim light appears and the King is seen still lying among the silver coins dropped by the dying Armand. He is asleep. The Queen enters, talking quietly to herself. She is looking for Jérôme, or for Korça, to find out what has happened during the night. She is surprised and confused to see the King's stage setting in such disorder. She has heard that the actor has killed himself, and she fears for the King's health. She knows that he has acted strangely. She is still rather afraid that there has been a renewed liaison between her husband and the dancer and she cannot understand why Jérôme cannot accept her love, and the happiness of a rôle as King. "Ne saurez-vous jamais prendre les mains que je vous tends? Et ne commencerez-vous à regarder notre jeunesse que lorsque nous serons vieux? Dois-je attendre notre vieillesse pour être heureuse?",<sup>150</sup> she quietly asks the

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<sup>150</sup>Ibid., p. 177.

sleeping King. She has recognized that in his passion for the past, the King cannot take interest in his present. She is right in wondering if they must wait until their youth, for they are now young, becomes a part of that past for it to interest the King. His obsession with the past is especially painful for the Queen because she, according to the prediction of the High Priest, can know nothing of that past. She is excluded from it not only by the fact that she was not part of it, but because she cannot be told of it. All she can do is wait for him to no longer be king. "Alors je vous dirai combien je vous aimais, et quand votre fils pourra ceindre la couronne vous me parlerez de votre passé qu'il me faut encore ignorer."<sup>151</sup>

The King begins to stir, obviously dreaming. He is talking in his sleep to Judas. "Attention! Voici qu'il tombe en pluie sur nous et sur la ville . . . Non, je ne veux plus faire l'ours, reveille-moi, Judas . . ."<sup>152</sup> He is perhaps thinking of the coins raining from Judas' hand. Whatever it was, the King is terrified. He looks around himself and is surprised to find the stage still as it was.

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<sup>151</sup>Ibid.

<sup>152</sup>Ibid.

Nothing has changed. When the Queen tells him that it is only three o'clock in the morning, he cannot believe that so little time has passed since the fatal rehearsal.

Trois heures! J'étais très mal sur ces marches, mais je suis si las! Ah! terrible soirée! Terrible! Et qui ne sert à rien, la vie continue! Le peuple, m'a-t-on dit, croit que je m'amuse! Si ma couronne traduisait les mouvements de mon âme et se tordait avec mes pensées, il en tremblerait à me voir le front ceint d'elle . . . Et ce cauchemar improvisé dans mon sommeil qui continue l'autre, ces cauchemars qui se chevauchent . . . J'étais sur un nauge, non, c'était un cheval, mon cheval blanc, mais il était noir et il avait le nez de Korça . . . Alors . . . Oh! et l'autre qui s'est pendu! Il a joué son rôle jusqu'au bout, lui, voyez-vous; pendu, Après huit années . . . Mais pourquoi ne dormez-vous pas Madame?<sup>153</sup>

The King's feelings about the results of his play are evident here. It was a disaster for him, a nightmare which is only continued in the nightmares he has just dreamed. This last nightmare does not seem as easy to explain as that of Tour à terre, perhaps because we only see a fragment of it here. The one obvious element is the confusion of reality and fantasy which one always finds in dreams. He is certain that it is his horse, but the color is different. The horse's nose being like Korça's might suggest the King's sense of being dominated by his new rôle,

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<sup>153</sup>Ibid. Italics mine.

of not being free to be Jérôme but forced to function rationally as the King of his country, the rational action represented by the wise, careful, pragmatic Korça. This is little more than conjecture, however, and the nightmare cannot be seen as particularly significant, except by its mere existence.

Jérôme, through his play, had accomplished the very opposite of what he had set out to do, and he realizes this. When the Queen mentions the disorder of the stage, Jérôme develops this term as a definition of his life. It is a definition which we have heard before, in Tour à terre.

Pierre had summed up his entire position in life with this statement to Patchouli: "Si ma situation au milieu de tout peut être indiqué par un mot, c'est par celui-ci: 'DESACCORD.' Je vis en désaccord avec mon propre désaccord."<sup>154</sup> The King feels the same degree of despair. "Oh! le désordre! c'est ma vie qui est en désordre; depuis hier soir, je ne m'y retrouve plus du tout. J'ai brouillé le jeu."<sup>155</sup> The King had known that he was taking a great chance with his play. In the first act he had admitted to the Queen "Je tente une

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<sup>154</sup>Tour à terre, p. 85.

<sup>155</sup>le Pont de l'Europe, p. 178.

aventure plus dangereuse qu'une guerre folle."<sup>156</sup> He has lost the game.

The Queen's attempts to console him only make the King more haughty in his tragic posture. He needs no one but himself. She must simply accept him as one of those kings about whom one reads in history books, "un roi capricieux et toujours triste."<sup>157</sup>

She cannot do this, for she loves him, with a normal, simple, all-consuming passion. She begs him to destroy her with him, if he must destroy his happiness in regrets about the past. She is willing to sacrifice herself to him, if only he will accept her into his anguish.

Alors, gagnez-moi à cette étrange maladie, entre-  
tenez en moi la désolation qui vous ruine. Accordez-  
moi à votre détresse. Je ne veux rien autre que vous  
ressembler; me voici, emportez-moi, je ne veux plus  
pleurer seul. Jérôme, laissez-moi vivre entourée  
de l'éclat de vos larmes; je veux bien souffrir, je  
souffre déjà, j'ai hâte de me déchirer davantage,  
mais avec vous! Mon Dieu! Jérôme, avec vous! Ne  
me donner plus le spectacle distant de vos tris-  
tesses; approtez-les en moi; je veux m'en nourrir  
ou mourir à vos pieds!<sup>158</sup>

No one can doubt her sincerity. It is a very pro-  
found expression of love, and even Jérôme will, before long,

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<sup>156</sup>Ibid., p. 122.

<sup>157</sup>Ibid., p. 178.

<sup>158</sup>Ibid., p. 179.

begin to be conquered by her obvious love for him. The intensity of this speech proves, in fact, that she is worthy of the King in his despair. Unfortunately, he does not want to share his tragedy. We have seen the egocentricity of his anguish, and that of all of Salacrou's heroes, and it is the very power of the Queen's avowal which prevents the King from accepting her in his "maladie." He laughs at her candor. "Je n'aime pas l'exaltation chez les autres."<sup>159</sup> This is perhaps one of the most telling statements that Jérôme has made. He must play the lead rôle, and there can be no tragedy but his tragedy. He can neither leave his tragic posture, nor can he accept competition. He will not share his rather delicious pain.

As though to change the subject, the King asks what his son's reaction had been to his having been whipped without cause. Without seeming to realize the significance of what the child has done, the Queen tells the King:

Après avoir demandé pourquoi vous étiez en colère,  
et qu'on lui eût dit que vous saviez qu'il était  
sage et qu'il ne vous fâcherait que s'il ne recevait  
pas cette fessée inattendue, il s'est aisément  
résigné. Tout de même après, du haut de la tour,  
il a jeté toutes ses poupées en les injuriant et  
un de ses oiseaux enfermé dans sa cage. En bas,  
la cage s'est brisée et l'oiseau était mort.

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<sup>159</sup>Ibid.

Comme le Sous-Préfet se trouvait là il le menaça.  
 Le Sous-Préfet apeuré recula en parlant de David  
 et Goliath; il parlait sérieusement, le petit aussi  
 était sérieux . . .<sup>160</sup>

This was clearly a monumental event in the young son's life, and it seems so similar to events in Salacrou's own life, and to events at least hinted at in the lives of his early protagonists, that it must be seen as significant in this play. It might be equated to that moment at which Salacrou realized that there would be no Ali Baba, or that terrible moment at which he discovered the existence of death. It is that moment in every young man's life at which he begins the evolution from child to man. It is again the loss of innocence. One can feel this young boy, accepting the whipping with considerable maturity, perhaps not crying, but then saying to himself "All right, this is the way life is. But no more birds and dolls for me." It is the first step in the recognition of the essential absurdity of life. The contrast between the King's son as he was earlier described by his nurse, and the young man who appears in the Queen's speech, is frightening. The nurse described him shortly before the whipping.

Ah! qu'il est riant, le petit joil de Leurs Majestés!  
 L'Excellence (the French ambassador) a donné le bateau

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<sup>160</sup>Ibid., p. 180.

mécanique, dans une boîte à serrure, et le petit bat des mains, suce la clef . . . chante-t-il? Il chante, puis va se moucher avec le navire, et je cherche, je cherche . . . Et voilà! coucou! Il m'appelle de sous la chaise . . .<sup>161</sup>

"Le petit aussi était sérieux . . ." The change brought on by his introduction to gratuitous, absurd pain is shattering, but the King does not seem shocked. He was sadly aware that this was an evolutionary step into manhood which had to be taken.

The Queen attempts to question Jerome about the success of his rehearsal, about the comédiens but he refuses to be drawn into an involved discussion of something which he considers finished. "On ne la jouera plus."<sup>162</sup> He has, however, no complaints about the cast. "Quelques-uns d'entre eux ont même pris le texte très à coeur; des scènes furent très bien jouées, avec un réalisme que je ne demandais pas; mais c'est la pièce qui m'ennuie."<sup>163</sup>

The King has found out about the Ministers' plot to take his crown, but he is not particularly worried. He, too, is a Frenchman, an outsider, who would be King. "Oui, c'est

<sup>161</sup>Ibid., p. 162.

<sup>162</sup>Ibid., p. 180.

<sup>163</sup>Ibid.



désolant, je fais le cinquième bouffon, le bouffon en chef . . ."<sup>164</sup> He has frequently indicated that he had little faith in the predictions which made him King, and he has no faith now. When the Queen tries to convince him that it was, indeed, chosen by God, he replies:

Ah! oui, la main de Dieu! Pour vous l'histoire est si simple: Dieu m'a désigné! Le seul droit d'être chef --- Ça ne va pas loin. Pouvais-je espérer, à Paris, d'être un jour roi, même d'un petit pays? Non! Aussi, j'ai accepté de voir quelles joies pouvaient naître d'une aventure, certes terrestre, terre à terre, mais inespérée. Eh bien, c'est plus agréable que le commerce, parce que c'est moins prenant, mais je vois assez vite la fin de tout cela.<sup>165</sup>

The end which he visualizes is apparently violent. He has perhaps become more aware of the real danger which the uprising poses his crown, and suggests that he expects a coup. "Les remparts sont massifs, élevés, et une nuit des spectres sortiront peut-être de cette cage (il montre l'armure) pour me distraire."<sup>166</sup> The absurdity of his situation is so obvious to him that he cannot understand how his Queen could continue in her blind faith in his divine right to rule. "Ici-même regardez-nous un moment, considérez cet entourage, dégagez-vous de vous-même, et

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<sup>164</sup>Ibid., p. 182.

<sup>166</sup>Ibid., p. 183.

<sup>165</sup>Ibid.

dites-moi si ce n'est pas effrayant ou ridicule? Quel est le sens de cette armure près d'une fenêtre, de ce costume bizarre collé sur mes angoisses . . ."<sup>167</sup> The suit of armor is a relic from a past which is not the King's, and he anticipates that someday this heritage into which he has been thrust will rise up against him and crush him for his sacrilege.

The Queen, in her feminine naïvete has absolute trust in the power and desire of God to control events to her benefit, and she does not doubt the honesty of the High Priest who has interpreted God's word on earth. "Attendez que Dieu vous retire de vos angoisses; un jour, il se montrera encore mieux que dans ses prédictions, qui vous étaient pourtant destinées."<sup>168</sup>

King Jérôme, being a creation of Armand Salacrou, cannot accept a God who operates in such a simple manner. If God is explicable, he cannot be God. All of Salacrou's references to God have indicated a God whose principal characteristic was mystery. It is a God who hides from man, who must be sought out, and not a compassionate Creator who reveals himself so easily to his creations.

<sup>167</sup>Ibid.

<sup>168</sup>Ibid.

Le Dieu que je cherche, qui m'inquiète, et dont, certes, je ne veux pas rater une imprudence, s'il doit en commettre une, ne se révèle pas dans des prédictions si aisées, si bien à notre portée humaine, que celle d'une couronne jettée sur une tête, comme au hasard d'une fête foraine, et il ne risque pas son mystère avec cette puerilité. Ah! une imprudence divine! En saisir une et dépister Dieu! Il y a des jours où je suis las d'interroger!<sup>169</sup>

There are several interesting elements in this speech, all of which have often appeared in Salacrou's earlier plays. The King is not indicating that he believes in the existence of an orthodox God, nor have any of the previous Salacrou protagonists. When they speak of God, as they often do, it means simply "mystery." He is "seeking" a God who is impossible to find, for once found, he is no longer God. He is disgusted with the ease people have in accepting their God, a God who is not mysterious, is not enigmatic. There is obvious reference to an event in la Boule de verre when he mentions a hat being tossed about at a fête foraine. The Young Man of that play, seeing the clown's hat being passed from head to head in the crowd, has the same reaction as the King. "Voilà! l'Eternel s'est posé sur moi comme ce chapeau sur cette foule, comme un oiseau sur un arbre. Ah! je comprends mon regret du ciel."<sup>170</sup>

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<sup>169</sup>Ibid.

<sup>170</sup>la Boule de verre, p. 26.

God who is accepted by "les hommes comme les autres" is too simple, too easy to find, too much scaled to human concepts. He is a human God and Salacrou's heroes, in their rage for permanence, in their poetic exaltation, can find no solace in a God who simply created man, and might indeed have been created by him. The King continues "Je cherche quelque chose qui me dépasse, qui soit plus grand que moi et qui me surprenne, qui m'enlève. N'importe quoi! Peut-être finirai-je dans le tourbillon d'un fleuve . . ."<sup>171</sup>

The Queen is certain that he has already found something which is superhuman, which "goes beyond" the King's human existence. He has loved her. It is the ability to love someone else which has always been the goal of Salacrou's people, and if the King can be convinced that he has, in fact, loved the Queen, perhaps he might be able to grasp that love as something onto which to attach his life, to prove that he does indeed exist. But she must prove it to him.

Mais vous m'avez aimée, Sire! Now premiers jours, nos premiers repas, tous les deux, sur la terrasse . . . Cette joie sereine! . . . Votre étonnement de vivre dans un château qui ne changeait pas de place la nuit! . . . Vous disiez, en montrant les nuages: "Désormais, c'est le paysage qui passe devant moi . . ." Et quand votre fils est né, ne vouliez-vous pas conserver toutes les cordes qui sonnèrent les

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<sup>171</sup>le Pont de l'Europe, p. 183.

cloches de l'annonce de la naissance, et les amener toutes, des églises au château, en entourer le château, y accrocher des guirlandes de fleurs? . . .  
 (Prenant les mains du Roi) Jérôme, ces mains, tu les serrais sur mes joues, tu regardais mes yeux, mon front, où tu suivais du doigt les petites bosses et les creux? Jérôme, tu me disais . . .<sup>172</sup>

These would certainly seem to be acts of love, and Jérôme is coming to be convinced that he had actually experienced something outside of himself. But his comment to his wife is typically salacrienne: "Oui! répète les mots, je veux des témoins!"<sup>173</sup> Salacrou's heroes must be continually reminded that they have existed, that they do in fact now exist. Love is proof of that existence, but love, like everything ceases to exist as the moments pass and must be continually renewed. It is the "circle" which had confounded Salacrou's first Young Man in le Casseur d'assiettes. "Je dois toujours recommencer, et c'est le commencement qui est impossible. Où commence le circle? Ma vie est un cercle qui m'étouffe."<sup>174</sup> Salacrou's protagonists find themselves continually faced with the necessity for proving to themselves that they exist. And each

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<sup>172</sup>Ibid.

<sup>173</sup>Ibid.

<sup>174</sup>Le Casseur d'assiettes, Théâtre I, 15.

instant's proof becomes instantly invalid, because it is instantly unreal and past. King Jérôme here is listening to the Queen's words as if he can collect them like stamps, order them, and make them functional in his re-ascertaining of his past love. "Je veux des témoins." It is a playwright speaking about his need both to review the events of his past to verify them, and his need for an audience before which to display his life.

As the Queen continues to evoke happy scenes from their supposedly happy past, the King is overcome with regret over his inability to act. "Ah! pourquoi me suis-je retenu de t'aimer?"<sup>175</sup> He seems to reveal that his relationship with his Queen had been like that with the other women in his life, or who could have been in his life. He had not kept rendez-vous with Carcinta, nor with Pierrette, and perhaps many more. He had apparently held back from accepting their love, or at least involvement with them, and it was apparently due to a fear of treachery. This spectre of the unfaithful woman has appeared in all the plays to this point; it is summed up in the image of Marie Madeleine.

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<sup>175</sup>Le Pont de l'Europe. p. 185.

"Sire, aviez-vous honte de m'aimer?"<sup>176</sup> Jérôme is approaching a realization of the destructiveness of his fears. Throughout this play he has moved toward an understanding of his motives, and the errors of his past. Especially in the Queen's case does he now feel that he has acted stupidly. "Pourquoi me suis-je, avec toi, méfié des désordres de l'amour?"<sup>177</sup> The word désordres is perhaps the key here, for it again suggests a distrust in anything that is not permanent, a hesitancy to give himself to anything which will not last forever. Of course, given Salacrou's heroes' knowledge that nothing will last, this means that they can never give themselves completely, or even in part, to anything. Life, thus, simply passes them, "le côté fleuve de l'existence."

The Queen understands nothing of this constant, anguished questioning about something which seems so obvious. "Mais non, Jérôme, tu m'as aimée. Je ne sais pas si tu peux aimer davantage, mais je crois que pas un homme ne pouvait aimer mieux. Oh! ce fut court! Jérôme, tu as oublié? Lorsqu'on n'aime plus, on oublie donc qu'on a aimé?"<sup>178</sup> This

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<sup>176</sup>Ibid.

<sup>177</sup>Ibid.

<sup>178</sup>Ibid.

is, of course, exactly the problem for Jérôme. He has, in effect, forgotten, for memories are meaningless to him. He has tried to use his play to convince himself that he had lived his past, and he has been disappointed. But perhaps if he can speak of his past to his Queen, who does love him and has said that he loved her, perhaps he can recover himself.

La vie passerait au travers de moi sans laisser de traces? Et mes regrets . . . Non! Non! N'attendant rien de mon futur, d'un futur impersonnel, n'espérant aucune joie de ce qu'il voudra m'aller chercher dans son magasin d'accessoires, dont l'expérience des autres nous ressasse l'existence, je me suis replié sur mon passé, sur ce que ma vie avait touché et je lui ai voué une tendresse exagérée . . . j'ai beaucoup souffert. Ah! si je pouvais te dire . . . t'expliquer, te parler de ce passé . . . Vous m'aimez . . . et vous n'osez désobéir à votre Dieu!<sup>179</sup>

This is a reflection of so many speeches in Salacrou's earlier plays that it would be useless to recount them here. Jérôme has, in the course of this play, made considerable progress over the nihilistic postures of Salacrou's earlier protagonists, however. He has perhaps found a method. There seems for the first time to be hope. His play has been unsatisfactory in making him happy, useless in regaining the past, but it has taught him about himself and clarified some mysteries. And now his Queen is trying to convince him

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<sup>179</sup>Ibid.



that he has, indeed, loved, without remembering it, has already had what he is seeking to prove his involvement in life. But he cannot probe this past, for the predictions forbid his talking about his life before reaching the borders of his new country.

This compulsion to explain himself has very existential overtones. The association with the ideas of the Existential movement has been one of the important elements in Salacrou's intellectual life, although, since his disenchantment with Socialism during his years with l'Humanité, he has remained true to his decision to refuse to lend his name officially to political or literary movements. It was Jean-Paul Sartre himself, however, who asked Salacrou to preside at the conference from which the excellent précis of the Existential philosophy, l'Existentialisme est un humanisme,<sup>180</sup> appeared. The position of King Jérôme at this moment in le Pont de l'Europe is almost exactly that of Sartre's Garcin in Huis clos. At the play's end Garcin realizes suddenly that the door to his Hell is open and that he can leave if he wishes, but, throughout the development of the play, has discovered that he must stay in the room,

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<sup>180</sup> Jean-Paul Sartre, l'Existentialisme est un humanisme (Paris: Nagel, 1963).

for he must convince Inès that he has not been cowardly in his past. Jérôme wants to speak of his past to his Queen for exactly the same reason, although cowardice is not exactly the emotion involved. It is essential that he explain himself, not only in order to justify himself, but more importantly to enlist another's belief in his cause, to add to the weight of evidence which might prove that he was authentically existent.

To the King's utter surprise, the Queen agrees to hear his story. She will break the law imposed by the High Priest and welcomes the punishment that God might pour down on her. She is terribly frightened, however, for she is certain that the predictions had been right about Jérôme's ascension and therefore equally right about the necessity for silence about his past. She suggests that they might flee, wander aimlessly in the countryside, find their first happiness again. The King is enchanted.

Tout l'air de la pièce m'entre dans la poitrine!  
Partir! Ah! ma petite Reine! Je t'enlève! A  
l'aube! Il fait froid, tu sais, à l'aube . . .  
Nous partirons avec notre fils. Partir . . . Je  
serai arrivé comme le soleil allait se reposer,  
et tout cela n'aura duré qu'une nuit . . .<sup>181</sup>

If he leaves as he had come, nothing will have been changed

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<sup>181</sup>Le Pont de l'Europe, p. 186.

for him. It will be simply another flight, exactly as he had fled Paris. Life will not let this happen again. He can no more ignore the years he has been King than he had been able to ignore his youth in Paris. His past has dominated him to an absolute degree until this moment, and he seems on the verge of coming to terms with it, of exorcising it and perhaps finding calm, if not happiness. But the events of his reign will not allow this to happen. The King and Queen have only a few moments to talk before doom unexpectedly walks in to snatch their choices away.

The Queen, in a very oblique manner, is pointing toward a question about Mercédès Carcinta, who is still very much on her mind. The Queen is, after all, a woman, and now that she has dared to agree to hear of the King's past, she is free to ask the questions that have been tormenting her since the Académicien first intimated something about an affair between the King and Mercédès. But she cannot simply ask, she must build up to the proper moment. She tells the King that they can return to Paris, see the house where he played as a child. And she is quite sincere in this. After a series of questions she asks one which has the effect of a catharsis, "Quel a été ton premier chagrin, après tes quinze ans?"<sup>182</sup> The age of fifteen appears again, and again

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<sup>182</sup>Ibid., p. 187.

we do not learn what event happened in that year which so fundamentally effected Jérôme's life. The question itself seems to have finally pushed the King into an acceptance of his present existence. His reply is startling, "Je ne sais plus . . . Je t'aime. Enfin j'aime! Ah! partir avec toi."<sup>183</sup> He has forgotten the tragedy which had so dominated him, and upon forgetting it, he loves for the first time. The object of the love remains relatively secondary to the experience of loving. From "Je t'aime" he moves to "Enfin, J'aime," with no direct object. It is the loving which he had sought, but it is indeed the Queen who has inspired this love, has performed the miracle none of Salacrou's other young women have been capable of.

This moment of pure emotion forces the Queen to admit the real motives for her questions, although this does not lessen her sincerity.

Je t'ai menti . . . je t'ai menti . . . la danseuse  
 Mercédès Carcinta . . . je voulais savoir . . .  
 non, ne me dis pas si tu l'as aimée . . . pourquoi  
 elle est revenue . . . Parle-moi . . . parle-moi,  
 Jérôme . . . Non! non! pas de cette femme . . .  
 La maison où tu es né demeure-t-elle?<sup>184</sup>

She is obviously struggling with herself, knowing that she

<sup>183</sup>Ibid.

<sup>184</sup>Ibid.

should not ask about Carcinta, that she should not be interested, particularly since she now seems to truly have Jérôme's love, but she cannot restrain herself. She changes the subject and Jérôme continues to answer her question about his past. The question about Carcinta has had no apparent effect on him. When he is asked to tell the Queen about his play, he is sincere when he replies "Oh! elle a de moins en moins d'importance!"<sup>185</sup> He need seek no more into his past, for he has found his present, and the play is now useless.

The Queen is quite ready to give up all for Jérôme.

La route fait la belle sous la lune! On voit si bien la route, la nuit; on ne voit qu'elle et du noir. Nous irons doucement de pays en pays comme tu voudras, à pied si tu le veux, nous attardant ou reprenant la route avec ton envie de changer de village.<sup>186</sup>

It is this willingness to sacrifice everything for Jérôme that has convinced him that he is at last loved, and which has perhaps made him love for the first time. He can trust the Queen implicitly and we have seen that he could never have trusted Mercédès or Pierette. The Queen has been his and no one else's, while his love for his earlier women had been pure fantasy, a transference of his

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<sup>185</sup>Ibid.

<sup>186</sup>Ibid., p. 188.

own desire to be loved. His play has been successful to the extent that it freed him from his illusions about the past, cleansed him of his fantasy and made him ready to accept the absolute purity of the Queen's love. There is none the less something a bit artificial in the King's position. It is the degree of the Queen's sacrifice which has impressed him, and he is still not absolutely convinced.

Ne me laisse pas oublier que tu étais la Reine et que tu abandonnes ton château d'enfance pour partir. Partir! toi qui m'entraînes. Une grande journée qui ne finira plus. Personne ne se doutera, plus tard, en nous regardant, de cette nuit que nous vivons en ce moment, alors qu'un roi et une reine décident de mettre la clef sous un pont-levis et de partir sans esprit de retour. Insiste bien, montre-moi bien chaque geste que je fais: dis-moi bien que je t'aime.<sup>187</sup>

The Queen, however, says the magic word, the one thing that had been missing from Jérôme's life, the one concept which was still missing from his hoped for love of the Queen. "Qu'importe que tu oublies maintenant, puisque nous nous aimerons toujours."<sup>188</sup> All his earlier dreams of love had been transitory, the Queen was offering him permanence. He has gone another step in his emancipation from anguish, found a possibility to escape the "côté fleuve"

<sup>187</sup>Ibid. Italics mine.

<sup>188</sup>Ibid. Italics mine.

of life, to find that something permanent which has tormented Salacrou's Young Men. "Toujours! Pourquoi n'as-tu pas parlé plus tôt?"<sup>189</sup>

Unable to control herself any longer, the Queen must return to Mercédès Carcinta. "Je n'en peux plus, Jérôme! Tu l'as donc beaucoup aimée?"<sup>190</sup> The King has forgotten whom she is talking about, so much is he enthralled with his new existence. "Un beau nom . . . Un beau nom de géographie pour voyageurs en pantoufles."<sup>191</sup> Did the actor not kill himself for her? "Es-tu folle? La Carcinta n'a rien à voir dans cette pendaison. C'est la fatalité d'un rôle. La Carcinta! Tout au plus son nom a joué avec mon coeur."<sup>192</sup>

As the King continues his dream about their flight, ending the discussion about Mercédès Carcinta, ("Je voudrais que sur les routes, à notre passage, les arbres se remettent à fleurir. . ."<sup>193</sup>) the Queen hears distant noises. Jérôme

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<sup>189</sup>Ibid.

<sup>190</sup>Ibid.

<sup>191</sup>Ibid.

<sup>192</sup>Ibid.

<sup>193</sup>Ibid.

has given up his life as King and assumes that he can ignore its consequences. "Laisse le ciel à ses affaires! Oh!

Attends! (Sur le mannequin, il jette sa couronne, son manteau.) C'est lui qui recevra demain ce qui reste des comédiens. Me voici un homme jeune, qui laisse derrière sa légende . . ."<sup>194</sup> He tries to ignore the heavy blows that the Queen points out, because he has come to the final moment of his self-knowledge, and what he has been prior to this moment is unimportant to him.

Laisse les nuages applaudir à notre union. Pourquoi n'ai-je pas compris plus tôt que l'intérêt de la vie et de mon avenir n'est pas dans un choix parmi les objets du magasin d'accessoires de l'expériences des autres, mais dans la manière dont on les mêlait à notre vie. Qu'il est sot de dire: quoi! je serai un homme comme les autres: banquier, paysan, amoureux et de faire ainsi à l'avance le bilan de sa vie! Il faut dire et voici le vrai mystère: "Comment serai-je un homme comme les autres?" Viens!<sup>195</sup>

This is a question which is in fact an answer. In asking himself "how" he has left the domain of "what." Salacrou's previous young men have been constantly haunted by the question of what they should become. They have begged their ancestors to return to show them the way. They have despaired and killed themselves, or simply fled life, abdicating existence. But Jerome has accepted life, has

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<sup>194</sup>Ibid., pp. 188-189.

<sup>195</sup>Ibid., p. 189.



acknowledged the Queen's love for him, and has recognized the possibility of his love for her. He has realized that he has already been existing, is already what he will be, is already defined. He need no longer probe his past to discover himself, for he is himself. He has made the leap into an existential awareness of himself. His problems are not solved, for he must continue to live, but he now knows his ground, has now become acquainted with his situation. He must still act, for realizing that one is alive is only the initial step in becoming, he must now function consciously in the present to give himself meaning.

He has, however, made one tragic error. He has assumed that he can, in his new awareness, simply ignore his past. But another existential given is that our past acts, and our contemporary situation, cannot be escaped, and that we must operate within the milieu which we have, knowingly or unknowingly, established for ourselves. Jérôme rather gleefully contemplates setting out on the road again, this time not fleeing, but seeking life, seeking authentic action which he can accept, happiness of which he no longer need be afraid. But, much like Mersault in Camus' L'Etranger, he has discovered life too late. Mersault, already in prison, already condemned to death, can only for

a moment savor the knowledge of the real existence of life, and perhaps of man's rôle in it. When Jérôme says "Come!" in anticipation of their new life, it is already impossible to avoid the dénouement awaiting him in his present rôle.

As the noise around the palace grows, Jérôme at last notices it. He is not yet fully aware of its significance, for he has already abdicated his crown, in effect, and he does not feel that it any longer concerns him. But as fires are seen quite near the palace gates, he becomes alarmed. The Queen wants one final avowal of his love, "M'aimez-vous, au moins?"<sup>196</sup> but Korça bursts in before the King can answer. The palace is under attack. The family from the Blue Forest has raised an army of peasants and the High Priest is supporting the revolt. The King is astounded that the High Priest has given his consent, for he had assumed him to be faithful, although he has never believed in the prophet's predictions concerning him. Korça explains that the priest is angry because he had expected a major position in Jérôme's government, and that he now claims to have received new revelations which have turned him against the King. There is nothing to do, and no escape. The

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<sup>196</sup>Ibid.

peasants are convinced that Jérôme is about to sell the country out to France and they are shouting for a new King.

All of the other characters begin to pour out onto the stage as the danger to the palace mounts. The King is firm, they will defend the palace to the last man. But there are no men left. The palace guards have gone over to the side of the revolutionaries. The doors have been thrown open and the cause is lost. Among the hysterical cries of the ministers, the players, the French ambassador and the others, there is a broken dialogue between Jérôme and his Queen. He attempts to calm her, telling her that nothing will be done to them, that they can still begin their life anew, but she is certain that they are being punished by God for her having listened to the King's stories of his past. There can be no escape from this punishment. When Korça tells the King that the mob wants him no longer to be King, he replies that he is in complete agreement with this wish. But, "Je ne peux plus abdiquer, je ne suis plus roi depuis une heure."<sup>197</sup> The discussion continues and, as the rioters are clearly approaching, the French ambassador suggests that Jérôme might do something more helpful than

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<sup>197</sup>Ibid., p. 191.

simply stand around talking, and this seems to spur the King into action. He takes his crown from the mannequin where he had placed it earlier, signifying his abdication and his new life, and puts it on his head.

Attention! Je reprends ma couronne! Et Sa Majesté n'accepte aucun conseil. Ne me traite pas déjà comme un de tes amis! Je suis encore le Roi, et il me reste le temps de te faire fusiller avant de l'être moi-même!"<sup>198</sup>

The Queen is crushed, for she feels that Jérôme is returning to his old role, and that she is losing him. But he seems considerably changed, resolute, positive, genuinely a King. "Entends tout ce bruit réveillé par le bruit de nos coeurs . . ."<sup>199</sup> He is not denying his new found love in again taking up his crown. He sees himself now both as King and husband, accepting the totality of his situation in life. One cannot know whether or not he might have saved himself and his queen had he in fact attempted to abdicate, but this is an existentially heroic act. He takes the final step in accepting his present, by refusing to deny that segment of his past which has brought him to this tragic point. Had he refuted his rôle as king, he would have been

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<sup>198</sup>Ibid., p. 192.

<sup>199</sup>Ibid.

acting inauthentically. By accepting it, with its implied dangers, he is becoming himself. He had made his choice to abdicate in order to function as husband and lover, and he now choses not to abdicate to become a whole man. It is as though he is pulling all the parts of his life into one being and accepting what he finds there, and the consequences that this brings on.

The Queen continues to flagellate herself for her supposed sin.

Oh! il est inutile d'essayer de sortir . . . Un barrière invisible et infranchissable . . . Dieu veut nous frapper où j'ai pêché. Es-tu éclairé, maintenant? Beaucoup de miracles sont des coïncidences, mais ce sont des coïncidences miraculeuses!<sup>200</sup>

The King asks Korça, now that all seems lost, to tell whether there was indeed a revelation, whether he was "le roi prédit" destined for his throne and his Queen. The final fantasy is swept away.

Que votre arrivée a dérangé son plan. Il était convenu qu'un de ses partisans devait venir par la route. Seulement, on ne savait lequel; on tirait au sort pour laisser Dieu choisir, quand votre arrivée inattendue déjoua l'intrigue du Grand-Prêtre.<sup>201</sup>

The reaction to this confession is ironic. The King feels that this frees the Queen from any need of guilt, for

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<sup>200</sup>Ibid., p. 193.

<sup>201</sup>Ibid.

it is obvious that he was not pre-ordained for the throne as the High Priest had said. But for the Queen, it is simply further proof of the force of God, for he fooled even the High Priest. As Korça has said, they were leaving it up to God, were drawing straws, to see which one of the Priest's men would become King, when Jérôme wandered along the road. By chance? Or was it indeed left up to God?

The problem is left unresolved, for the Nurse runs in shouting that the "bandits" have killed the King's son. They broke into the child's room, grabbed him sleeping from his bed and dashed him against a wall. As the Queen rushes out to go to her son, Jérôme is one last time faced with the ironic impotence of his theatrical scene, the room in which all the action has taken place.

Mais il fallait le défendre! Ils ont osé tuer mon fils! Et que me reste-t-il dans ce théâtre, pour me défendre? Je ne peux tout de même pas mourir l'épée de mes bouffons à la main? Des revolvers de carton! Une vie de parade et de paroles! Mon fils . . .<sup>202</sup>

This review of his past had been useful, but it was not life. It was not real, but simply a spectacle. And, most tragically, he had wasted precious moments of his life.

The play ends rather quickly after the Queen returns,

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<sup>202</sup>Ibid., p. 194.

stabbed and bleeding. She falls to the floor, dying, and the revolutionaries rush into the room and seize the King. As he is being handcuffed, the Queen looks to Pierrette and says:

Si vous retournez avec Jérôme, prenez soin de lui et soyez douce, surtout les premiers jours, c'est le désir d'une mourante! (Au Roi.) Jérôme, je meurs, mon fils doit être mort! Que te restera-t-il de moi? M'as-tu bien aimée, cette dernière nuit!<sup>203</sup>

"Ma Reine! Ma Reine! Je n'aimais que toi! Toutes mes années perdues . . ."<sup>204</sup> "Pauvre petite Reine, pardon! Je ne suis jamais en mesure! J'arrive toujours trop tard aux rendez-vous que la vie me donne! . . . Enfin, tant de douleurs ne sauront faire qu'une seule mort."<sup>205</sup>

The fate of King Jérôme is somewhat ambiguous at the end of le Pont de l'Europe. One would expect him to be killed. Korça is condemned and led off to be burned, but there is nothing concrete said about the King. From the text itself, it is likely that he escapes death, to return to Paris with the ministers, Mercédès and Pierrette, who are to be turned over to the French ambassador for safe

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<sup>203</sup>Ibid., pp. 194-195.

<sup>204</sup>Ibid., p. 195.

<sup>205</sup>Ibid.

conduct back to their country. This would indeed be a fate as horrible as death for the King. The Conciergerie suggests "Nous nous monterons dans les music-halls, à Paris. Les quatre clowns du Roi Prédit. Tous les cinq . . ."206 The King's final speech evokes the tragedy of his situation. "Tous les cinq? Avec eux! Repartir vers cette vie-là? Ma Reine, ma petite Reine . . . Ah! quand je pouvais t'aimer, te faire vivre, être Roi?"207 "LE RIDEAU TOMBE SUR LA SORTIE DU ROI BOITEUX."208

Le Pont de l'Europe was no more a theatrical success for its young author than Tour à terre had been, nor could it have been. Its interest lies in what it tells us about the playwright, the development it shows in his art, the function of that art in his search for a means of existence. These are not important to an audience which has come to be entertained. The critics were not universally against the play, however, and several209 recognized the potential genius of the author even if the play itself did not move

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206 Ibid. Italics mine.

207 Ibid., p. 196.

208 Ibid.

209 A fair sampling of contemporary critical comment may be found immediately following the text of le Pont de l'Europe in the Gallimard Théâtre complet edition.



them. It was not, at any rate, the beginning of Salacrou's glory as a playwright.

But it does mark the end of a period of searching, a rather complex series of probes into both the playwright's past and into his chosen vehicle of expression. If it was not successful theater, le Pont de l'Europe was nonetheless successful in establishing Armand Salacrou once and for all in the theater. He had found his way and was never to leave it. It is the play in which he matures into a conscious, if not yet absolutely skillful, playwright, in which he sees himself perhaps for the first time in that rôle. To be sure, he finds no solutions to those agonizing questions about the meaning of existence. There are no answers this side of death. But he correctly states the essential question, "Comment serai-je un homme comme les autres?" From this point on his quest will be valid, increasingly realistic, direct and to the point.

The play itself can be seen as a parallel to the evolution of the young Salacrou through his earlier plays. At the play's opening King Jerome is merely acting the rôle of King in his fantasy land, but as the play closes he has become in fact King of his country. He cannot succeed as king, for success is scarcely possible in Salacrou's ironic

deterministic universe. He finds momentary happiness, seems on the verge of actually becoming himself, but Salacrou, although he is the creator of his artistic world in which he can manipulate his people, is not powerful enough to change the very order of existence. And that order is essentially destructive. As Paul-Louis Mignon has written of these early plays:

Déterministe de toujours, Salacrou a cherché désespérément à trouver avec ses personnages une signification de l'existence dans des provocations qui remettent en cause un ordre apparemment inique mais solidement établi. Il est parvenu à leur donner des illusions de liberté. Puis, quand l'effort s'épuise, la mécanique inexorable du destin les reprend dans son engrenage.<sup>210</sup>

In the earlier plays Salacrou might seem, like King Jérôme, playing Hamlet in a fantasy of poetic exaltation, ignorant of the real quest, searching blindly, ineffectually. In le Pont de l'Europe, now the King who has taken up his crown has accepted life and all its diverse elements, Salacrou becomes a playwright.

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<sup>210</sup>Mignon, op. cit., p. 78.

## CHAPTER VI

### CONCLUSION

On the 26th of November, 1925, a month before the first performance of his work, Tour à terre, Armand Salacrou wrote the short dialogue between himself and the characters created in his early plays,<sup>1</sup> an "interview" which has been mentioned several times in this study. He had already completed le Pont de l'Europe and, now a father of six weeks, he felt that his play writing career was finished. "Contraint de travailler du matin au soir, je pensais alors que je n'écrirais plus."<sup>2</sup> Although this, of course, was not to be the case, this interesting conversation serves as an excellent vehicle for unifying this first group of plays and exhibiting them as a first étape in the playwright's long and highly successful career.

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<sup>1</sup>Salacrou, Théâtre I, 44.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., pp. 42-45. This "Interview de l'auteur par lui-même" was first published in the Revue de l'Oeuvre (décember, 1925) as an "avant-première" to the first production of Tour à terre.

It is true that Salacrou's next play, Patchouli, was not a marked departure from the techniques he had already developed, but the themes of this play might be seen as merely continued elaborations of fundamental concepts already clearly established in le Pont de l'Europe and the plays which preceded it. Patchouli is often cited as the play marking the first level in the evolution of Salacrou's theater, but it seems apparent that, in terms of his discovery of the potential function of the theater in his personal universe le Pont de l'Europe represents the climactic point in a period of search and experimentation. It must also be noted that two years passed before the composition of Patchouli, two years which were critical, and painful, for Salacrou. In stark contrast to the years 1923-1925, exciting years of almost constant literary production, the period between le Pont de l'Europe and his next play was one in which Salacrou was essentially devoted to earning a living for his family.

The "Interview de l'auteur" is especially interesting for it is here, for the first time speaking as himself rather than through his characters, that Salacrou explains the rôle of the theater for a playwright such as himself, a rôle of which he became acutely aware in le Pont de l'Europe. This function is, of course, closely linked with his fundamental

theme: "Comment serai-je un homme comme les autres?" We have seen, throughout the unfolding of these early plays, the playwright approaching a recognition of the insistent imposition of this question into his life. In the plays prior to le Pont de l'Europe the question remained imprecise, not clearly stated, perhaps ignored. This question might be seen almost as a moment of "illumination," a sudden discovery of something which had always been present, but not quite comprehended. It is the fact that it is understood in this play that leads to the conclusion that the Pont de l'Europe must stand as a monumental point in Salacrou's development, both as a playwright and as a human being.

It is obviously established that this fundamental question is the result of several confluent themes in Salacrou's life, and exhibited as well in his work. The recognition of the existence of death is the stunning, bewildering explosion of awareness which makes it impossible for him to accept life as a normal, natural, sympathetic manifestation of universal benevolence. It is this involuntary and horrible ability to see life as it really is which dominates the secondary themes manifested in his works, and which has driven Salacrou to confront those fundamental questions which can be ignored by lesser, happier men, "comme les autres." His attempts to come to terms with these questions, the

evolution of his understanding of existence which culminates in re-casting the question itself, is the thread which unites these early plays.

In moving from the anonymous Young Men, to the concrete but relatively ineffectual Pierre, to King Jérôme, who recapitulates the evolution from impotent fantasy to a very existential grasping of his situation, one can trace in a very real sense the continually increasing entrenchment of Salacrou into his art. It has been clear that he was, from the very beginning, a partial character in his own plays. In the figure of King Jérôme he is firmly established in that rôle, openly choosing to be so.

His first protagonist, the Young Man of Le Casseur d'assiettes, makes a violent, poetic, but essentially useless effort at dominating his situation. From a position of simple bewilderment in the face of the inhumanity of human life, he moved to a posture of hostile antagonist. Having been given the momentary hope of defeating alienation through a discovery of God, those hopes crashed around him when he found that there was no God to incarnate the "love" of his divine cat. Equating God and love, forced to deny also the existence of love when he learned of the absence of God, he can do no more than shout to "awaken" this God whose guilt has been to create man and then cease to exist.

This first play is, then, a statement of position, rather than a proposal of solution. It is likely that Salacrou had not yet fully discovered the theater. But it is also exactly the play one would have expected the dramatically immature, but philosophically quite mature, Salacrou to write. It is a cry, perhaps childish, against a life which is not as it might be. It is an attack against religion, and an attack which is rather well founded, given Salacrou's psychological make-up. There is no inherent contradiction in attacking a God whom you do not assume to exist. This apparent contradiction has been what has led critics to conclude that Salacrou is in fact a believer who does not know that he is. He is striking out here at the idea that God might exist. He is lashing out at Ali Baba, whom he was told existed, upon whom he counted to give him the secret words, and whom he has now learned does not exist, never existed. In the same sense, shouting to awaken a God who has gone deaf to human cries, is a symbolic attack against a God who was supposed to have existed, but is in no way an affirmation that he indeed does exist. Finding that God does not exist, Salacrou must exorcise any hope that his potential existence might have engendered. This is, again, a very existential position. Hope is the ultimate destroyer of action.

The Young Man of Boule de verre marks a step in the direction of self-awareness for Salacrou. He is little more victorious at the play's end than was his predecessor, but he is considerably more concrete as an individual. He is not now "everyman" who invokes all to join him in a relatively universal quest, to better the situation of humanity, or at least to draw blood for universal injustice. This second Young Man finds the most private of all solutions, suicide. This is certainly a no more acceptable result, but it is clearly more personal. And through the pieces à lire, as well, one senses an evolution of Salacrou's point of view. He is focusing in closer and closer on his protagonist. He is becoming more and more human, less and less abstract. He is crystalizing his awareness of what he can do with drama, is gradually becoming himself, as protagonist of his plays.

Pierre, as the lifting of the cloak of anonymity suggests, is flesh and blood. The events of his life are perhaps unrealistic, but his reactions to them are not. Solutions are, of course, out of the question, but Pierre almost reaches the moment of discovery which will make King Jérôme a success (within the limits of success possible in Salacrou's deterministic conception of existence). He seems to realize that he might be capable of limiting his life to



the extent that he might, at last, comprehend and clutch it. Had he been able to shrink the dimensions of his universe to the size of a prison cell, reduce his potential for action to the minute act of siezing the ray of light which would come through his cell window, he might have been able to integrate the fragments of his life into a palpable, understandable Self. He was not allowed to do this, perhaps because Salacrou himself was not yet at that point in his development.

It is in the Pont de l'Europe that, for the first time, Salacrou's protagonist accepts life. After a turbulent period in which King Jérôme exhibits most of the characteristics of his predecessors, he suddenly, simply says "Yes." And this affirmation, not of a possibility for hope or success, but of the simple existence of life in the present, is the first genuinely optimistic moment in Salacrou's theater. It is optimistic in the existential sense, that one can, perhaps, finally understand that the absurdity of life is simply a fact of existence. The attempt to become someone, to put on the trappings of an existence, to choose from the possibilities offered by others' lives, is fantasy. It is not what but how. And not how to become "someone," but how to become yourself. In making this discovery, one becomes God, because one

becomes his own creator. One can defeat life only by grasping the present. This temporary victory is all that life offers, and one gains it through contemporary action. If you are Armand Salacrou you do this by writing plays. And in writing plays you become the God whose absence has haunted you.

It is this "god" who appears in "l'Interview de l'auteur," Salacrou the God of his character's universe. He speaks to them as though they existed in reality, both apart from his own consciousness, and also still under his domination. In a fascinating situation in which he is obviously writing the words which the characters speak, but in which they seem to have an existence of their own. Although they remain his creations, they are his creations who have come to life. And in talking to them he reveals why they were created. It is, of course, King Jérôme whom he chooses to speak for him. A minor character asks the playwright why, indeed, he had thrust them into life. Jérôme answers:

Attendez; laissez-le pleurer tranquillement. J'ai une réplique là-dessus dans le Pont de l'Europe; la voici: "Comment? Pourquoi ai-je écrit ces petits fragments de scènes que les comédiens me joueront? Eh! Quel besoin me pousse à sortir de moi des mots et des gestes en plus des mots et gestes de ma vie? Ne cherchez pas midi à quatorze heures: J'aime le théâtre parce qu'il donne une grossière mais visible

réalité aux créations de mon esprit, parce qu'il est un pont entre ma pensée et les choses que ma main touche. Au moins, que je puisse voir mes paroles correspondre à des gestes, même si ces gestes ne sont pas dessinés avec mon corps . . .<sup>3</sup>

Man must act to exist, as King Jérôme has discovered. But man must also be aware that he is acting for this action to be significant to him. It was in order to be aware that he was alive that Armand Salacrou created his plays, as he says quite clearly in the above quote. Man is, of course, a mental creature, as far as our "being" is concerned. The "spirit," the "soul," the être, are all terms to describe the "real person." But these are vaporous concepts and our existence must be demonstrated in more concrete terms. So we produce, not in order that our productions might stand alone and be of value, but that they might indeed prove that we existed in creating them.

When Salacrou's characters tell him that they understand nothing of this metaphysical business, he very simply sums up the distinction between himself and those of his philosophical persuasion, and the "hommes comme les autres." "Notre malheur, c'est justement d'avoir tant d'intelligence que nous ne comprenons plus. Comprendre, c'est le privilège des imbéciles et des saints."<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>3</sup>Ibid., p. 42.

<sup>4</sup>Ibid., p. 44.

"Tant d'intelligence" is indeed the tragic flaw. Just as the Young Man of Boule de verre had seen himself "avec l'oeil de Dieu," Salacrou had falled from ignorance into knowledge of life, just as Adam had fallen into human existence. But he knew the value of the theater, and saw it as a weapon against the ephemeral, a tool with which he might, if not defeat absurdity, at least wage a conscious and continual battle. It is a battle which has, almost ironically, brought him great success and a significant position in French literature. It is a battle whose lines were drawn, whose strategies were understood, whose stakes were set while Armand Salacrou was growing from a nameless young man into a King who writes plays.

## APPENDIX

The following is a listing of the plays of Armand Salacrou, in chronological order of first publication, with the exception of HISTOIRE DE CIRQUE, which is inserted at the date of its composition, since its much later date of publication would lead to false assumptions about its position in the canon. Information pertinent to the study of Salacrou's theater is included for each play: later publications, subsequent productions in France and elsewhere, translations, and general comments about the popularity of certain plays in recent years in France. This material has been gathered from a number of sources. It is a compilation of bibliographical material from earlier studies of Armand Salacrou's theater, as well as data received through correspondence with Salacrou himself, and with his editors. It should not be considered absolutely exhaustive. There is no doubt that many performances of Salacrou's plays have not been recorded, particularly foreign performances. There have certainly been unauthorized productions, which would not appear on lists received from La Societe des Auteurs. There are apparently translations of which there is no record, for many of the foreign productions listed are by native troupes, probably in translation. There has been no attempt to make assumptions about the likelihood of existing translations, and those listed here are verified from concrete sources. It is hoped that this material will be helpful in forming an idea of the scope of influence of Armand Salacrou's theater, both in France and abroad, and it is in this sense that the inclusion of this material in a study which treats only a small number of these plays seems justified.

### LA BOULE DE VERRE

1. Intentions (Paris), 3<sup>e</sup> année, Nos. 28-30 (décembre, 1924), 5-35.
2. Les Inédits d'Estienne. Paris: Estienne, 1958.

Never performed. Not included in Théâtre complet.

#### LE CASSEUR D'ASSIETTES

1. "Pièce en un acte ornée de lithographies de Juan Gris." Paris: Galerie Simon, 1924.
2. "Précédée de HISTOIRE DE RIRE at LA MARGUERITE." Paris: Gallimard, 1941.
3. Théâtre I. Paris: Gallimard, 1943.

Only performance: The Netherlands, Leiden. The Leids Studenten Toneel. April 7, 1954.

#### MAGASIN D'ACCESSOIRES

1. Sélection (Anvers), 4<sup>e</sup> année, No. 10 (juillet, 1925).

Never performed. Not included in Théâtre complet.

#### HISTOIRE DE CIRQUE

1. Les Idées de la nuit. Paris: Arthème Fayard, 1960.
2. Les Oeuvres libres (Paris), No. 173 (octobre, 1960).
3. A Circus Story. Modern French Theater, ed. and trans. into English, Michael Benedikt and George Wellwarth. New York: Dutton, 1964, pp. 197-210.

Never performed. Not included in Théâtre complet.  
Written in 1923 but unpublished until 1960. Translated into English.

#### LES TRENTÉ TOMBES DE JUDAS

1. Sélection (Anvers), 5<sup>e</sup> année, No. 9 (juin, 1926).
2. Les Idées de la nuit. Paris: Arthème Fayard, 1960.
3. Les Oeuvres libres (Paris), No. 173 (octobre, 1960).

Never performed. Not included in Théâtre complet.

#### TOUR A TERRE

1. "Pièce en trois actes. Suivie de Le Pont de l'Europe, pièce en trois actes. Avec deux préfaces sur le théâtre contemporain. Une note sur Tour à terre et un portrait de l'auteur par André Masson." Paris: Nouvelles éditions françaises, 1929.

2. Théâtre I. Paris: Gallimard, 1943.

First performed play of Armand Salacrou: Théâtre de l'Oeuvre, 26 November, 1925, directed by Lugné-Poé. No subsequent stage performances. Broadcast, 26 June, 1948, by the French National Radio in an adaptation by Paul-Louis Mignon. No translations, no performances outside France.

#### LE PONT DE L'EUROPE

1. Paris: Nouvelles Editions françaises, 1929. With Tour à terre.
2. Théâtre I. Paris: Gallimard, 1943.

First performed by the Jeunes Auteurs at the Théâtre National de l'Odéon, 30 November, 1927. Directed by Claude Franc-Nohain. No subsequent performances. No translations.

#### PATCHOULI

1. "La Scène de la comtesse," Correspondance (Paris), No. 12 (janvier, 1930).
2. Paris: Gallimard, 1930.
3. Théâtre I. Paris: Gallimard, 1943.

First performed at the Théâtre de l'Atelier (Paris), 22 January, 1930, directed by Charles Dullin. No subsequent productions. No translations.

#### ATLAS-HOTEL

1. Les Cahiers de "Bravo," (Paris), No. 17, supplement to Bravo, July, 1931.
2. "Suivie de Une Femme libre. Paris: Gallimard, 1934.
3. VERSION DEFINITIVE, La Petite Illustration 831, Théâtre 420 (Paris), 1937.
4. Théâtre II. Paris: Gallimard, 1944.

First performed at the Théâtre de l'Atelier (Paris), 15 April, 1931, directed by Charles Dullin. Another performance at same theater 2 May, 1938. Produced in 1963 at the municipal theater of Oyonnax, France. No translations. No other recorded performances.

## LA VIE EN ROSE

1. Fragments. Les Cahiers du Sud (Paris), No. 140, 1932.
2. Paris: Editions du Cahiers du Sud, 1936.
3. Théâtre II. Paris: Gallimard, 1944.

First performed by the Compagnie des Quinze at the Théâtre du Vieux-Colombier, 3 December, 1931, directed by Michel St.-Denis. No subsequent productions. No translations.

## UNE FEMME LIBRE

1. "Pièce en trois actes précédée de Atlas-Hôtel," Paris: Gallimard, 1934.
2. Théâtre III. Paris: Gallimard, 1942.

First produced at the Théâtre de l'Oeuvre (Paris), 5 October, 1934, directed by Paulette Pax. A second French production, 5 February, 1949, at the Théâtre Saint-Georges, under the direction of Jacques Dumesnil. Subsequent productions in Czechoslovakia (1937), Germany (1953), Belgium, Switzerland (1960), as well as productions on French radio and television. Translations in Spanish and Italian.

## LES FRENETIQUES

1. Les Oeuvres libres (Paris), No. 168, 1935.
2. "Précédée de ATLAS-HOTEL," Paris: Gallimard, 1930.
3. Théâtre II. Paris: Gallimard, 1944.

First produced in Paris at the Théâtre Daunou, 4 December, 1934, directed by Raymond Rouleau. Produced for Télévision Française by Philippe Ducrest, 19 May, 1959. Only recent production in Buenos Aires, Argentine (1960). Translated into Italian.

## L'INCONNUE D'ARRAS

1. "Suivie de Les Frénétiques." Paris: Gallimard, 1936.
2. Théâtre III. Paris: Gallimard, 1942.
3. Théâtre choisi et présenté par Paul-Louis Mignon. Paris: Club français du Livre, 1959.

First production in Paris by Lugné-Poé at the Comédie des Champs-Élysées, 22 November, 1935. Revivals in



France in 1936 and 1949. Foreign productions in Austria (1937), Italy (1940), Belgium (1944, 1949, television 1957), Finland (1951), Germany (1947), England (1948), Netherlands (1948), Mexico (1949), United States (Stanford University, 1952). Since 1960 there have been several productions in France, and on French television. The play was also performed in Argentina, Uruguay and Brazil in 1962. There are translations into Italian and Spanish.

#### UN HOMME COMME LES AUTRES

1. Les Oeuvres libres (Paris), No. 188, 1937.
2. "Suivie de La Terre est ronde." Paris: Gallimard, 1938.
3. Théâtre III. Paris: Gallimard, 1942.

First produced in Paris at the Théâtre de l'Oeuvre. 25 November, 1936, directed by Paulette Pax. Subsequent Paris revivals in 1944 and 1958, when the play was accepted into the repertory of the Comédie-Française. Extraits broadcast on French National Radio in 1960. Foreign productions in Czechoslovakia (1937), Italy (1950), Yugoslavia (1953), Morocco (1960), Portugal (1960), Argentina (stage and radio, 1961), Canada (radio 1965). A number of productions in the French provinces in recent years. Translations into Spanish and Italian.

#### LA TERRE EST RONDE

1. "Précédée de Un Homme comme les autres." Paris: Gallimard, 1938.
2. Théâtre choisi et présenté par Paul-Louis Mignon. Paris: Club français du Livre, 1959.
3. Théâtre IV. Paris: Gallimard, 1945.
4. The World is Round. Three plays by Armand Salacrou trans. Norman Stokle. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1967.

Produced for the first time by Charles Dullin at the Théâtre de l'Atelier (Paris), 7 November, 1938. A second Dullin production at the Théâtre Sarah-Bernhardt, 8 October, 1946, was followed by the acceptance of the play into the repertory of the Comédie-Française on 4 February, 1956. Produced on French Television in

1960 and on French Radio in 1967. Foreign productions include: Sweden (1939), Belgium (1945, 1963), Greece (1946), Germany (1957), Japan (1957), Italy (1960), Hungary (1962), Switzerland (radio 1967). There have been several recent productions of this play in the French provinces. Translations in German, Spanish, Italian, English.

#### HISTOIRE DE RIRE

1. Les Oeuvres libres (Paris), No. 224, 1940.
2. "Suivi de La Marguerite et Le Casseur d'assiettes." Paris: Gallimard, 1941.
3. Théâtre IV. Paris: Gallimard, 1945.
4. Théâtre choisi et présenté par Paul-Louis Mignon. Paris: Club français du Livre, 1959.
5. When the Music Stops. Three Plays by Armand Salacrou, trans. Norman Stokle. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1967.

First produced in Paris at the Théâtre de la Madeleine, 22 December, 1936, directed by Alice Cocéa. Revival at the Théâtre Saint-Georges in 1955 and a "Gala" performance at the Théâtre Sarah-Bernhardt in 1967. Produced on French Radio in 1966, French Television in 1958. Foreign productions: Spain (1948), Canada (1948, radio 1960), Belgium (1949, 1963, 1967), Italy (1950), Chile (1952), Yugoslavia (1956, 1962), England (1957), Poland (1957), United States, John Drew Theater, Long Island, New York (1957), Argentina (1961), Mexico (1963), Holland (1966), Germany (1966), Morocco (1966), Israel (1966, radio) Switzerland (1967). There have been numerous recent productions of this play in France. Translations in Italian and English.

#### LA MARGUERITE

1. "Précédée de Le Casseur d'assiettes et Histoire de rire." Paris: Gallimard, 1941.
2. Théâtre IV. Paris: Gallimard, 1945.
3. Marguerite. Three Plays by Armand Salacrou, trans. Norman Stokle. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1967.

First production at the Théâtre Pigalle (Paris) directed by Julien Bertheau, 28 October, 1944. Several amateur

productions in 1963, radio presentations in Paris, 1965 and 1967. Foreign productions: Java (1949), Mexico (1949), United States, University of Illinois Playhouse (1951), Belgium (1951), Spain (1953), Canada (1955), Denmark (1956), Argentina (1956, 1962), Finland (1957, 1965, 1966), England (1958, radio 1966), Portugal (1960, 1965), Yugoslavia (1963, 1965). Numerous productions in France in recent years. Translations in Hungarian, Portuguese, English.

#### LES FIANCES DU HAVRE

1. "Avec un portrait de l'auteur par Raoul Dufy." Paris: Gallimard, 1944.
2. Les Oeuvres libres (Paris), No. 228, 1945.
3. Elites Françaises, supplément théâtral, No. 1, 1946.
4. Théâtre V. Paris: Gallimard, 1947.

First performed at the Comédie-Française, 16 December, 1944, under the direction of Pierre Dux. No subsequent Paris productions. Performed in Belgium (1947, 1960), Canada (1947) and on television in Luxembourg (1966) and Switzerland (1966). No performances in the French provinces in recent years. Translated into Italian only.

#### ARCHIPEL LENOIR

1. "Tragédie en un acte," La Revue théâtrale (Paris), No. 1 (May-June, 1946). (A one act version of the play.)
2. "Comédie en deux parties. Avec un portrait de l'auteur par Max Jacob." Paris: Gallimard, 1948.
3. "Précédée de Poof." Paris: Gallimard, 1950.
4. Théâtre VI. Paris: Gallimard, 1954.
5. Théâtre choisi et présenté par Paul-Louis Mignon. Paris: Club français du Livre, 1959.

First performed at the Théâtre Montparnasse (Paris), 8 November, 1947, directed by Charles Dullin. Revived at the same theater in 1962. Foreign productions: Italy (1948), Poland (1948), Netherlands (1952), Yugoslavia (1953), England (1954), Japan (1954), Belgium (1956, 1963, radio 1966), Switzerland (1961), Argentina (1960), Romania (radio 1966), Czechoslovakia (radio 1966). Rarely performed in the French provinces in recent years. Translations in Hungarian, Italian, and Russian.

## LE SOLDAT ET LA SORCIERE

1. Les Oeuvres libres (Paris), Nouvelle série 8 (234 de la collection), 1946.
2. Théâtre V. Paris: Gallimard, 1947.

First produced at the Théâtre Sara-Bernhardt (Paris), 2 December, 1945, directed by Charles Dullin with music by Francis Poulenc. Apparently no subsequent stage productions, but broadcast by French Radio (1966) and Belgian Radio (1966). Translated into Italian.

## LES NUITS DE LA COLERE

1. "Avec un portrait de l'auteur par André Masson." Paris: Gallimard, 1947.
2. Théâtre V. Paris: Gallimard, 1947.

First produced at the Théâtre Marigny by the Compagnie Renaud-Barrault, directed by Jean-Louis Barrault, 12 December, 1946. No subsequent Paris productions. French Radio (1948, 1966). Foreign productions: Czechoslovakia (1947), Italy (1947, 1962, 1964, 1965, radio 1966), Poland (1947), United States, Drama Workshop of the New School for Social Research, New York, unpublished translation by Mme. Irwin Piscator, directed by Mr. Piscator, (1948), Romania (1948), Belgium (1948, 1960, radio 1965), England (television 1948), Hungary (1940), Israel (1949), Germany (1949-1950), Canada (1952), Yugoslavia (1953), Japan (1953), Austria (1955), Netherlands (1955), Greece (1957), Holland (1960, 1963), Russia (1961), Spain (1964). Produced extensively in the French provinces. Translations in Italian, Japanese, Flemish, English (unpublished).

## POURQUOI PAS MOI

1. "Suivie de Poof," Collection de la Revue Théâtrale (Paris), No. 7, 1948.
2. "Précédée de Dieu le Savait." Paris: Gallimard, 1951.
3. Théâtre VII. Paris: Gallimard, 1956.

First produced in Brussels, Belgium by the "Rideau de Bruxelles" under the direction of André Berger, 24 September, 1948. Paris production at the Théâtre Edouard VII,

26 October, 1950, directed by Jacques Dumesnil. No subsequent productions in Paris. Foreign productions in Tunisia (1948), Japan (1958), Holland (1963), Belgium (1961, radio 1965), Canada (radio 1965). Rarely performed in the French provinces in recent years. No translations on record.

## POOF

1. "Précédée de Pourquoi pas moi," Collection de la Revue Théâtrale (Paris), No. 7, 1948.
2. "Suivie de l'Archipel Lenoir." Paris: Gallimard, 1950.
3. Théâtre VI. Paris: Gallimard, 1954.
4. Translated into English by Felicia Liss, Modern International Drama (Pennsylvania State University Press), I, No. 1, 1967.

First produced in Paris at the Théâtre Edouard VII, 26 October, 1950, directed by Yves Robert. Presented on French Radio in 1965 and 1966. Produced in Morocco (1961). Translations into German and English. No recent productions in France.

## LA BEAUTE DU DIABLE

1. "Tragédie pour l'écran par René Clair et Armand Salacrou," France-Illustration, le Monde-illustré (Paris), Supplément théâtral et littéraire, No. 57, 1950.
2. Comédies et Commentaires de René Clair. Paris: Gallimard, 1959.

This screen-play by René Clair and Armand Salacrou was filmed by a Franco-Italian company, "Universal-Produzione" and "Franco-London Film" in 1950, starring Michel Simon, Gerard Philipe and Nicole Besnard. There have been no stage productions and no translations.

## DIEU LE SAVAIT

1. "Suivie de Pourquoi pas moi?" Paris: Gallimard, 1951.
2. Théâtre VI. Paris: Gallimard, 1954.

Produced at the Théâtre Saint-Georges, 11 December, 1950, directed by Jean Mercure. No subsequent productions in

Paris. Performed in Tunisia (1951), Italy (1951), Argentina (1952), Belgium (1953), Japan (1954), England (television 1954), Netherlands (1955). Not produced in recent years. Translated into Japanese.

#### SENS INTERDIT

1. Les Temps modernes (Paris), No. 80, 1952.
2. "Avec un portrait de l'auteur par André Beaudin." Paris: Gallimard, 1952.
3. Théâtre VII. Paris: Gallimard, 1956.
4. Anthology of 20th Century French Theater. New York: Paris Book Center, 1967.

First production at the Théâtre du Quartier Latin, 6 January, 1953, directed by Michel de Ré. No further Paris productions; French Radio 1961 and Television 1965. Produced in Tunisia (1954), Belgium (1955, 1961), Japan (1955). Seldom produced in recent years elsewhere in France. No translations.

#### LES INVITES DU BON DIEU

1. "Avec un portrait de l'auteur par Jean Cocteau." Paris: Gallimard, 1953.
2. Théâtre VII. Paris: Gallimard, 1956.

Produced at the Théâtre Saint-Georges, 23 September, 1953, directed by Yves Robert. No subsequent performances recorded in France or elsewhere. No translations.

#### LE MIROIR

1. L'Avant-Scène (Paris), No. 139, 1956.
2. Théâtre VII. Paris: Gallimard, 1956.

Produced 21 September, 1956 in Paris at the Théâtre des Ambassadeurs, directed by Henri Rollan. Except a Belgian production in 1959, there are no further productions of this play on record. No translations.

#### UNE FEMME TROP HONNETE

1. Paris: Gallimard, 1956.
2. "Version définitive," Paris-Théâtre, No. 122, 1957.
3. Théâtre VIII. Paris: Gallimard, 1966. (Includes both versions.)

First produced at the Théâtre Edouard VII, 3 December, 1956, directed by Georges Vitaly. Revival in Paris at the Théâtre Saint-Georges in 1966. Produced in Italy (1956, 1963), Germany (1958), Austria (1958), Hungary (1963), Chile (1962). Translations into German and Italian. Not widely performed in France in recent years.

#### BOULEVARD DURAND

1. Paris: Gallimard, 1960.
2. Théâtre VIII. Paris: Gallimard, 1966.

First produced in Le Havre at the Centre Dramatique du Havre, 19 September, 1961, directed by André Reybaz. The Paris production was at the Théâtre Sarah-Bernhardt, also in 1961. The play has been produced in Yugoslavia (1962), Uruguay (1962, radio 1962), Belgium (television, in Flemish, 1965), Switzerland (television 1966). The play has been extensively produced in the French provinces, is Salacrou's most popular play, in terms of number of performances. There is no information available about translations (except into Flemish) but the play has undoubtedly been performed in other languages.

#### COMME LES CHARDONS

1. Paris: Gallimard, 1964.
2. Théâtre VIII. Paris: Gallimard, 1966.

First performed at the Comédie-Française, 26 October 1964, directed by Michel Vitold. There were a total of 22 performances of this production. Available information is incomplete on subsequent stagings of this play. There have been at least two radio productions (France Culture, 1965 and Radio Lausanne, 1965). No information on foreign productions or translations is presently available.

#### LA RUE NOIRE

1. Paris: Gallimard, 1967.

No information available concerning this play.

#### (LA DERNIERE RENCONTRE)

This play, mentioned (in the introductory essay "Armand

Salacrou and his theater" in his Three Plays by Armand Salacrou) by Norman Stokle as having the date "1965" had not yet been published as of 1968, according to a letter from Editions Gallimard (3 October, 1968). "Une nouvelle pièce de SALACROU qui n'a pas encore été publiée et à laquelle il travaille encore." There is no further information on this work, which might, indeed, have now been completed.



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See Appendix for bibliography of the works.

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