

## “Alternance” and Montherlant’s Aesthetics

by Gerald Morreale

**A**LTERNANCE, Montherlant’s ethical doctrine, lies at the core of his aesthetics and determines it in several significant ways. The basic rhythm of *alternance* is expressed by Montherlant himself by the formula *ædificabo et destruam*. He stated it explicitly first in 1935, in his “Avant-Propos” to *Service inutile* and then twenty-five years later in a “Postface” to his last published play, *Le Cardinal d’Espagne*:

*Ædificabo et destruam: je construirai et ensuite je détruirai ce que j’ai construit. Une épigraphe pour ce livre. Une épigraphe pour ma vie.*

*La tentation de détruire tout ce qu’on a construit est une des obsessions de mon œuvre. Ædificabo et destruam.—“j’édifierai, et je détruirai ensuite ce que j’ai édifié”—a été pendant longtemps une des devises de cette œuvre.*

Still more recently in an article in the *Nouvelles Littéraires* (March 8, 1962), he again emphasized the importance of *alternance*. Its rhythm is sometimes translated into Biblical terms, such as those of the Ecclesiastes found in *Aux Fontaines du désir*: “‘Il y a un temps pour planter, et un temps pour déraciner ce qu’on a planté.’” More often, it is expressed in an aphorism or a maxim, inserted into works of fiction themselves, such as in *La Petite Infante de Castille*: “Notre affaire est de voir tout ce qui est, c’est-à-dire le respectable et le risible, sans sacrifier l’un à l’autre, et, si nous écrivons, de les montrer tour à tour.”

*Tour à tour* can be taken as the keyword in Montherlant’s striving for a certain kind of all-inclusiveness or unity. *Alternance* seeks its resolution in syncretism or in reconciliation of conflicting beliefs rather than in logical synthesis. In this essentially dualistic view there is an attempt to reconcile opposites through total acceptance. Montherlant’s theory is carried to the extreme of not rejecting any attitudes, of welcoming attitudes that are logically or even morally contradictory. “Nature” is posited as the model from which this anachronistic ethic derives and the guide it is to follow or to which it adheres. Accordingly, Montherlant would have

us believe, one has only to abandon oneself to the "essential rhythm of Nature," to "alternate" between "la Bête et l'Ange," to oscillate from "carnal life" to "moral life." This wavering between extremes is justified for Montherlant by Nature, because Nature is obviously characterized by opposites, by *alternances*.<sup>1</sup> He stated that since his writing of *Le Songe*, in 1922, he decided to accept himself entirely as a man and as a writer. From then on, he vowed never to fear expressing all that he felt or thought even when such total expression might be harmful to him. This Alceste-like resolution became manifestly evident in all his subsequent writings and continues to characterize Montherlant today.

It is not surprising that Montherlant's doctrine of *alternance* has been criticized. A kind of relativism, it has been attacked as an escape from moral commitment. Gaëtan Picon and Simone de Beauvoir, among its eminent critics, see it as a deceptive eclecticism devoid of moral courage. When Montherlant states, as part of his doctrine, that to be human, "c'est comprendre tous les mouvements des hommes," or, "tout le monde a raison toujours," one searches in vain for the worth and exact meaning in these utterances. In such sentiments lies a refusal to make value judgments and a willful ambiguity is disturbingly at work. Nowhere does Montherlant attempt a logical justification of his tenuous position. One is repeatedly aware that he is engaging in a kind of eloquent if poetic mystification. Are his well-turned arcana but a convenient means for escaping responsibility as a writer? Montherlant's positing of Nature as a model for conduct and as a means even for transcendence, together with his relative lack of concern for the moral commitment of the writer, contribute to alienate him from a view that looks to transcendence in strictly human terms and that has increasingly accepted a sense of social, moral and aesthetic responsibility.

While the ethical value of *alternance* remains questionable, the metaphorical significance of its basic formula becomes evident and derives value in aesthetic terms. When Montherlant says, "j'édifierai, et je détruirai ensuite ce que j'ai édifié," one cannot take him at his word. He cannot mean a literal nihilism because a material or physical destruction would deny that which is basic to the artist and his art. In a naive sense, there can be no art where there is no work, no expressed form. If Montherlant followed to the letter his own dictum his "works" would be cast into his wastebasket after he had "constructed" them and, consequently, there would be no art nor, for that matter, would there be a Montherlant. But symbolic or figurative destruction can and must be meant if *ædificabo et destruiam* is

<sup>1</sup> See Montherlant's key-essay on *alternance*, "Syncretisme et Alternance," *Aux Fontaines du désir* (Paris: Grasset 1927).

to be taken seriously. Three such types of "destruction" exist. First, a detachment—perhaps moral in nature—from his finished works and his fictional characters; second, a psychological destruction in his portrayal and development of fictional character; and, third, a stylistic destruction.

In his *Carnets*, Montherlant wrote: "Mes œuvres brillent pour certains êtres d'une jeunesse éternelle, alors qu'elles sont mortes dans mon cœur" (p. 284). Similar expressions of this kind of moral destruction are not difficult to find among his many references to his own work or to his concept of art; for example, again in the *Carnets*: "Il n'est rien que j'ai écrit, dont, à un moment de mon existence, je ne me sois senti pressé d'écrire le contraire" (p. 334). This formulation of *tour à tour* remains a persistent trait of Montherlant's aesthetic attitude. A most direct statement of this kind of destruction is apparent in the "Postface" of *Le Maître de Santiago*: "D'ordinaire, à peine ai-je terminé une création je me détache d'elle, me retourne contre elle; elle m'agace et m'ennuie." Similarly, Georges Carrion is an outstanding example of Montherlant's moral detachment from one of his fictional heroes. A character who is endowed with certain admirable traits in *Fils de personne*, he is made to execute a complete volte-face in that play's sequel, *Demain il fera jour*. From an idealist who sacrifices his son to a lofty ideal of quality, Georges becomes a despicable man who sacrifices his son to his own cowardice.

These kinds of detachment are in keeping with the basic view of *alternance*. If they do not actually reach the seriousness of moral indifference, they reflect, nevertheless, an artistic detachment that wishes to maintain a certain independence towards one's creations. Perhaps they reveal something as fundamental as an artist's need to continue beyond his creations. Once a particular work has been completed, the problems of creation it had represented and the degree of fulfillment which it had attained leave the artist free, as it were, to devote himself to other concerns. The artist, having resolved his work, is often compelled to proceed in a direction other than the one that had preoccupied him and from which his achievement had released him. In this way, Montherlant seems to react no differently than most writers and *alternance* appears to have a traditional effect upon him. But not all writers pursue this attitude with the clamor and consistency of a Montherlant. His mode of moral detachment from his finished works as well as from his fictional beings make him appear to destroy willfully what he has constructed. Having, by the necessity of the creative act of writing, committed a certain part of himself to a work, another part of himself seems to demand that Montherlant abandon his accomplishment. This non-literal destruction is similar to one of Montherlant's predominant themes and preoccupations: a parent's re-

jection or abandonment of his offspring. Thus personal—and perhaps psychologically disturbing—motives seem to lie beneath Montherlant's attitudes of moral detachment. The parent who rejects a child is essentially related to the author who rejects his own literary creations. On the aesthetic plane, this kind of moral destruction is the obvious *alternance* within the artistic construction to which a writer needs to adhere in order to create the work or fictional character that he then proceeds to abandon.

The second type of destruction, psychological in nature, is revealed by Montherlant's portrayal and development of fictional character. A basic rhythm of contrasts and opposites operates to assure us that no character is fashioned all of one piece. His fictional beings are ruled by inconsistency, paradox and contradiction and destroy a comfortable, complacent image of unity or coherence. But we have become accustomed to expect psychological inconsistency in character portrayal. Montherlant's psychological destruction thus allies him to what seems today a traditional manner of presentation of fictional character and *alternance* once more reveals its conservative force.

What may be called stylistic destruction, finally, is the third manifestation of the translation of *Ædificabo et destruam* into aesthetic terms. This metaphorical destruction can be discerned in Montherlant's treatment of plot, in his use of language, his manner of description, and in his tone. A plot is built only to be disregarded—or destroyed—or subordinated to other concerns, usually of a moral or philosophic nature. Poetic, sublime language alternates with prosaic quasi-vulgar language and may provoke a shocking—or destructive—effect. Minutely recorded and detailed description gives way to vague, impressionistic-like strokes that evoke more than describe. Lucid, objective description is juxtaposed to lyrical, passionate verbal outpouring. A wide range of tones—constantly shifting, constantly alternating—jars, jolts or pleases. Restraint in various forms and to various degrees gives way to a complete lack of measure. Understatement and hyperbole often alternate with one another. Finally, an illusion of realism is often destroyed through various means; such, for example, as over-extended use of caricature, or apparent manipulation of the reader by a direct insertion of so-called objective observers into the narrative and by the author's numerous direct intrusions into the story he is telling.

The aesthetic metaphor *Ædificabo et destruam* thus may serve as an initial approach to an appreciation of Montherlant's art. It suggests the intimate relationship that exists between the author's ethics and his aesthetics. But by itself it cannot shed sufficient light upon the complex and intricate art of Montherlant. Two complementary considerations will

permit a better understanding of what that art is—the role emotion plays and Montherlant's concept of the poet.

Montherlant's aesthetic places great importance upon emotion. In his *Notes de théâtre* he writes: "Les deux moments de la création dramatique. La création par l'émotion, qui donne la matière. Puis la création par l'art, qui juge, choisit, combine, construit." This formulation applies equally to Montherlant's art in general and not solely to his dramatic production. There is an implication that the relationship between content and form is often intricate, subtle and intimate, each having an effect upon the other and both being often mutually determining. Not so much *what* is said but *how* it is said may be all-important. The work of art could not exist without both substance and expression.

"Puis la création par l'art, . . ." reveals Montherlant's belief in the rationality of art. It also indicates an awareness that art is "doing" and as such counterbalances the spontaneity and gratuity of creation by emotion which is "feeling." Four characteristic verbs tell what art does: it "judges, chooses, combines, constructs." For Montherlant this combination of actions is also creation and suggests the intellectual and technical processes of creativity—the elements of that ultimate control the artist must exercise. The material presented by emotion must be evaluated. There must be selection and elimination, for there can be no choice without these two operations. Elements must be combined into patterns and a relationship of parts to the whole be established. Finally, this combination of actions demands the construction of a sound and complete unit, a fulfillment of what the author has set out to do. In a word, creation by art gives *form* to the work of art.

Emotion, at the other pole of Montherlant's aesthetic dualism, literally gives *content* or the "material of creation" and this represents creation by emotion. But not all material would give rise to the impulse of art. For Montherlant only material highly charged with emotion and brought to a point of artistic readiness because of its emotional content engenders the artistic impulse. He speaks of emotion as the first of the two moments of creation. The adverb *puis* which introduces "creation by art" suggests the priority in time or occurrence of emotion. Emotion is thus attributed a generative importance and value. Thence the primary function of emotion: it is that which inaugurates, compels the creation of art, it is that without which art would be impossible—at least for Montherlant. He also acknowledges a secondary function of emotion: he sees the emotive capacity of a finished work of art as one of the goals that can, or even should, justify art. "Les chapelles qui font la mode écrasent de leur dédain une poésie d'émotion," he wrote in *Sur les femmes*. And he quotes Lamarine in support of this view: "Celui qui sait émouvoir sait tout." But the

emotive capacity comes into play only after the work has been completed and for that reason is of less interest here than the generative value of emotion.

Emotion in the generative sense has, for Montherlant, principally four meanings. The first is the ordinary one, a strong feeling that "moves." "Je suis de ceux qui pensent," he wrote, "qu'il n'y a pas création de poésie là où il n'y a pas une émotion initiale, d'où jaillit un *canto jondo*. . . Rien ne remplace l'émotion, rien n'en a le goût, rien ne lui est comparable" (*Sur les femmes*). Or, in reference to his theatre: "J'ai crié les hauts secrets qu'on ne peut dire qu'à voix basse." Secondly, emotion means "passion." As is the case with the first meaning, emotion thus understood differs in degree of intensity as well as in duration: "Ils appellent 'éloquence,' 'rhétorique' ce qui sort de moi comme du feu. Est-ce ma faute si l'expression chez moi, colle sur le jet de la passion?" A third meaning allies emotion to the non-rational, mysterious facets of psychic experience. In a letter to Faure-Biguet he wrote: "On ne fait une œuvre d'art qu'avec ses nerfs: aussi je cultive mon système nerveux, car c'est lui seul qui créera." In his *Carnets*: "Quelquefois il semble que notre pensée se meuve sans que nous y ayons part. Il pense en nous comme il neige sur la campagne." (p. 284.) Finally, a fourth meaning of emotion suggests what is commonly called "inspiration": "Le stylo coule. On n'y fait rien, et après quelques jours il cesse de couler." (*Carnets*, p. 283.)

In his discussion of how he wrote *La Reine morte*, Montherlant gives insight into the role emotion plays in creation.<sup>2</sup> Using Luis Velez de Guevara's play *Reinar después de morir* as a point of departure, he noted that the situations and characters were as far removed as possible from what he could "nourish from himself." During a period of sleeplessness following his study of that play, he noticed that "tout changea de forme." Resorting to a metaphorical analogy to the speeded-up mutations that occur in documentary films on natural science, Montherlant stated that "tout se mit à bouger": "Quand nous est représentée en une minute telle croissance végétale qui dans la réalité s'accomplit en plusieurs semaines. . . Chaque personnage et chaque situation de Guevara, qui étaient pour moi des choses mortes, vinrent se coller sur ma vie privée et s'en nourrir. Déjà je pouvais les appeler mes créations. Dans le silence de la nuit, je sentais affluer en elles le sang qui sortait de moi-même." The Infante became "malade d'orgueil" because Montherlant himself was that way during certain periods of his youth. Ferrante took on a form "pétri de moments de moi." Inès de Castro became no longer a woman who already had a child, as Guevara had depicted her, but rather a woman who was expecting one, because

<sup>2</sup> See "Comment fut écrite *La Reine morte*," in *Théâtre*, Bibliothèque de la Pléiade (Paris: Gallimard, 1955), pp. 237-241.

"il y avait là une matière humaine que des dames amies m'avaient rendue familière." And, similarly to the phenomenon he mentioned in creating the character of Léon de Coantré, "isolant de moi ce côté pauvre type en l'exprimant,"<sup>3</sup> he discovered that "chacune de ces créatures devenait tour à tour le porte-parole d'un de mes moi." A second rapprochement with "la vie monstrueuse des plantes" is made: "Grouillement, éclosions saugrenues, accouplements hybrides, métamorphoses extravagantes: si le monde pouvait se douter de quoi et comment est faite une œuvre!" He speaks of the creative process as a "cuisine infernale," emphasizing its non-rational, gratuitous quality: "Dans l'état de création où j'étais, tout ce qui tombait sur moi fleurissait incontinent. Mon sujet attirait, polarisait, pompait tout, et le fécondait. Là-dessus je fourrais tout: . . . un fait divers lu dans le journal, un souvenir de lecture, des paroles qui venaient de m'être dites étaient utilisées sur-le-champ. Le Hasard lui aussi est une Muse." A more direct implication of emotivity in creation is expressed by what Montherlant calls *l'unité de l'émotion*. He feels that the emotion actually experienced in life can be and usually is transposed in art into an entirely different expression; and that emotion itself is of value to the artist: "La colère que vous éprouvez ressort dans votre art en cris de tendresse; la douleur en cris de plaisir; peu importe de quelle espèce est votre émotion, il suffit que vous soyez ému."

Although Montherlant wrote *La Reine morte* in less than five weeks, he points to the necessary "germination" that preceded his writing: "Car l'œuvre a été longuement portée, et cette transe n'est que la crise de dénouement d'un travail interne, insensible et sporadique, qui dure peut-être depuis des années." Montherlant experienced similar long periods of germination before writing many of his other works, *Le Maître de Santiago*, *La Ville dont le prince est un enfant* and *Les Bestiaires*, among them. Montherlant says that he had conceived the character of Don Alvaro Dabo entirely but waited twelve years "sans que me vînt à l'esprit l'intrigue où je le logerais."<sup>4</sup> As for *La Ville*, he asserts that the construction of the play was worked out during his seventeenth year, in 1913, one year even before he wrote *L'Exil* which he then considered a sequel to it ("Postface," *Pléiade* ed., p. 937). Early letters to his friend Faure-Biguet give evidence, finally, to a germination of several years preceding his writing of *Les Bestiaires*.<sup>5</sup>

<sup>3</sup> See Pierre Sipriot, *Montherlant par lui-même* (Paris: Seuil, 1953), esp. pp. 8-9 and 115.

<sup>4</sup> "Postface," *Le Maître de Santiago*, in *Théâtre*, p. 659.

<sup>5</sup> *Les Enfances de Montherlant* (Paris: Lefebvre, 1948). In Sept. 1909 Montherlant wrote: "Je sors des corridas de Bayonne. Je ferai certainement plus tard quelque chose

One further observation must be made concerning the nonrationality of art, or "creation by emotion." A certain spontaneity, when something "clicks" into place, as it were, is also part of Montherlant's concept of the creative process. This phenomenon can even extend to the conceiving of characters, and Montherlant gives the examples of Egas Coelho and Dino del Moro who were, he insists, "born" and "developed" as though instantaneously once the actual writing of the play had begun. These two characters were "entièrement constitués et viables d'un seul coup, mais cette fois en quelques minutes d'insomnie (entendons-nous: d'insomnie lucide, et non de demi-rêve, car je n'ai jamais eu l'honneur d'avoir des états seconds)." And a final note of mystery is injected by Montherlant's assertion that "L'invention proprement dite de la pièce était faite, d'ailleurs, presque en entier, durant ces insomnies au fort de la nuit; c'était l'heure profonde des grandes germinations."

Montherlant's apparent oxymoron, *insomnie lucide*, demonstrates again the dichotomy of *alternance* in relation to aesthetics. His concept of the Poet is an attempt to resolve the inherent dichotomy of his ethics.

Many of Montherlant's attitudes are those that are not commonly associated with poetry or a poet. In his preface to his one-act dramatic poem *Pasiphaé*, he defines himself in relation to his art as a *moraliste* and a *moralisateur*: "celui qui étudie les passions, et celui qui propose une certaine morale." He refers to himself as an "amateur d'âmes" in his "Postface" to *Le Cardinal d'Espagne*. He has repeatedly expressed his concern for the *permanent nature of man*, for study of the *human heart*, for the *défauts* of men which he finds within himself. He has often mentioned his fascination with individuals who are different from what they think they are: "Ce que chaque être offre de plus exaltant à l'amateur d'âmes, c'est sa façon de se mentir à soi-même." A play interests him only if "L'action extérieure, réduite à sa plus grande simplicité, n'y est qu'un prétexte à l'exploration de l'homme; d'exprimer avec la maximum de vérité, d'intensité et de profondeur un certain nombre de mouvements de l'âme humaine." This traditional, classic outlook, in keeping with the spirit of the *Grand Siècle*, is explicitly stated by Montherlant, in his *Carnets*: "Une chose me frappe dans ma production présente et à venir, c'est combien elle est et sera inactuelle. Ce qui me retient, ce sont les caractères généraux et éternels de l'homme. En quoi je suis 'classique'!" (p. 180).

Yet notwithstanding these appearances to the contrary, Montherlant

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là-dessus, c'est une des choses les plus magnifiques et enivrantes qui soient" (p. 52). In 1912 he wrote: "Je mets de l'ordre dans mes notes pour un machin sur les sensations tauromachiques" (p. 92). *Les Bestiaires* was finally written between 1925 and 1927.



is first and foremost a poet: "Je suis poète, je ne suis même que cela, et j'ai besoin d'aimer et de vivre toute la diversité du monde et tous ses prétendus contraires, parce qu'ils sont la matière de ma poésie" ("Synchrétisme et Alternance," p. 36). *Alternance* approaches its full resolution in Montherlant's concept of the poet, in Montherlant's ultimate evaluation of himself. The poet is the "immense amant, il n'est rien de sublime qui ne lui serre la gorge, il n'est rien d'atroce dont il ne se sente le complice et le frère" (*Ibid.*, p. 37). As a poet, Montherlant attempts to bridge the gap between pairs of opposites. While *tour à tour* is the keyword for alternance, *à la fois* is the precept to which the poet adheres. Simultaneity is the goal he seeks to achieve. With a "loyalty to himself" that gives absolute priority to the expression of his so-called *part essentielle* and is at the same time his greatest mark of respect for his public, the poet is not satisfied by his life alone. Nor do his dreams satisfy him. He is not ultimately content to experience first the one and then the other—in accord with the rhythm that governs *alternance*. Rather he wants to live his dream and dream his life. Despite misunderstanding, despite provisional concessions, he knows that he must engage the Angel of Poetry in desperate battle, for he is *sui generis*. *Poesis* alone will enable him to reconcile the irreconcilable and will bring about the Victory which is his Defeat.

A closer examination of Montherlant's concept of the poet corroborates these remarks. When he expresses the idea that the poet plunders or pillages reality and makes his poetry out of it, he resorts merely to a commonplace. But he quickly leaves the commonplace with this striking metaphor: "Quand il veut faire avec sa poésie du réel, la poésie se fâche, s'évapore en touchant terre: 'Je ne retournerai plus sur terre, moi qui ai été dans tes rêves.' Le poète dit: 'Dussé-je empoisonner le réel, je tenterai d'y réaliser ma poésie. Je suis homme, et que dégoûtent les habitudes solitaires: je ne me satisferai pas de mes rêves.' Ceci est le drame de la poésie."<sup>6</sup> For the poet who wants to fulfill or realize his poetry, "c'est la lutte contre l'ange." He strives to "faire toucher terre à l'ange de la poésie." This dramatic image is further developed: "Quelquefois, après bien des efforts, une lutte épuisante, il parvient à terrasser l'ange, mais alors l'ange, roulé dans la matière, ses ailes se déplument; froissé, couvert de crotte ou de poussière, et dans la laideur de la défaite, ce n'est plus qu'un vivant quelconque et que tout divin a abandonné. Et le poète, se détournant de lui avec rancœur: 'Qu'ai-je fait! Il était si beau dans le ciel!'" But the poet "a réellement terrassé l'ange" and "il a réellement réalisé tout ce qu'il avait conçu. Il a réellement remporté toute la victoire. Mais sa victoire est sa défaite."

<sup>6</sup> "Palais Ben Ayed," *Aux Fontaines* . . . An important essay for understanding Montherlant's concept of the poet.

This Victory which is also a Defeat represents for Montherlant one of the highest achievements of man. And the work of art it brings about represents that which will survive its creator. To illustrate his attitude Montherlant refers to Edmond Jaloux's emotion in seeing, next to the body of Proust in the sombre room where the great writer had died, the collection of his works. Jaloux saw that collection, Montherlant insists, as "un îlot de terre ferme au milieu du fleuve de ce qui passe." Into that body of work a substantial part of Proust's being had passed: "Là est un bien pour tous et pour toujours, indépendant des hommes et de leurs vicissitudes, et qui les nourrira encore quand les événements d'aujourd'hui se seront résorbés sans trace dans le magma informe du temps. Avec cela, l'artiste sait bien que, quoi qu'il arrive, il a gagné." These sentiments indicate Montherlant's detachment from the public, his belief in personal glory and immortality, his assent to the priority of art over contemporary events. In an almost mystical state of awe, Montherlant seems to hear the Artist say: " 'Laissez-moi me reposer dans ma création; en elle, et en elle seule, je me délivre des contrariétés du monde et des miennes propres; c'est elle qui m'exorcise de mes démons et des vôtres. Laissez-moi faire une belle œuvre, et que moi seul je puisse faire, par laquelle je vous servirai mieux qu'en me perdant dans vos agitations.' " The work of art, for Montherlant the poet, thus takes on the aspect of a refuge, a retreat or means of escape from the common lot, a hopeful means even for exorcism.

In an apostrophe to the Soul of the Artist, Montherlant beseeches, as if in fervent prayer: "Ame de l'artiste, pareille à celle du philosophe et à celle du chrétien, en ce que votre réaction est celle de l'éternel, . . . élevez-vous, affamée de profondeur, de plénitude et de lumière, en un lieu où les fantômes de la terre ne vous gouverneront plus." Montherlant rejects his common humanity and reaches for some kind of superhuman absolute. He wants to be god-like if not a deity in his own right. One of the characteristics of a deity is to be misunderstood—a problem of which Montherlant is only too aware. Epitomized by the symbol of the Exile, much space and effort are devoted to it. It is one of the most persistent, fundamental preoccupations of his entire body of work as well as of his life. Together with the theme of a parent's rejection of a child, and perhaps complementing it, the problem of misunderstanding is ever-recurrent—from the very first work that he acknowledged, written at the age of eighteen and significantly entitled *L'Exil*, to the present. Not only are his fictional heroes exiles who lament over being misunderstood, but Montherlant himself has repeatedly voiced the same laments when speaking directly for himself. Some of Montherlant's personal, non-fictional expressions can

<sup>7</sup> "L'Ame et son ombre," *Service inutile* (Paris: Grasset 1935), p. 141.

be found in the mouths of his fictional heroes. Montherlant wrote in his *Carnets*: "Ma destinée est de souffrir de ce qui ne fait pas souffrir les autres, et de ne pas souffrir de ce qui les fait souffrir." (p. 97.) Pasiphaé, Ferrante, Costals, Georges Carrion, Alban, Cisneros, even Andrée Hacquebaut and Léon de Coantré have said in essence the same thing. Or, again, the "fils de personne" that Montherlant sees himself to be, proclaimed, as any one of his fictional characters might have: "Entre nous et le public, *tout*, l'admiration comme la haine, est à base de malentendu." He spoke of the "worms that devour your work": "Les vers de l'incompréhension, les vers du dénigrement, les vers de l'indifférence, . . ."

Yet, despite a genuine and deep anguish caused him by *le malentendu*, Montherlant feels that it is important that he create his works. He has produced abundantly and continues to produce. To be sure, Montherlant remains convinced that "l'important, c'est que l'œuvre existe." For him mystery resides in a work of art; it is poetic, religious in essence and is its own justification: "Les œuvres des écrivains n'ont pas été faites à notre intention et par amour pour nous, plus que le fruit sur l'arbre ne mûrit à notre intention et par amour pour nous, plus que l'univers n'a été créé à notre intention et par amour pour nous. Les œuvres des écrivains ont été faites par le besoin organique qu'ont les écrivains de s'exprimer." This "besoin organique" resembles the "nécessité intérieure" of which he spoke in his Dedication to *La Reine morte*. "Mes œuvres sortent toujours d'une nécessité intérieure, plus ou moins profonde." It is the *part essentielle* of the writer "qui frappe en lui pour qu'il la tire au jour." It has absolute priority: "Pour l'écrivain qui a quelque chose à dire, la tâche de le dire prime tout."<sup>8</sup>

*Moraliste, moralisateur*, but poet above all, Montherlant possesses a comprehensive and complex aesthetic that enables him to move between two literary worlds: that of art for art's sake and that of so-called *littérature engagée*. That he rejects neither, that he refuses to take a stand for one and against the other—but accepts each, *tour à tour*—should not be surprising in the light of *alternance*.

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<sup>8</sup> "Barrès s'éloigne," *Aux Fontaines* . . . p. 135.