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JEAN RICHEPIN: A CRITICAL STUDY

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I. INTRODUCTION

Almost a decade has elapsed since the death of Jean Richepin and still no critic or biographer here or in France has written his chronicle. Some, indeed, have given fragmentary criticisms, but all of these combined do not suffice to give a complete picture of the man and his works. Inasmuch as many of them are about the "Chanson des gueux" and the author's subsequent incarceration, the impressions gained are frequently unjust. It is a well known fact that in his poetry Richepin was wont to scandalize the public by his bold attacks of conventions and creeds, by his truculence in describing the social outcasts for whom he felt great sympathy. But little has been said about his novels, although they represent a significant portion of his work. His plays, through their repetitions in Paris, have become fairly well known there. But in this country only two or three of them have attracted any attention. Nevertheless, they are works in which the author manifested most vividly many of his meritorious traits.

It is the aim of this study to give briefly Richepin's history, insofar as it reveals his character, and to analyse his best and most typical works. We shall point out his resemblances to other French writers of various periods and schools and indicate to what extent they obtain; we

shall show the traits which are exclusive with Richepin and which make him an individualist rather than an adherent to any school; and we shall make an evaluation of the author and of what he produced.

During his long literary career Richepin wrote approximately sixty volumes of novels, short stories, lectures, poetry and plays. None of these genres belongs to any definite time in the author's life, for he produced simultaneously works falling into all these categories. The novel "Césarine," for example, appeared in 1888, with the play entitled "le Flibustier." Yet these two bear no likeness whatsoever to each other. Nor has his play "Par le glaive" any resemblance to his novels "le Cadet" and "l'Aimé," although all three appeared at relatively short intervals. This dissimilarity between works of the same period is due to the fact that there is very little progression in the author's thought or manner of writing. This phenomenon may be attributed to his incapacity for or his resistance to growth. Happily, however, he was endowed with unusual ability of expression. He required no slow and tedious exercises to develop his literary skills; he was from the very first a virtuoso in prose and verse. But because of his limitations of character, his fine literary form is frequently unaccompanied by profundity of content. Even critical moments left slight traces on his character. He served in the Franco-Prussian War and witnessed the struggles of the Commune, but neither of these experiences had much influence on him beyond furnishing a few episodes for some of his stories.

It is evident, therefore, that his works cannot be divided into groups corresponding to stages in intellectual or literary development. This being true, we have considered it advisable to study him according to genres rather than by periods.

II. MAIN DISCUSSION

A. The Life of Jean Richepin

None of the fiction of Jean Richepin is more dramatic or more interesting than his own life. The turbulence of his career began in Algeria, in 1849, at the very date of his birth. The son of an army physician, he passed his early years in an atmosphere of excitement, in a country still under the strains of conquest. The change from post to post stimulated a love of travel, of adventure and of stirring living which were to become strong components in his mental and physical constitution. Heredity also was responsible for his Bohemian temperament which he manifested in every phase of his living, in his dress, and in his writings. Of Touranian descent, he was proud to trace his ancestry back to prehistoric times. When he reached maturity he attributed his scorn for laws and his instincts for revolt to his racial origin. "In his red globules" he heard singing the voices "Des Huns, des Bohémiens, des races Vagabondes" from whom he inherited "Son esprit mécréant, son grand amour du grand air et des courses lointaines, l'horreur de l'idéal et l'amour du néant."[1] His appearance seemed to prove the truth of this theory of his origin. His own statement is corroborated by those who knew him: "J'ai les os fins, la peau jaune, les yeux de cuivre, un torse d'écuyer et le mépris des lois."[2] Jules

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1. Richepin, J., les Blasphèmes, p. 237.
2. ibid.

Lemaître described him more fully: "Under the thick curlings and black of his hair like astrakhan, with his skin like copper, his eyes of gold, his well rounded lips, his symmetrical beard and the air of extreme gentleness apread over his calm visage, Jean Richepin has the air of a Moorish prince or of an Assyrian king, a Saracen king, and I know not what of Touranian in addition."[1]

In character and talent he has frequently been compared with François Villon. Bessie Van Vorst calls Villon his literary ancestor. "Long ago in the Middle Ages," says she, "when the troubadour was a pet of princes and a favorite of queens, Jean Richepin had an ancestor in literature, François Villon, lyrist, lover, and vagabond, who knew no laws save those of love and verse. Through the centuries his blood has filtered into the veins of Richepin, bringing a passionate gypsy poet into the nineteenth century to delight Bohemians' hearts."[2]

In 1854, during his father's service in the Crimean Was, we find him with his mother inhabiting the rue de Belleville in Paris. For a year he attended a primary school and won the prizes in reading and arithmetic. After his father's return, the family lived at the fort of Vanves, where the child followed the courses for illiterate soldiers given by a sergeant. In his spare moments, with his father as teacher, he learned to beat the drum with exceptional ability. In "le Pavé" he recalls this experience as one which gave him lasting pleasure.

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1. Quoted by Cameron, A.G., Introduction to Selections from Jean Richepin, p. 5.
2. Van Vorst, Bessie, "Jean Richepin," The Critic, vol. 34, p. 537.

Once again in Paris, he studied at the Lycée Charlemagne and at the Lycée Napoléon. Counseled by his professors, he entered the Ecole Normale Supérieure and became a model student, in spite of his eccentric nature which was difficult to reconcile with university discipline. His teachers often called him the "sublime Touranian." Marcel Fouquier says that "A l'école normale il fut un irrégulier brillant, un romané lauréat du prix de vers latins. C'est justice d'ajouter que même dans la voiture ambulante de 'Miarka,' il serait toujours licencié ès-lettres."[1] This is indeed true for his great strength in rhetoric and his skill in versification and the manipulation of words acquired at the Ecole Normale are everywhere evident in his works. As foreseen by all, he passed a brilliant examination and was graduated with the qualifications required for a professorate.

But the mildness and monotony of a life which promised comparative poverty and little power tempted him not at all. He turned from teaching for the state and almost starved while giving private lessons in French, Greek, Latin, and mathematics and writing for unsuccessful newspapers and magazines. Thus began a remarkable literary career. When students were lacking and his writing brought no remuneration, he tried many ingenious means of gaining a livelihood. At one time he installed a machine for fried potatoes on a street corner in the Latin Quarter. His sign read:

Frites--
Jean Richepin
Ancien Elève de l'Ecole Normale.

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1. Fouquier, Marcel, Profils et portraits, p. 31.

This method of advertising his business was not entirely to the liking of the school. His wonderful athleticism enabled him to engage himself as a wrestler in the booths of fairs which line the boulevards on holidays. For a short time he worked on a coaster, trading between Nantes and Bordeaux. He was about to sign on a merchant ship bound for South America when he fell in with a band of gypsies. Because of his excellent baritone voice he became their singing leader. He won their favor with his sleight of hand, his juggling and his jumping. At Fontainebleau, some art students, finding in him the incontestable gypsy type, offered him money to pose as their model.[1] Richepin's refusal so angered the chief of the gypsies that a quarrel with him ensued. When the latter's daughter offered to elope with him, he fled to Paris, knowing that her rejection would mean a stab in the back. Ever afterwards, the memory of those weeks spent among the Zingari haunted him like a pleasant and unforgettable dream. "Ce rêve vécu est toujours si en moi que souvent vient bruire à mes oreilles les airs d'ours que mes amis les romanitchels me chantonnaient jadis au temps de mes caravanes de jeunesse qu'il me semble qu'ils me reviendront bruire quand je me remettrai en route pour mon dernier voyage."[2]

In 1869, Richepin was editing secretary of a leaflet which had its offices in the Place de la Sorbonne and which defended the Naturalistic school. This was the period when he frequented young writers such as Paul Arène, Mérat, Valade,

1. Huddleston, Sisley, Paris, Salons, Cafés, Studios, p. 339.
2. Richepin, J., Toutes Mes Vies, p. 77.

Emile Blémont, Pierre Elzear, Lafagette and Rollinat who were entirely devoted to the new ideas. This group, whose influence was quite serious, served as a connecting link between the Realists and the Parnassiens.

During the Franco-Prussian war he went to see his father at Besançon. There he collaborated in the provincial newspaper "l'Est" and put himself at the disposal of the captain of the ship Rolland to instruct mobilized men. Later, he joined the francs-tireurs and fought valiantly in the army of Bourbaki. When peace was declared he returned to Paris and witnessed the disaster of the Commune. On the eventful night of March 26, 1870, he passed through the rue de Vaugirard with cannon balls whizzing past his ears and took refuge in the Luxembourg. He saw Paris in flames and its streets strewn with dead. The horrors of this civil war are realistically described in Richepin's novel "Césarine."

Richepin now joined with Raoul Ponchon and Maurice Bouchor to form the trinity of Vivants. With them and others he smashed street lamps, drank deep, yet revelled most in intellectual intoxications and in literary discussions. In their colorful and tempestuous living, this group perpetuated the traditions of the stormy student days of the Middle Ages, of the violent youth of Villon. Richepin was welcomed by a circle of Bretons who were indefatigable drinkers and by a society of Haitians who considered him as an honorary Haitian because of his bronze skin and his woolly hair.

He attired himself in a striking fashion. He wore tight-fitting cashmere breeches and patent-leather hessians.

His statuesque head was covered by a grayish Tyrolese hat adorned with a crimson cord and tassels. The upper part of his well-proportioned body was clothed in a dazzling white shirt of soft material, with collar turned back over a black velvet jacket. By means of this remarkable dress and his magnificent physical appearance he created an impression which he was able to turn to the advantage of stimulating interest in his literary efforts.

Shortly after the war, Richepin became an assistant teacher in a Paris school. He relates how he converted his recalcitrant pupils into friends. They were as old as he. They mocked him and refused to listen. On one provoking occasion the harassed teacher brought down a violent fist on the desk and delivered the following speech: "Messieurs, I must ask you to believe that I am not here for my pleasure. If you are bored, I am still more bored. But I have to earn my living. Do you intend to prevent me? Then I will ask you to come and tell me so, face to face, on the Place du Panthéon, where I will wait for you after the class is over. It is understood that, as we are practically of the same age, it is with our hands that we will exchange explanations."[1] This method was efficacious; his class was conquered. After the studies were over, the young teacher taught his pupils how to march on their hands, how to turn somersaults and how to lift weights with their teeth. It is needless to say that his popularity increased from then on.

The activities of his youth were exceedingly varied.

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1. Huddleston, Sisley, Paris, Salons, Cafés, Studios, p. 339.

He became an intense student of Parisian life, wandering through its crowded and dingy quarters, studying its occupations and trades. Twice he voyaged with caravans of mountebanks whose society he found highly enticing. He says: "..j'ai un faible pour les athlètes, ceux qui gagnent leur vie de bourgade en bourgade, d'où me vient ce goût pour tout ce qui est ambuland et déambulant ..... Je fus souventes fois amateur applaudi..... On a pu me voir aux foires du Trône et de Neuilly."[1]

In these milieux so different in spirit and language, Richepin's literary talents became enriched. He read voraciously books of all types; he studied the classical language of France in the masterpieces of the seventeenth century, and that of the Middle Ages in the poems of Rutebeuf, of Villon and of Marot. He read the best poetry of the past and present. He listened to the naïve songs of the peasants and of the destitute and he learned their argot as well as Latin. He accumulated in this way an enormous repertory of words which was to contribute so much to his reputation. But while waiting to employ this richness so patiently acquired, he collaborated in the "Mot d'Ordre" and in the "Corsaire." He published serially in "la Vérité" a sympathetic study of Jules Vallès called "les Etapes d'un réfractaire, Jules Vallès." He made an attempt at a Shakesperian play - "l'Etoile," at the Tour d'Auvergne Théâtre, in collaboration with André Gill.

Finally, in 1876, Richepin leapt from obscurity. He wrote his "Chanson des gueux" in which he showed his deep under-

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1. Richepin, Jean, Toutes Mes Vies, p. 50.

standing of and sympathy for the vagabond. He revealed himself the vagabond's champion and apologist. This poetry, though ardent, vigorous and audacious, would probably have passed unnoticed except for the denunciation of a Parisian newspaper. In accusing the author of immorality, this daring organ did him the great service of making his name a topic of discussion in all the literary circles. Unfortunately, he was condemned as a corrupter of public morals, sentenced to thirty days of imprisonment and fined 500 francs. In addition, "la Chanson des gueux" cost him his civil rights which he consistently refused to have restored to him unless accompanied by the right to print his book as originally written. The cost of the suit left him penniless and the newspapers became suddenly prudish concerning him. Another might have been overwhelmed by this ill luck; but his moral and physical stamina saved him. After serving his prison term, he left Paris. Having sung the gueux he did not hesitate to become one himself. He became an unloader of wood and a 'longshoreman at Bordeaux. Lolling on the quays or on boats, passionately loving the water, he gathered the store of experience about the sea, storms, sailors and colors which resulted in such magnificent work later.

It is the delight of Richepin's critics to relate an original and interesting adventure which he had in London. With only a few louis in his pocket, he had counted on his fine appearance to procure him meals and lodging. The price of his round-trip ticket from Paris practically exhausted his savings.

He was content to eat like the workmen; a pint of ale, a piece of bread and some strips of smoked fish constituted his daily menu. Nevertheless, his resources dwindled and he thought of a curious stratagem. He had noticed that the recruiting sergeants of the English army were searching for recruits. New enlistments were always preceded by food and wine, particularly the latter. Then the young conscript, intoxicated, signed the enlistment papers without resistance and found himself engaged to serve Queen Victoria for seven years. Richepin decided to play a trick on the Queen's officers and treat himself to a succulent meal at their expense. Without affectation, he walked before the barrack's door. The first sergeant, seeing this splendid, well-built fellow, fell into his trap. He envisaged Richepin as a horse-guard. He approached him, started a conversation, and offered him a glass of gin. They entered a tavern where gin, claret wine, roast beef and Chester cheese composed their excellent meal. Then when satiated with good food and drink, Richepin feigned inebriation with the consummate skill of a comedian and, taking advantage of a moment's distraction on the part of the sergeant, ~~he~~ dashed through the door with the lightness of a gazelle.

On his return to Paris, Richepin wrote for "Gil Blas" and began again his literary production which was to be uninterrupted almost until his death. "Les Caresses," written in 1877, are verses equaling "la Chanson des gueux" in poetic force. In 1883, his success was assured when he played the title rôle of "Nana-Sahib" opposite Sarah Bernhardt at the Porte-Saint Martin. The collection of poems entitled "les Blasphèmes" (1894) con-

tributed still more to the reputation he had earned with the "Chanson des gueux." "La Mer" (1886), "Mes Paradis" (1894), "la Bombarde" (1899), "Poèmes durant la guerre" (1914-1918), "les Glas" (1922), "Interludes" (1923), will be discussed in this study. His series of novels which had begun with "Madame André" (1878) continued with "la Glu" (1881), "Quatre petits romans" (1882), "Miarka" (1883), "les Braves gens" (1886), "Césarine" (1888), "le Cadet" and "les Truandailles" (1890), "l'Aimé" (1893), "Flamboche" (1895), "Lagibasse" (1899). The plays "Sapho" and "Sophie Monnier" (1884), "M. Scapin" (1886), "le Flibustier" (1888), "le Chien de la garde" (1889), "Par le glaive" (1892), "Vers la joie" (1894), "le Chemineau" (1897), "la Martyre" (1898), "les Truands" (1899), "Don Quichotte" (1905), "Laïs" (1920) appeared with equal regularity. There are also noteworthy collections of short stories; "les Cauchemars" (1892), "les Contes de la décadence romaine" (1898), "Contes espagnols" (1901), "le Coin des fous" (1921), and the "Contes sans morale" (1922), being the chief among these.

As the above titles indicate, the author exercised himself in all the literary genres with surprising fecundity. But the one which he prefers is the theatre. From his early youth he composed for his own satisfaction tragedies which had no chance of being played. He dreamed of founding a municipal theatre, consecrated to the glory of Paris, and of producing there only patriotic dramas written by himself. He desired to revive French history in dramatic form for his people. This project which he reserved for his old age was never accomplished.

Richepin travelled widely. Besides his numerous trips to London, he visited Italy, the Balearic Islands, Belgium, Holland, Denmark, Sweden, Germany, Switzerland, Spain, Algeria and Morocco. However, these sojourns far from his own roof-tree did not prevent his becoming an impeccable père de famille. When vagabondage became less attractive to him he continued his athleticism within his own home. He taught his sons Jacques and Tiarko the same feats he had taught his pupils many years before. He retained, in old age, the physical magnificence of his former years. His noble head, his gray hair, beard and moustache which fell in a multitude of curls contributed to the Olympian air which characterized him throughout his life.

In 1900 he retired from the stage and devoted most of his time to lecturing and journalism. He became a member of the French Academy in 1908. At the outbreak of the World War he devoted all his talent to the service of his country. His "Poèmes durant la guerre" and "Proses de la guerre" testify to his patriotic sincerity. At his death, in 1926, France lost a striking and unique man of letters. Jules Lemaître said of him: "... il est le dernier de nos poètes qui ait, quand il le veut, le souffle, l'ampleur, le grand flot lyrique. Il est le seul qui, depuis Lamartine et Hugo, ait composé des odes dignes de ce nom et qui n'ait pas perdu haleine avant la fin; et en même temps ce rhétoricien a su écrire de merveilleuses chansons populaires. Grand poète en somme: dans ses meilleurs moments, un Villon de moins d'entrailles et de plus de puis-

sance, qui aurait passé par le romantisme; ailleurs un superbe insurgé en vers latins."[1] Arnold Guyot Cameron says: "For virility and vitality, for a beautiful exhibition of liberty, for originality, for wealth of phrase, for eloquence and truculence, for savor and strength, literature will wait long for a brilliancy and power to compare with the creative force and the dazzling quality of Jean Richepin."[2]

1. Quoted by Cameron, A.G., Introduction to Selections from Jean Richepin, p. 44.
2. ibid., p. 45.

B. Novels

Jean Richepin's prose consists of something over twenty volumes of novels and short stories, of a biographical study and of several collections of lectures and articles on America (l'Ame américaine), on Athens (l'Ame athénienne), and on the World War (Proses de la guerre). And, although, according to the literary critics, his novels represent the least significant part of his writings, they equal in volume the poetry and dramas on which his reputation rests. These novels are not without importance for the understanding of the author's mind since they embody so clearly ideas and tendencies found in his other works. They are especially illuminating in showing his preferences in art and social conduct. His admiration for the simple folks, his hatred for the smug bourgeoisie, and his distaste for social conventions are ever evident. His taste for the unusual is given free expression, studies of curious aspects of human behavior, of strange sensations, of physical and psychological monstrosities being, in general, the material of his novels.

Here, as in his other productions, one searches in vain for constructive ideals which might serve Richepin as a point of departure and one finally concludes that he is primarily an individualist and an artist who has no moral to preach. As Arnold Buyot Cameron says, he is in direct line of Romantic survival. "Like Romanticism itself, he is an exception. He has the extraordinary, the extreme, the exception-

al, the rare, the revolted and the revolting often as the common matter of his production ... And his very personality, divided alternately between the brilliant classical scholar and the Bohemian, between the man of normal school training and the man of nature, himself the paradox of the cultivated nomad, accurately represents the antitheses and contrasts of Romanticism."[1] This paradoxical nature was recognized by Richepin himself when he admitted: "En moi cohabitent un rhétoricien de la décadence et un zingari de la grande route, rétameur de casseroles, maquignon et acrobate."[2] We find in him, then, the literary tendencies of conflicting schools. Like Victor Hugo, he mingles the grotesque with the sublime. Often his lugubrious choice of subjects and his bold manner of presenting the less agreeable truths make him resemble Emile Zola. Yet, because of his independence, Richepin cannot properly be called a follower of any school. He suffers by contrast with other illustrious figures in literature because he has none of those theories which give the "strength of consistent fibre, impelling purpose and stirring ideals."[3] He is neither a prophet nor a leader "He has no worldwide view like Balzac, none of the humanitarian creed, the standard-bearership of Hugo. He has none of the political philosophy of Lamartine, the socialistic theorizings of George Sand, the ardor-causing enthusiasms which found such different manifestations in the two Dumas, the

1. Cameron, A.G., Introduction to Selections from J. Richepin, p. 24.
2. Le Goffic, Charles, Les Romanciers d'aujourd'hui, p. 281.
3. op. cit. p. 24

force for radical reforms in literature which fretted the struggles of Zola."[1] Consequently, his work lacks moral purpose and the author pays the penalty for his literary anarchy.

Through a comparison of his novels, we have found that his manner is ever changing. We might wish that he had combined his literary gifts in such a manner as to give direction and purpose to all his works. We regret that he has formulated no philosophies such as other great writers have often led us to expect as proof of genius. However, because of his lack of philosophical profundity, he must not be dismissed as unworthy of critical study. His merit, which is by no means small, resides in his extraordinary power of expression, in his precision of observation of things both visible and psychological, in his robustness, and in his generosity of feeling and instinct. The analyses which follow are given with the aim of showing the diverging tendencies already indicated and of pointing out the characteristics which are most typical of Richepin's genius.

"Madame André" (1878) is a psychological novel which bears testimony to the fact that Richepin was capable of more depth than is shown in many of his later stories. Here he describes, with a precision reminiscent of Balzac or of the de Goncourt, the influence of a woman on the literary career of the young Lucien Fredolle. Unselfish devotion is the almost consistent guide to Madame André's conduct. Because of her superior age she refuses to become Lucien's wife or mistress.

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1. Cameron, A.G., Introduction to Selections from Jean Richepin, p. 25

But on learning of his financial ruin, she decides to surrender to his wishes. For his happiness she relinquishes her child and her fortune to a guardian and accepts all the hardships of middle-class life to which she is unaccustomed. To her collaboration are due all his literary successes, for it is she who organizes his disconnected utterances and writes the literature which makes him famous. Yet she never fails to give the credit to Lucien whose mediocre talent she sincerely overestimates.

While visiting at the home of Pierre Fresson, Lucien meets a charming young lady whom his host intends him to marry. Incited by Pierre, Lucien returns to Paris to seek certain explanations of his mistress and to bid her adieu. She, however, proves to him Pierre's duplicity and her own worthiness and he resolves to forget the young Pauline. During a serious illness, Lucien admits to his friend, Jacques Nargaud, that it is Mme. André who possesses the genius which has brought him renown. During an hour of unconsciousness, Pierre removes him to his home where, on his recovery, he marries Pauline.

From this moment Lucien's writings show a marked inferiority to those done with the help of his former mistress. Several years later he reads an article by Jacques Nargaud who announces the death of a great poet. On reading further he finds that is is Mme. André to whom Jacques ascribes Lucien's success. Lucien sheds a tear and evokes for a moment the dear memories of his love that is now dead. He regrets his cowardice for having abandoned so noble and devoted a woman. However, throwing his paper into the embers, he closes forever that chapter of his life.

In this psychological novel, Richepin studies the mental activities of his chief personages; he shows what motivates their acts and what their consequence is. He presents two characters, - one magnanimous and devoted, - the other devoted but weak. He depicts Mme. André at first as a woman guided by tenderness rather than by passion. However, as old age approaches, when Lucien has returned to her from his visit at Fresson's she becomes intensely amorous. Richepin gives the physiological explanation for this rejuvenation which is quite as remarkable as his description of Lucien's malady.

> "Par le bizarre concours de circonstances, ce retour d'amour coïncidait chez Mme. André avec l'approche du retour d'âge, et il en résulta une singulière transformation pour son coeur et pour son corps. Sans la violence renaissante de sa passion, livrée à sa froideur coutumière, elle eût sans doute traversé doucement cette époque critique, où les derniers charmes de la femme s'effeuillent comme des pétales de fleurs tardives ... Des désirs inconnus, des soifs inextinguibles s'éveillaient en elle. Sa raison, sa solide raison d'autrefois trébuchait dans une sorte d'ivresse ... Plus de prudence, plus de soucis maternels! La passion seule, effrénée, terrible, absorbante."[1]

Wisdom is forgotten in an attempt to crowd into a brief space of time enough love to last forever. Realizing her responsibility in Lucien's illness, she no longer protests against his departure to marry Pauline.

To the end her conduct is generous towards her lover. None but the most magnanimous could accomplish such heroic deeds and such uncomplaining sacrifices. The weak nature of Lucien is all the more despicable placed in juxtaposition with hers. His jealousy causes unnecessary pain to his mistress while his ob-

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1. Richepin, J., Mme. André, pp. 82,3.

tuseness makes it difficult for him to see the importance of her aid and permits him to be enslaved to the wishes of the egotistical Pierre. He is puerile in his reasoning, feeble, selfish and ungrateful. Recognizing these weaknesses, we are still unable to condemn him. We understand that his behavior is in accordance with his nature. He acts not as he should but as he can. He becomes a subject of pity when he leaves his secluded paradise, where he has dwelt with his mistress, to dwell in a material and selfish world in which achievement and fame will be forever barred from him.

The psychology is less profound in the novel which bears the title of "la Glu" (1881). The idea here presented is found many times in the plays of Dumas, the Younger. It concerns the guilty woman who has no remorse for her wrong-doing and, therefore, no desire for rehabilitation. Although it was not Richepin's purpose to point a moral, this story, like some of Dumas' plays, shows that such a woman does not deserve to live. Like other women of her class, la Glu knows how to attract men and bind them to her through her subtle and malevolent charm.

Doctor Cézambre, her husband, is her first victim. On obtaining proof of her infidelity, he departs and takes refuge in the little fishing village of Croisic. Ten years later, she, not knowing his whereabouts, goes to the same village for a vacation. She continues her devastating work with the fisher-lad, Marie-Pierre. Soon she finds another lover in the old Count Audren de Kernan de Ribiers. One morning

Adelphe, the Count's grandson, follows him to la Glu's home and is greatly astonished to see his former mistress from Paris. At this moment, Marie-Pierre bursts madly into the room and threatens to kill the other two lovers. When Dr. Cézambre comes in search of Marie-Pierre the woman's three lovers and her husband are face to face. Later in the day la Glu menaces Marie-Pierre's mother and the latter, fearful for her son, kills her. Cézambre, who has not had the courage to commit this act, nevertheless accepts the blame for it and declares himself a prisoner. The old mother feels no guilt for she has restored peace to her household and liberated society of a malefactor.

Although essentially a story of feminine depravity, "la Glu" is not all sordid; it is not without its bright incidents. Pierre's gentle fiancée, Naïk, being the very antithesis of la Glu, furnishes a measure of relief with her simplicity, charitableness and love of the good. She addresses a prayer to the Virgin Mary for the salvation of her dead rival and it is she who restores Pierre's strength and sanity. The presence of Père Gillioury imparts a Breton atmosphere to the story. This refreshing old sailor visits Marie-Pierre's house twice weekly to take supper and to spend the evening in playing polkas on his violin or banjo and in singing quaint and plaintive lays. Having been a navigator for forty years, he has a prolific repertory of sea tales. Characters of Père Gillioury's type are very dear to Richepin. Undoubtedly he had met many sailors like Gillioury during his short career

at sea. In "le Flibustier" he returns to these rovers of the deep who have exercised so strange a fascination over him.

"Quatre petits romans" which follow "la Glu" are not of great importance. But, in them are seen glimpses of the author's genius and evidence of his skill in dealing with different types of subjects. The treatment of "Soeur Doctrouvé" and of "M. Destrémeaux" is psychological; that of "Les Débuts de César Borgia" and "Une Histoire d'un autre monde" is romantic. The first two are stories of mental struggles of the chief personages; the two latter ones are primarily the recounting of conflicts with physical forces.

With regard to style and plot the story of "Soeur Doctrouvé" is extremely simple. Richepin lays aside all ostentation as if to make the disappointment within the soul of the heroine all the more poignant and profound. The very absence of exciting events and complications creates an ominous atmosphere of stark tragedy. The lively town of Besançon furnishes the background for the portrait of the devoted and dutiful Marguerite. The mountains surrounding the city, its busy quarters, its ramparts, its clock industries, its cathedral, and its aristocratic faubourgs are described in such a manner as to lend a distinctive charm to the story. The sober penury of the Marquise d'Aubentel's household possesses a quiet dignity which for many years satisfies Marguerite. From early childhood she has been taught that sacrifice, in order to endow her brother Pierre with a fortune and position befitting the rank of Marquis, is both correct and just. "Il s'était établi

entre la mère et la fille, à mesure que celle-ci avait pris de raison, une sorte de pacte tacite pour sacrifier sans réserve à ce rejeton si frêle en qui pouvait encore fleurir l'arbre de noblesse des Villers-Doisnay d'Aubentel."[1] Consequently, until reaching full maturity the austerity of this unnatural life is accepted by the girl unquestioningly. The only proposal of marriage which she receives is made by a wealthy clock manufacturer who is willing to accept Marguerite without a dowry. The Marquise refuses in the name of family honor, which must never be soiled by a mésalliance with an enriched bourgeois. Marguerite submits bravely to her mother's decision to remain forever a spinster. "Je suis fière," she says, "d'avoir à connaître les joies sévères du devoir."[2] At the Marquise's death she relinquishes her small inheritance to Pierre and enters the Carmelite convent where she is called Soeur Doctrouvé. Here she lives happily for some time believing that she has accomplished her duty. However, on receiving the announcement of Pierre's marriage to a wealthy Jewess, she realizes the futility of her generosity. She recalls with bitterness her immolation in the past for the sake of the family honor. She regrets her refusal to marry the clock merchant. The shock of disillusion kills her. But before dying she resigns herself and proudly murmurs that the useless sacrifices are perhaps the most beautiful.

The merit of this story lies in its simplicity and in its faithfulness in the portrayal of a real life situation.

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1. Richepin, J., Soeur Doctrouvé, p. 118.
2. ibid. p. 122.

The fate of Marguerite recalls many similar disappointments. Within the memory of all of us is the picture of an older sister or mother who has sacrificed fortune, health and happiness for the favorite son or daughter and who ultimately has received no reward, not even the joy of fulfilled hopes. Here is real tragedy resulting from the deception of long nourished aspirations. But it is inevitable tragedy for only rarely are there found individuals who conduct themselves according to the plans others have laid for them.

The story of "M. Destrémeaux" is told with the mastery of one who has given much consideration to the functioning of the mind and conscience. It relates the misfortunes of the hero who for reasons of honor relinquishes all rights to marry the girl he loves. Sudden financial reverses cause him to ask for three years grace in which to recover his fortune. Without further explanation he departs. At the end of the specified time his fiancée receives a letter which is in the nature of a confession. M. Destrémeaux reveals the secret of his humble origin as the child of circus performers and of his return to his former career of circus-rider. He shows great powers of introspection as he tells of his vain hopes, of his courage, of his disappointments, of the struggles within his conscience, and of his sense of honor which now prompts him to sacrifice his love. He condemns himself for ever daring to aspire to such aristocratic relations; for lacking in courage to tell the truth about his profession at the time of his departure. He is now fully aware of his deceit

and unworthiness and summons his courage to renounce all hopes of marriage. Still loving his fiancée, he begs not to be despised and gives her leave to marry another. The terrifying dénouement of the story proves his sincerity. His fiancée marries and, years later, takes her child to the circus. On seeing M. Destrémeaux, she utters a cry which attracts his glances. Recognizing her, it is as if his last hope has been fulfilled. He throws her a kiss and, instead of jumping into the net prepared for him, dashes himself to death on the earth beneath.

The fantastic adventures of two Parisian mountebanks which are recounted in "l'Histoire d'un autre monde" might readily be ascribed to some romantic writer of the early part of the nineteenth century. Hugo, himself, could have imagined nothing more sensational than the escapades of Marius and Jean, the chief personages of this story. These two men are described thus: "Jean Pioux était hercule et on le devinait en le voyant: non pas qu'il fût, ainsi que la plupart de ses confrères, une masse informe de muscles et de chair; mais la force était empreinte dans ses mouvements.... Malgré le front étroit, la barbe et les cheveux drus, durs, et frisés, il n'avait l'air ni d'une brute, ni d'un fier-à-bras. On eût dit une tête d'enfant très bon, portée par un cou de taureau, et encadrée dans une crinière de lion noir. Marius différait en tout de Jean. Il arriva presque en se disloquant, avec des contorsions, des renflements de dos, des effacements de poitrine, comme s'il voulait se couler par un trou ou glisser entre des doigts... Il prenait des allures

difformes et pouvait se faire passer pour estropié. En réalité, il etait assez grand, mince et sec, souple comme une anguille, dur comme un bandit et malin comme un singe. Rien de plus bizarre que sa tête! Il avait tout ce qu'il faut pour être laid, et il ne l'était point. Ses cheveux longs et incolores ressemblaient à de vermicelle. Sa face blême, plus ridée qu'une poire chiche, était agitée, tirée, pincée, recroquevillée par de perpétuelles grimaces. Sur ce fond de papier mâché se détachait un nez long, terminé en boule, légèrement vermillonnée au bout. En somme, la figure de Mazuclard représentait assez bien un fromage à la crême vivement secoué, avec une framboise au milieu. Et cependant, il n'était pas laid! Ses yeux jaunes s'ouvraient si grands, si clairs, si vifs, si profonds parfois, si intelligents toujours, qu'on oubliait la forme de la lampe en voyant quelle flamme y brûlait."[1] One might expect to find within the taurine body of Jean and the sorry body of Marius fierce and repugnant natures. However, aside from having served in the army of the Commune, neither one gives evidence of malicious traits. Like many a romantic hero, they present the paradox of a noble soul within a monstruous or unpleasant exterior. We shall relate the events of the story in order to show their highly fictitious nature and their resemblance to those found in the literature of the Romantic school.

As punishment for being innocently drawn into a riot of the Commune, Jean and Marius are condemned to a penal

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1. Richepin, J., l'Histoire d'un autre monde, pp. 45, 46.

island. There their difficult lives are sweetened by the kind attention of Jeanne, the cruel adjutant's daughter. Both fall in love with her but they refuse to allow jealousy to spoil their long-standing friendship. When Jeanne is kidnaped they decide to risk their lives in search for her. Their flight from the prison camp through the marshes, though not entirely impossible, is too apparently an invention of the ingenious author. The picture of Marius, with a tin box of matches tied on his head, tramping in water up to his mouth, amidst toads and reptiles almost excites laughter rather than pity. They finally reach dry land and enter a cave where a savage tribe is performing a religious ceremony. By means of the clownish tricks which they have exhibited many times in the streets of Paris, they succeed in pleasing the tribal chief and recover Jeanne. While Marius is gone in search of food, the searching party of the adjutant arrives. Not recognizing his daughter who is now dressed in male attire, the adjutant shoots her and Jean. The latter, however, before dying hurls his slayer against the rocks and crushes him to death. Marius, on his return, is in the depths of despair. Neither hope nor courage is left him. Life without these two loved ones appears unbearable. Binding both their bodies to him, he wades into the water and is engulfed.

We recognize in Jean and Marius some of the traits of the fated hero. From the very beginning of their story they are the innocent victims of circumstances. Due to

their profession of mountebank, they happen to be in the street during a Communistic uprising and are taken prisoners among the refractories. Later, when Jeanne disappears, they consider it their sacred duty to search for her. They are fully aware of the consequence of their escape but their altruism does not permit them to consider their own safety. Their superhuman efforts to save their lives among the savages and to recover the girl are ultimately of no avail. Marius' case is hopeless after the death of Jean and Jeanne. Death is certain among the savages; escape is impossible; a return to the prison camp means death or an eternity of torture. Like the heroes of Hugo's "Travailleurs de la mer" and l'Homme qui rit," he has fought valiantly against reverses and is depleted of strength and courage. Suicide is the only apparent solution of his difficulties.

In choosing historical subjects Richepin always displays his penchant for the licentious. His "Histoires de la décadence romaine," his play "Par le glaive" and his story entitled "les Débuts de César Borgia" verify this fact. Many of the major crimes of history are described or named in these works. The corruption of the Borgia family is so extensive as to include robbery, fratricide, incest, simony, poisonings and assassinations. The accounts of these crimes form the episodes of "les Débuts de César Borgia". There is no conclusion to the book, it being merely a series of pictures depicting the tainted lives of an infamous family. The assassination of François Borgia by his brother, César, furnishes the nucleus for the

other episodes. It occasions a most startling confession on the part of the sorrowing Pope Alexander VI who relates all his sins before his shrinking prelates. It also occasions a banquet which betokens the forgiveness of César by the entire family. With this episode the story ends midst feasting and debauch.

The gypsy traditions with which Richepin was so thoroughly acquainted are depicted in "Miarka, la fille à l'ourse" (1883), and all the affection which he felt for these nomads finds expression here in lyrical prose. Understandingly, he describes both the ugliness and the beauty of the wandering life which had for him a singular attraction. His gift of expression enables him to evoke in the reader all that he himself feels. A proof of his attachment to the subject of "Miarka" may be seen in his descriptions of himself and his son Tiarko in the personages of Prince Hohaul and Tiarko, respectively. The description of Hohaul, who comes to claim Miarka as his bride, well coincides with descriptions of the author found elsewhere.

> "Il était de taille moyenne, plutôt grande. Ses jambes fines, presque maigres, se dessinaient sous les plis flottants d'une culotte de soie rouge, serrée aux chevilles. Ses flancs pleins et ses reins extrêmement cambrés étaient étranglés par une large ceinture en maillot de filigraine d'or. Une veste de vieux velours cramoisi, tout galonnée, brodée, passementée, soutachée, raide de paillons et de pierreries, lui cuirassait le torse, qu'il avait large et formidablement carré des épaules. Ses bras en sortaient, nus jusqu'aux aisselles, bras forts et à la fois gracieux, aux muscles puissants sous une chair arrondie, avec des gonflements d'hercule et des

mollesses de femme. La peau en était cuivrée, polie, au grain de métal, et rehaussée, sur le bras gauche, entre la saignée et le coude, par une lentille noire pareille à une mouche de velours.

"Mais ce qu'il avait de plus beau encore, c'était la tête. Sur un cou robuste, un peu gras, sans tendons, sans pomme d'Adam, elle se dressait fière et dominatrice. La bouche, aux lèvres rouges, se retroussait à droite en un pli moqueur et cruel que ne cachait pas la fine moustache brune et légèrement mordorée aux pointes. Le menton carré, volontaire, impérieux, s'encadrait dans une jolie barbe toute frisée et fourchue, mais non rude toutefois, et, au contraire, d'un aspect soyeux. Le nez droit, terminé en boule, respirait l'orgueil et la volupté par ses narines mobiles. Les joues, larges et sculptées de forts méplats, étaient couleur d'orange, avec des rehauts de citron verdâtre sous les yeux. Les yeux étaient extraordinaires. Enfoncés sous les deux bosses de sourcils, dont la ligne les contourait jusqu'au coin des arcades, ils n'étaient pas très grands, et ils avaient cependant le regard immense..... Ils étaient à la fois très doux et très féroces, pareils à des yeux de lion et, comme eux, ils s'embusquaient sous les brouissailles d'une chevelure épaisse, aux noires boucles embrouillées, qui couvraient tout le front d'une bouillante écume de ténèbres."[1]

When the child Miarka comes into the world her father is already dead and her mother expires upon giving her birth. Her only remaining relative is the old Vougne, her grandmother, who baptizes her in the clear, cool waters of the brook and sings in her native language the odes of her people to the river and to the sun. These Richepin translates into French verse. They express the philosophy of a people who live close to nature, who can never establish themselves in any land and who honor the sun as their creator. This is the

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Richepin, J., Miarka, p. 75.

prayer to the sun:

"Soleil qui flambes, soleil d'or rouge,
Soleil qui brûles, soleil de diamant,
Soleil qui crées, soleil de sang.

Soleil, je t'offre cet or vivant;
Soleil, je te donne ce diamant de chair;
Soleil, je te voue ce sang de mon sang.

Soleil, met ton or sur sa peau!
Soleil, met ton diamant dans ses yeux!
Soleil, met ton sang dans son coeur!"[1]

In the stanzas which follow we find a dedication of the child to the wandering gypsy life. La Vougne sings these verses to the new-born babe.

"Dans l'eau qui court sans but,
Dans l'eau qui fuit sans fin,
Sois trempé sans fin ni but.

Comme elle va toujours,
Sans te fixer à la terre,
En la rongeant, en la rongeant.

Comme elle, aie pour pays
Les nuages d'où elle tombe
Les nuages où elle retourne

Comme elle, à travers tout,
Tu passeras, tu filtreras,
Car tu es libre, libre, libre.

Comme elle, tu sauras chanter
Ecoute bien sa chanson
Elle dit: 'Marche, marche!'

Comme elle, quand tu mourras,
Tu iras dans une grande mer
D'où le soleil te reprendra."[2]

Miarka is born at Ohis in Thierache and there she grows up, with Pouzzli the bear who suckles her and the neigh-

1. op. cit. p. 15.
2. op. cit. p. 14.

bor boy Gleude as her playmate. Grandmother Vougne awaits daily the arrival of a gypsy band. But years pass and her hopes are unfulfilled. Miarka learns the gypsy lore and the science of medicinal herbs which is the treasure of her people. The mayor of the village, who admires her intelligence and grace, hopes to marry her in order to ascertain certain secrets of her language. Gleude also loves her and kills the mayor in an outburst of jealousy. But when he attempts to pursue Miarka, Pouzzli the bear kills him. La Vougne dies; Miarka lingers at Ohis awaiting the gypsy king who is to come and claim her as his queen. He comes as Prince Hohaul whose description has already been given. Miarka departs with him.

In the sonorous prose of this book is expressed a wealth of truth concerning gypsy life and philosophy. The reader witnesses the birth and marriage of Miarka, the death and funeral of her father, mother and grandmother. Descriptions of their conduct lead us to believe the gypsies an unmoral people who murder, steal, lie and curse the Christians. Richepin succeeds, however, in rendering them likable. Their wholesome love of gladness and nature endears them to our hearts.

Actor and writer himself, Richepin knows the sadness and joys accompanying the artist's career. His difficult and irregular life constitutes a favorite subject for some of his novels and short stories. For those who, like the hero of "Brave gens" (1886), sacrifice all for art he has the greatest admiration. Yves Kergouët in this story is apparently the author's ideal for he speaks and acts as Richepin himself

might do.

Yves is an artist in all his being. His thoughts are of exquisite purity and his talent is effectively used for the glory of his art. Musician at a café-concert in Paris, he has for his inspiration his pupil of voice, Madeline Loupiat. He has a friend Tombre who habitually drowns in alcohol his sorrow of unrequited love and by and by becomes an inveterate drinker. Yves counsels him to abandon this vulgas habit. He, too, likes his brandy, but as an artist, as his elixir of work when his mind and body are fatigued. Yves' advice conforms to Richepin's philosophy. He detests all that smacks of the bourgeois. To drink now and then to produce, for inspiration, is befitting an artist; but drinking, for its own sake, is vulgar and is typical of a Desaugiers or a Béranger. Now, these poets represent for Yves, as for Richepin, the very depth of intellectual abasement. According to the musician, Tombre is unhappy because he expects too much of love. Real love, according to Yves, is disinterested and seeks no recompense. Tombre's fortune turns, however, and he and Georgette depart for America. After the latter's death, Tombre returns to Paris where he soon dies of Delirium Tremens. Yves, in the meantime, has married Madeline and, for the sake of his mother and sister, has accepted a position as convent organist at St. Malo. With characteristic magnanimity he adopts Georgette's son and accepts all the privation which this responsibility brings.

With"Césarine" (1888) Richepin returns to the style employed in "Mme. André" and with equal perspicacity he depicts a situation of similar devotion and martyrdom. Paul

Roncieux, a student at the Lycée Napoléon, has never known any affection other than that of his protectress, Césarine. His father, Captain Roncieux, dislikes him to a degree which puzzles all his friends. Paul falls hopelessly ill and it becomes the lot of Césarine to care for him. In an outburst of anger against his father's menacing letters, Paul explains the enigma of their animosity. The Captain is persecuting him because he is the son of a faithless wife whom he killed after shooting her lover in a duel. Césarine does her best to protect the helpless boy and to make his few last days happy. They flee from place to place and at last take refuge in an ambulance. Paul is arrested and shot as a Communist. His mistress, not wishing to be separated from him avows herself to be of the same party and meets with his fate. On hearing of Paul's death, the Captain heaves a sigh of relief and admits that he does not believe the boy was his son.

A third person befriending both Paul and Captain Roncieux relates this story from the psychological angle. He sees the admirable qualities in both his friends; he recognizes them both as worthy men who cannot drive from their thoughts their hatred for each other. In persecuting his innocent son the Captain probably behaves precisely as his stern training dictates. He has known no tenderness and, consequently, is incapable of the sentiment himself. Deceived by his wife, and uncertain of the boy's paternity, he sees in him only the mother's obnoxious traits. He re-

proaches him for his weak body and sensitive nature which make a military career impossible for him. Physically and temparamentally, Paul is best suited for the scholarly activities which he pursues. His persecution is all the more pathetic since there is no remedy. But nothing can soften the captain's embittered heart, nor can anything eradicate the incompatibilities which exist between these two souls.

Perhaps no other place has been more completely described by Richepin than the country of Thiérache which serves as the setting for "Miarka", "le Cadet", and "Lagibasse". We attribute the author's predilection for this section of France to the wild and primitive character of its people which appeals to his own untamed nature. In presenting this favorite background he displays a thorough scholarship. From the information he gives, the reader may reconstruct a study of the geography and the climate of Thiérache as well as of the characteristics and occupations of the Thiérichiens. As already indicated in "Miarka", it is through this country that the gypsies, who are known to the natives as merlifiches or merligodgiers, pass on their migrations through France. Occasionally some of them have renounced their life of wandering to remain in the valley of the Oise. There they have instituted the industry of basket-making and have left their trace in colonies of basket-makers. Richepin tells us concerning these settlers: "Parfois en de temps reculés, quelques-uns d'entre-eux s'y sont établis à

demeure, reniant leur amour de la fuite et leurs moeurs d'hirondelles. Les vanniers d'Ohis et de Wimy ont tous l'air d'être les descendants de ces coureurs fixés. Ils en ont gardé les goûts de travail artistique, la passion des cantilènes, l'horreur de la culture, la peau basanée et le poil noir."[1]

Thiérache is a section of France which has never been favored by glory. Situated in Picardie between Namur and the Ardennes, it forms a territory very unlike that surrounding it. Content with its isolation, it has never tried to extend itself further. Invasions and wars have been almost unknown to it. Only the gypsies have brought their influence to the valley of the Oise which became their traditional route. Thus the race of Thiérachiens has remained autochthonous and extremely peculiar. Richepin states that, according to ethnographers, Thiérache is one of the most ancient beds of humanity in Europe. By the Thiérachiens' characteristics, one recognizes still today, marked by strange reversions of atavism, the fierce and primitive blood of Pleistocene people who inhabited that part of France before the arrival, not only of the Franks and the Germans, but the Gauls themselves. Even to the casual observer, the present type of Thiérachien differs from the Picard, the Wallon and the Ardennais. He is stockier, his hair is darker, and his complexion less clear. His eyes make one think of very distant and mysterious epochs when man was not far advanced from the animal. No

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1. op. cit., p. 9.

other section of France knows more love crimes, nor more cruel and monstrous revenges. Although the Thiérachien is today disciplined and more reasonable, his behavior is still characterized by atavistic cruelty. "... On comprend à quelles reffervescences des vieux instincts primitifs et sauvages un être, plus près de la nature, peut et doit être poussé violemment et inconsciemment, par cette âme de la terre thiérachienne, par cette âme faite de toutes les âmes de tant d'ancêtres à demi brutes, par cette âme qui vit encore dans tant de regards là-bas, à la fois rusés, lubriques et féroces, par cette âme d'un pays qui sue l'amour, l'embuscade et le meurtre."[1] Let us bear these traits in mind during the discussion of "le Cadet" and "Lagisbasse". This knowledge of the Thiérachiens' nature prepares us for the brutalities we shall see perpetrated.

Just as Zola presents in "la Terre" his study of the peasants of la Beauce, Richepin presents his study of Thiérache in "le Cadet". This novel is a revelation of peasant philosophy, conduct and language. That the farmers of Richepin's book seem less brutal than those of Zola is due to the fact that the mental side is stressed rather than the physical. Psychological phenomena preoccupy the author more than the physical motions of his characters. He is less prone to exaggerate and, consequently, his picture is more truthful. In the matter of greediness the peasants of Thiérache do not differ from other French peasants. They take all that the soil

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1. Richepin, J., Lagibasse, pp. 5, 6.

can possibly yield. They contrive in every possible manner to possess much land and to keep it within the family. Their crudity, although given less importance by Richepin, comes near equalling that described in "la Terre".

In contradistinction to the character of its people, we find the country of Thiérache rich in natural beauties which are depicted again and again. Its inhabitants love it for its springs and its marshes, for its flowers and its woods, for the sweet, moist scent of its meadows. The brutal character of their nature does not exclude a strong affection for their homeland. Gleude, in "Miarka," when only a short distance from Ohis, longs for the familiar scenes which are so dear to him.

> "Il regrettait ses verts fourrés de la Thiérache, tout bariolés de fleurs, tout gazouillants d'oiseaux, les marais pleins de grenouilles coassantes, les ravines tapissées de mousses, les pentes herbeuses au bas desquelles murmuraient des fontaines, les allées de grands peupliers hantées par les pies bavardes, les sentes embaumées où bourdonnaient des insectes d'or et de pierreries."[1]

Even Miarka, whose heart is cold and who inherits the gypsy passion for the open road, cherishes Thiérache. She refuses to marry King Hohaul there for fear that she will not have the courage to depart later with him.

There is something enchanting about this spot which is more fully described in "le Cadet." Although the locale of this novel is the village of Herme-le-leups, another corner of Thiérache, the scenes are essentially the

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1. Richepin, J., Miarka, p. 48.

same as those of "Miarka". The freshness of the earth due to the numerous pools and streams, the grayish tints of the valleys, the light mists which take on tints of blue and rose, the murmur of flowing waters, - all these are pictured by Richepin in a prose of rare quality. The quotation which follows exhibits the stylistic beauty of the author and describes, felicitously, the natural beauty of Thiérache.

> "Les regards étaient sollicités d'abord par les quelques notes éclatant dans le gris de la vallée: bouquets d'arbres ou tapis de près dont le vert s'avivait aux naissantes pourpres du ciel, écailles d'argent bruni qui miroitait sur les toits d'ardoise. Mais vite on se détachait de ces aspects prévus, pour admirer surtout et humer des yeux ce gris si frais et si doux, cette fumée d'eau qui était comme l'haleine d'aube de la vallée. Les ruisselets, les flâches où germaient les sources, les étangs invisibles où elles s'épandaient en nappes sous l'herbe et les osiers, tout sommeillant encore dans la brume. Brume légère, bleuâtre, que l'orient teintait de rose. Peu à peu les pointes de l'osier trouaient cette gaze. Des lambeaux s'en arrachaient, s'évaporaient en poussières transparentes. Et il ne fallait pas un grand effort d'imagination pour se figurer une féerie en effet, un lent et paresseux éveil de nymphes ondines, que l'une après l'autre s'étiraient, se dévêtaient de leurs voiles nocturnes et en laissaient s'envoler à la brise les traînantes écharpes."[1]

It is little wonder that Amable Randoin de Toraval, the hero of "le Cadet," regrets the namy years spent away from his beloved Thiérache. Returning from Paris broken in health and spirit, he finds himself deprived of his share of the Randoin estate. He wishes he had had the wisdom never to leave this paradise for the noisy and fleeting pleasures of

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1. Richepin, J., le Cadet, p. 3.

the capital.

Having been the Benjamin of the household, Amable, known as the Cadet, has been given every opportunity for a happy and complete life. Because of his refined tastes and interests he was sent to Paris to receive his education. At his departure, his elder brother Désiré, lacking the qualities of a nobleman, assumed the duties of miller and farmer on his father's domain. Like Marguerite in "Soeur Doctrouvé" he has grown into the habit of abnegation and with hard labor he has been able to keep Amable in Paris for many years. He has accomplished this feat joyfully because of his great love and admiration for his brother.

> "Il le considérait en vérité comme son supérieur, ne se comparait même pas à lui, sinon pour le trouver plus beau, plus intelligent, plus ayant droit à tout; il n'en souffrait en aucune façon, en jouissait bien plutôt, fier de son cadet comme d'un fils."[1]

He expects great achievements on the part of the Cadet and to his great satisfaction receives letters relating fabulous successes. In reality, Amable after failing his law examinations, makes many ventures which endiin ignominious failure. He becomes a publisher, founds a newspaper and loses money in a newly organized bank. For a time he lives a Bohemian life, associates with worthless men and women who pretend and dream like himself. He is always backing new enterprises, political circles, schools of painting. He writes and publishes bad verse, frequents grisettes for whom he establishes a millinery or dress shop. It requires less than seven years of this mode of living to deplete his capital and income amount-

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1. op. cit. p. 110.

ing to 50,000 francs.

> "A trente-quatre ans sonnés, sa jeunesse enfuie, sa fortune perdue, toutes ses vocations avortées, il se trouvait n'être rien autre chose qu'une espèce de vieil étudiant, faux bohème, artiste à la manque, avec sa vie à recommencer. Destinée semblable, sauf les différences de milieux à celle de son père, l'ancien officier de la République, rengagé en 1814 comme simple dragon, avec l'épaulette de laine et la moustache grise." 1

During these years Désiré has paid Amable's mortgages and kept the entire estate intact. The letter in which he offers to pay all of his brother's debts and to save their property is intended only to show affection. To the reader who understands his generous motives it is touching in the extreme. But to Amable it is humiliating because it renders him too conscious of Désiré's alms. But the innocent sincerity of the letter is apparent:

> "Tu n'as plus rien, mon cadet; mais c'est comme tu avais encore tout. Je me suis arrangé avec Maître Leherpeur pour racheter tes créances. Les engagements que j'ai souscrits, en vue de nous conserver ainsi le patrimoine entier, sont lourds, et ne me permettent plus de te servir de rente. Mais, en prenant de la peine, je saurai les tenir et nous faire vivre par surcroît. Vivre ici, au Moulin-Joli, où il faut que tu viennes. Arrive. Il y a place pour deux. Tu pourras y composer des livres, y colorier des tableaux, ou bien t'y distraire en chassant comme le père, si tu n'as plus d'ambition, ce que je souhaite. Pour moi, je me fais une fête de penser que nous finirons sans doute nos jours, tranquillement, en vieux garçons."2

Amable's ingratitude prompts the proud reply that he is earning a rich living as an artist and that Désiré is to keep all

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1. op. cit., p. 55.
2. op. cit., p. 15.

the estate for himself. However, after more vain efforts to gain a living, he is finally obliged to return home to avoid starvation. He presents the sad dejected figure of one who, having aspired to, and known, life in the grand manner, is forced to return home, poor and broken morally and physically.

> "C'est ainsi qu'il revenait, transi, déplumé, écoeuré, du monde et de lui-même, se reprochant d'ailleurs son retour comme une lâcheté. Retour de vaincu, en effet, de fuyard qui avait quitté Paris comme on se sauve d'un champ de bataille après une déroute complète. Et il n'avait seulement pas averti du jour de son arrivé, préférant rentrer en tapinois dans ce nid où il se réfugiait honteusement."[1]

As foretold by Amable's attitude to the letter cited above, Désiré's generosity and pity are badly received by him. The awkward words of sympathy are as burning coals to Amable's sensitive nature. His poverty obliges him to accept his brother's help at the cost of intense moral suffering.

> "Les premiers mots de Désiré après l'étreinte, ces premiers mots dans lesquels le brave garçon mit à plein sa douleur de voir le Benjamin si mal en point, ah! combien ils furent pénibles pour Amable! Et, pourtant leur mère en personne n'en eût certainement proféré d'autres. Combien maladroits, néanmoins! Hélas! maladroits comme une poignée de main trop forte, comme un baiser qui emporterait le morceau ....
>
> -Mange ma soupe, mon pauv' fieu, mange ma soupe, cadet, mange-la bien.
>
> Et Amable souffrait attrocement. Dès le début, il avait été blessé de cet ébahissement douloureux devant sa maigreur, sa mine hâve, ses hardes lamentables. Etre traité en pauvre, en meurt-de-faim, au regard même de la vieille Marceline, redoublait la cuisson de cette blessure.... Il détestait jusqu'aux larmes de son frère, jusqu'à ses bonnes larmes de pitié naïve. Il avait

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1. op. cit. p. 17.

> l'involontaire, inique, mais écoeurante sensation que Désiré en arrosait le pain exprès pour lui faire manger aussi sa pitié."[1]

Had Désiré been more clever in his charity, or Amable less sensitive, the latter might have been happier. But with their characters such as they are; scarecely admitting modification at their age, Amable's dislike grows daily. Désiré's way of emphasizing his gifts by the use of "mon" and "ma" becomes habitual. "Mange ma soupe; prends mon linge, mes draps, mes chemises". Such statements are made quite without humiliating intentions, through simple pride of possession. Seeing the Cadet's increasing displeasure, he blames himself for not putting enough ardor in his generosity and redoubles his efforts to please. At this point, the author cleverly anticipates the sad consequences of the misunderstanding which exists between the two brothers. It would have required a less clumsy hand than Désiré's to unburden Amable of the heavy weight which lay upon his heart.

> "Le coeur d'Amable n'était pas aussi mauvais qu'il en avait l'air, aussi fermé, aussi muré. Dans cette cave, où moississaient des champignons vénéneux, les ténèbres ne demandaient peut-être qu'à se purifier de brise salubre, à se dorer d'un rayon de soleil. Mais pour cela il fallait ouvrir la porte bardée de fer, et l'ouvrir doucement, habilement, avec une clef fine s'insinuant aux secrets compliqués de la serrure, tandis que Désiré y cognait lourdement avec la grosse clef de son moulin."[2]

There is another cause for Amable's discontent, his forced adherence to Désiré's meticulous mode of living. The military precision of all the household activities exasperates

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1. op. cit., pp. 19, 20, 21.
2. op. cit., p. 28.

him. His great misfortune is that self esteem and pride prevent him from protesting. But suffering in silence creates the illusion of paying for his brother's hospitality.

> "En se taisant, Amable se donnait l'illusion de payer son écot à l'hospitalité acceptée, et de payer secrètement, ce qui lui semblait plus hautain, plus grand seigneur, d'un mépris non sans élégance. Les menus, mais si cruels sacrifices de soumission, auxquels il s'astreignait à écorche-coeur, voilà quelle était sa monnaie. Rénumération suffisante, bien sûr, à la subsistance sans plus, sans égards surtout, qu'on lui fournissait au prix de tant d'humiliantes et muettes tortures."[1]

This manner of reasoning brings Amable to transpose the rôles and make himself the creditor and Désiré the debtor. From this moment his hatred and ingratitude grow. Again, Richepin prognosticates the inevitable outcome of this rancor growing in the dark recesses of Amable's heart. His vague antipathy now boldly takes form and formulates itself in precise terms. The author continues:

> "Dans la cave aux champignons vévéneux, dans la sombre cave sans soupirail, derrière la porte condamnée que Désiré n'a pas su ouvrir, les monstrueux cryptogrames allaient épanouir à l'aise leurs végétations toujours croissantes de noire envie."[2]

In spite of his misery, Amable remains at the Moulin-Joli. The country makes a strong appeal to his artistic temperament. He fills his days with walks, with hunting expeditions or with the contemplation of the beauties of nature. Incapable of translating his impressions into a poem or a picture, he is none the less sensitive to the se-

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1. op. cit., p. 39.
2. op. cit., p. 40.

ductive qualities of the countryside.

> "Il savait même analyser son émotion, en savourer les nuances, et pourtant ne rien perdre du mouvement large et spontané qui ouvrait son âme aux enchantements poétiques et pittoresques de cette belle nature. Il en jouissait ainsi d'une façon rare, en dégustait les plus délicats séductions, toute la grâce si originale, si finement exquise, et avec l'intime orgueil d'être le seul à le comprendre."[1]

The surrounding nature almost intoxicates him. Alone in the forest, he experiences a reaction which is not only artistic but physical. His mind becomes confused; his flesh is penetrated by the mysterious and profound strength of his native land. The earth becomes a living soul. In childhood it was his nurse, his mother, his grandmother and now, by a strange miracle, it is his mistress. He feels her urging him to remain and he throws himself upon her bosom and ecstatically embraces her. Hereafter, his most cruel and debasing deeds will be committed in the name of this new mistress.

It is on one of his numerous walks that Amable meets the smuggler and poacher, Borgnot who cleverly insinuates a method to get rid of Désiré. For a long time he has spied on the Cadet and has come to know of his extraordinary passion for the earth. He devines the envy and dislike which the younger brother must feel for the one who now owns the entire domain. He tells how he disposed of his own enemy, the customs officer, by shooting him and hints that Amable might achieve his ends by similar means. At first,

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1. op. cit., p. 43.

this incitation to fraticide horrifies Amable. The idea of such a crime is repugnant to him and seems especially abominable since it is the worthless Borgnot's suggestion. To drive away his dangerous thoughts he takes a new interest in their home and even helps Désiré in the farm duties. Then, to prevent himself from committing a crime in the future, he conceives the idea of adding another person to their ménage. He now considers Désiré's marriage a necessity; his wife will not only prevent a tragedy but she will provide an heir for their cherished estate. As Amable has anticipated, his torture subsides when Désiré marries Anaïs. He is happy to have advised his brother in what promises to be a good marriage. When Désiré finds, however, that his wife cannot bear him a child he treats her with indifference and cruelty. Amable, still concerned with providing an heir, believes it is duty to become Anaïs' lover. Peace is restored when her child is born. At the death of the baby, the mother becomes conscience stricken. Believing this to be the punishment of her adultery she henceforth refuses to be Amable's mistress. This refusal causes him to desire again Désiré's death. He rationalizes to the point that he considers it his duty to commit the murder. When the Franco-Prussian War breaks out, he reproaches his brother for cowardice in not joining the French forces with him. He even blames the wounds he receives on Désiré for, he reasons, if his older brother had been there he would have protected him against the enemy. He also believes that Anaïs should have been by his side to care for him. His return home

from the campaign with a cicatrice on his face is rendered painful by Désiré's movement of horror and pity. Amable, mad with anger, swears that he shall have his revenge.

> "Il se fit à lui-même, solennellement, un serment monstrueux, à la fois monstrueux de perversité (puisqu'il n'aimait plus Anaïs) et d'orgueil (avec sa tête épouvantable d'aujourd'hui); et ce serment le rendait plus ricanier."[1]

His sweetest revenge will be to possess Anaïs. But she, now fully repentant, rebuffs him. Enraged, he rushes into the fields where he meets Borgnot who joins him in wishing Désiré's end, the latter having denounced him and had him whipped for profaning a dead Prussian sentinel. However, the vagabond has the wisdom to desire to hide his hatred for several years. Were he to murder Désiré now he would be suspected immediately. But Amable cannot wait; he must experience the joy of perpetrating the crime himself. Calmly, he stations himself near the road where his brother is to pass and shoots him. Borgnot is accused and convicted in spite of his testimony to Amable's guilt. One month later he is guillotined.

Only the old servant Marceline knows Amable's guilt and she prefers to keep silent. She is happy to end her days with him. Her cognizance of his guilt relieves him of the necessity of confiding in others. Out of genuine gratitude he fills her last days with filial tenderness. He realizes that with her death he will lose his last human friend and he looks forward to that time with fear.

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1. op. cit., p. 276.

> "Certes, parce qu'il avait pour elle une sincère et grande affection, tant méritée! Mais aussi, (sans qu'il s'en rendît compte) parce qu'elle était la dernière, l'unique à partager le secret du crime commis, de la vengeance tirée, du triomphe impénitent, et parce qu'après elle Amable voyait s'ouvrir pour lui un morne horizon de solitude, dont parfois d'avance il avait peur."[1]

Besides the joy of confiding in Marceline, Amable experiences a fiendish pleasure in knowing that the community suspects him. He delights in the nocturnal visits of his neighbors who congregate before his house to shout their accusations. At times, he is tempted to confess to the priest who is the only one who still believes in his innocence. When Marceline dies he seeks absolute seclusion in an impenetrable forest,and the earth, always his best love, becomes his confidante. Many an hour is spent lying in the grass, breathing his confession to nature.

> "Oh! s'écria-t-il un jour, la terre, la terre! Oui, c'est vrai. Toi, écoute.
> Il était en ce moment là-haut, a^ Toraval, couché dans l'herbe à plat ventre. Et c'est à même le sol, la bouche collée à lui, qu'il ajouta:- Oui, tu sais, je l'ai tué. C'est bien moi. Oui, moi, tu entends, moi."[2]

One day he is found dead, facing the earth and embracing it.

We give this lengthy account of "le Cadet" to show the minute psychological detail of which Richepin is capable. Working from cause to effect, he shows the source of each psychological phenomenon and reveals its outcome. Amable's peculiar temperament is a heritage from his father who was a petulant country squire with a penchant for warlike adventure

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1. op. cit., p. 353.
2. op. cit., p. 359.

and high living. It is the spirit of his father that urges him to seek the dangers of battle.

> "De fait, lui, sans forfanterie, très naturellement, se sentait, plus que jamais a cette heure, un autre sang dans les veines, le sang de ses aieux les hobereaux, gens d'épée, le sang de son père surtout, du soldat coureur d'aventures. Il s'enorgueillissait de constater cette belliqueuse humeur d'atavisme, et la constatait bien réelle. Il poussait même jusqu'à ne pas s'en faire un mérite, plus fier de se dire:
> -Par patriotisme, allons donc! C'est par goût de la guerre que je pars, avant tout, parce que j'aime le danger, et parce que c'est amusant."[1]

We are told that the savage gratification he experienced at the sight of the enemy's blood eclipsed all others experienced before.

> "Oh! quels bons et beaux jours il passa, le casse-cou revenu à sa destinée réelle, le fils du Randoin aux étranges aventures, le descendant authentique des batailleurs et des chasseurs jadis essorés de Toraval, quel superbe temps d'existence hasardeuse, où largement s'épanouit toute la fleur de vaillance de la vieille race. Le bohème d'autrefois, l'artiste raté, l'enfant prodigue au retour humiliant, le cadet envieux, le vieux garçon repris de sensualité aux dépravations d'un adultère incestueux, rien de tout cela ne subsista plus, ne se réveilla plus, pendant cette périlleuse campagne, ces affût, ces marches, ces nuits en plein air, ces journées sans pain, avec des coups de fusil pour dessert? Et, parmi les enivrantes sensations nouvelles, le souvenir qui revient le moins souvent au coeur du capitaine Amable, ce fut bien celui, si vague désormais, si peu intéressante, de l'insignifiante Anaïs!"[2]

Added to these atavistic traits, Amable has a proud and sensitive nature which renders his brother's boun-

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1. op. cit., p. 265.
2. op. cit., p. 266.

ty distasteful. The thought of favors received arouses only hatred. When, however, he turns the tables and becomes his brother's benefactor by providing a wife and heir, he feels his debt squared and his dislike disappears. But when he realizes that he really loves Anaïs, trouble is again afoot. Jealousy ensues and hatred which has only been smoldering bursts into flame. His savage traits come to the fore and he kills Désiré with no more scruple than if it were his Prussian foe.

In his insane love for the earth and a primitive manner of living, Amable again displays characteristics inherited from his father. "Amable, en effet, en vieillissant, avait pris toutes les allures sauvages de feu le père Randoin, moins la jovialité. Le goût de la chasse lui était revenu, effréné, jaloux, particulièrement jaloux."[1] Paradoxical as it may appear, this savageness does not exclude a delicate sensitivity to the artistic beauties of Thiérache. He condemns those who draw material benefits from the earth while he is content to harvest only spiritual and sensual pleasures.

Although of an indolent and passive nature, Anaïs is culturally superior to her husband. Reared by two maiden aunts, she has been petted, spoiled and somewhat unfitted for the duties of a farmer's wife. She finds in Amable the intellectual and artistic refinement she would have wished in Désiré. He is sympathetic when she is forced to listen

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1. op. cit., p. 345.

to the mortifying humor of Marceline. In love-making he displays a finesse worthy of a Don Juan. It is only remorse for the loss of her child, constant prayer and a hope to remold Désiré's character that give Anaïs strength to resist Amable. Not suspecting the Cadet's guilt, she remains affectionate to the end.

Désiré's character is far less complex than those already discussed. From his mother he has inherited the solid traits of the Picard peasant. Like her, he has only admiration for the Cadet who is so obviously his superior and he places his love for him above all things. As is common to French peasants, he often carries economy to the point of a vice. Nevertheless, with his younger brother his generosity seldom fails. Rarely does he reproach him for his idleness and his lack of order. He is more frequently disappointed with Anaïs and he makes no effort to hide his chagrin when a girl child is born. His love for the earth, though just as intense as Amable's, is of a different sort. He appreciates only its economic value while the Cadet's appreciation is artistic and sensual.

Marceline, the servant is also interesting. For many years she has managed Désiré's house; she has been his companion during Amable's absence. Her pronounced preference for the latter is due to her liking for his deceased father whom he resembles. Désiré's resemblance to his mother renders him less likable. Marceline has a crude and ready wit and an astuteness for which peasants are often noted. She

quickly understands the relations between Anaïs and Amable and she derives a secret pleasure from seeing her favorite possess what belongs to Désiré. To the end of her life she enjoys going over the poignant and tragic scenes in which the Cadet has played a part. They savor the joys of a perfect understanding.

Borgnot's perspicacity is unsuspected by all except Amable. Although he is the laughingstock of the young men, the bugbear of little children and a bother to housewives who mistrust him, his existence is not difficult. He has paid a heavy price for his reputation of being the smartest smuggler in the country. At the hands of the customs officers he has received a fractured leg, an injured back and three condemnations amounting to seventy-seven months in prison. Like Amable, he spends much time wandering through the fields and the two are destined to meet each other often. With subtlety and indirection he tries to instil into Amable his revengeful ideas. Had not he himself repaid in his own coin the customs officer who had injured him? He has observed the Cadet's ecstasy when alone in the country and he has the temerity to suggest that Désiré has swindled him of his dearest possession, his land. "Oui, encore de la bonne terre qu'il vous a filoutée, ce gredin! Oui, filoutée, à vou , pauv' Cadet!"[1] Recognizing in Amable certain tastes and characteristics which he himself possesses, Borgnot conceives a fraternal affection for him. He is, therefore, con-

1. op. cit., p. 54.

cerned for his happiness.

> "Dans sa jugeotte, il trouvait leurs deux sorts pareils. Du bons temps, des aventures, le pain blanc mangé le premier; et ensuite la misère! Car M'sieur Amable avait beau ne point trucher, en loques et la besace à l'épaule; ce n'était après tout, qu'un gueux, lui aussi!"[1]

The incident of the profaned body of the Prussian sentry fortifies the vagabond's hatred for Désiré and nothing but murder will satisfy his desire for revenge. To his sorrow, Amable accomplishes this deed and thus deprives him of his anticipated joy.

That Richepin's prose often lacks delicacy of expression is quite evident in reading "le Cadet". In its crudity it comes near equalling the prose of Zola. It is regrettable that within a psychological study of such great merit are to be found numerous breaches of taste. Many critics have ascribed these to his desire to be seen, to be recognized and to sell his books. P. Etienne Cornut says concerning his boldness of expression: "Ses principes assurément, probablement ses illusions, sa dextérité, n'est gênée par rien. Il imitera les plus forts, les dépassera même, exagérant leurs qualités et leurs défauts, surtout leur corruption. En sceptique avisé il n'oublie pas de regarder de quel côté tournent les girouettes, pour prendre le vent. Zola fait 'la Terre', Richepin la refait dans 'le Cadet'."[2]

Perhaps it would be unjust to reproach Zola for his blatant naturalism. Such was the quality of his writing.

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1. op. cit., p. 51.
2. Cornut, Etienne P., les Malfaiteurs littéraires, p. 93.

Seldom did he give evidence of a capacity for a more refined type of production. Except for "le Rêve," which was more or less a literary exercise, he wrote nothing comparable to Richepin's "Miarka," "Mme. André" and "Braves gens" in purity and delicacy of style. However, in "le Cadet" one finds the lack of sentimentality and terre à terre quality which are also found in the great Naturalist. Often passages in "le Cadet" recall similar ones in "la Terre." Although Jean Macquart is less sensitive and less artistic than Amable, his sensual love for the earth resembles Amable's. Jean reviews the history of the earth and expresses sentiments similar to those of the Cadet.

> "Alors, il résuma inconsciemment toute cette histoire: la terre si longtemps cultivée par le seigneur, sous le baton et dans la nudité de l'esclave, qui n'a rien à lui, pas même sa peau: la terre, fécondée de son effort, passionnément aimée et désirée pendant cette intimidité chaude de chaque heure, comme la femme d'un autre que l'on soigne, que l'on étreint et que l'on ne peut posséder; la terre après des siècles de concupiscence, obtenue enfin, conquise, devenue sa chose, sa jouissance, l'unique source de sa vie."[1]

Again, in "la Terre" we are told of the farmer Hourdequin, who, because of his modern education, has en extraordinary attachment to the soil.

> "Ah! cette terre, comme il avait fini par l'aimer! et d'une passion où il n'entrait pas que l'âpre avarice du paysan, d'une passion sentimentale, intellectuelle presque, car il la sentait la mère Commune, qui lui avait donné sa vie, sa substance et où il retournerait. ... Plus tard, il l'avait aimée en amoureux son amour s'était mûri, comme s'il l'eût prise dès lors en légitime mariage, pour la féconder."[2]

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1. Zola, Emile, la Terre, vol. 1, p. 78.
2. ibid., p. 99.

At Toraval, Amable experiences similar feeling. But he considers it a sacrilege to take from the earth any profits.

> "L'ascension à Toraval resta son plaisir le plus aigu, si intellectuel (croyait-il) et néanmoins d'une volupté toute physique; car c'est par là que dériva, en flux d'amour singulier, ce qui lui demeurait de passion au coeur et au sens.
>
> Il en vient à s'éprendre de la terre, au point de considérer bientôt comme un sacrilege le profit qu'il en tirait."[1]

In spite of their many similarities, these authors differ greatly in their method. Zola observes and describes physical phenomena, the outward behavior of masses, while Richepin describes mental activities. The latter's psychological studies involve a minuteness of detail worthy of a profound student and thinker. His characters are individuals with problems and aspirations different from those of other individuals. On the contrary, Zola's novels are of epic scope with the masses in the leading role, - "la Terre" being written as the epic of the peasants' struggle to wrest his existence from the earth.

Ten years after the publication of "le Cadet", Richepin chooses a Thiérachien as the chief personage of his novel "Lagibasse" (1900) and again he terminates a story with a dénouement in keeping with the brutal Thiérachien nature. The protagonist, Valentin de Lagibasse, bears other resemblances to the Cadet, besides the similarity of his origin. He, also, is a country gentleman who goes to Paris in quest of a culture befitting his rank and, like the Cadet, under-

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1. Richepin, J., le Cadet, p. 344.

goes influences there which unfit him for the resumption of a peaceful provincial life. He is of simple tastes, however, and resolves to live penuriously so that his patrimony may remain intact for the reconstruction of his château in Thiérache. His great misfortune is to become a fellow pensionnaire with three men suffering from mental derangement. They have as chief a priest with an obsession to bring about an aberration similar to his own in the minds of those who yield to his suggestions. Seeing in Lagibasse an easy prey, he plans a regimen calculated to achieve this end. In time, the student becomes completely subjugated to the priest's ideas and, as is desired of him, he falls in love with Zénaïde, a little pensionnaire of Creole and Tamoul descent, whose simian features and movements appear at first quite unattractive. Finally, weeks of strict adherence to the prescribed routine end in his mental collapse. Seized by an irrepressible impulse to return to Thiérache, he secretly entrains with Zénaïde. Then the unmistakable signs of derangement manifest themselves. His muscles become tense, his gaze fixed, his face livid and foam gathers on his lips. He possesses an unusual lucidity of mind which is like a great calm frequently preceding a storm. He is now capable of making a true appraisal of the priest. He recognizes his adroit charlatanism in the exercise of his hypnotic powers and he even condemns himself for his gullibility. After their arrival at the château his shrieks startle Zénaïde from her sleep and cause her to take flight into the forest. Reduced to the

level of animalism by his dementia and the atavistic fierceness of his race, he rushes madly in her pursuit. With his teeth he tears into the struggling girl's flesh and drinks her blood. When the priest comes in search of the two lovers he finds them dead. He pronounces a perfunctory prayer and utters his customary and enigmatic "C'est bien, c'est bien."

"L'Aimé" (1893) is a novel equalling "Lagibasse" in uniqueness. Its hero,who is a modern Don Juan, scarcely appears, but his valet, Fourguisse, keeps a record of his numerous seductions and relates his "sublime" exploits. The story, in itself quite brief, is intermingled with many philosophical digressions of the narrator. Gabriel, known as l'Aimé is the son of a former monk turned sorcerer and the courtesan Delphine Vionchard. The latter, charmed by the seductive powers of her son, wishes to assure him of a colossal fortune so that he may indulge in every sort of amorous vagary for his entire life. But the wife of the man from whom Delphine expects to inherit millions has become aware of her reprehensible schemes, blinds her with vitriol and fatally poisons Gabriel. Fourguisse becomes insane through the stress of living in the midst of such intense moral perversion.

"Lagibasse" and "l'Aimé" detract from, rather than add to, Richepin's reputation as a novelist. His original aphorisms and unexpected observations, which have no apparent reason other than to violate the rules of good taste or attract undue attention, weaken the narrative. These two works are examples of what happens when the author indulges in the

puerility of exhibiting his learning. He refuses to allow the reader to forget that he was a prize pupil in rhetoric, that he has studied philosophy, that he has a more than ordinary knowledge of the psychopathology of sex and of many unusual physical and mental disorders. We recall his display of scholarship in ethnology when he comments on the gypsies in "Miarka," on the racial traits of the Thiérachiens in "le Cadet" and "Lagibasse" and on the racial mingling in the person of Zénaïde in the last named work. In many instances these observations enhance the value of his writings by making the characters more comprehensible. But when scientific and philosophic digressions are given too much prominence, his novels suffer. Richepin might well have demonstrated his own enlightenment with less fanfare. Apparently, this is too much to expect of him, however, for in those traits which we criticise so severely he is hopelessly a romantic. His zeal "en analysant l'extraordinaire, tout ce qui est exubérant, outrancier et révolté, tout ce qui, en un mot, tranche violemment sur l'existence régulière et acceptée"[1] is typical of the most ardent romanticists.

The descriptions of human depravity in "Flamboche" confirm the opinion of critics who say that the author likes to astonish and scandalize the bourgeoisie. Indeed, even the most broad-minded reader is shocked in following the development of the intrigues of the Baron de Miérendel and his mistress. This austere politician who is a member of the Legion of Honor, former magistrate, former consul, influential

1. Gilbert, Eugène, le Roman en France au XIXe siècle, p.376.

member of the Chamber of Deputies, chief of the League for the Moral Improvement of the Arts, founder and director of the great newspaper "la Conscience", possesses the basest traits. Injustices he imagines to have suffered at the hands of his deceased brother lead to the resolve to seek revenge by ruining the latter's son, Flamboche, physically, morally and financially. Being his nephew's guardian, Miérendel places him in the school of the depraved Chugnard where he is to receive a questionable education which will end in the corruption of body and mind. However, the innocent and amiable Flamboche exercises a salutary effect on Chugnard who learns to love his pupil as a son and tries to save him from his designing uncle. Nevertheless, Miérendel accomplishes Flamboche's financial destruction through false manipulations in the stock markets. He then involves Chugnard in legal processes, causing his bankruptcy and imprisonment. He rids himself of his distasteful nephew by sending him from Paris to direct a silver-lead mine which is about to close. Flamboche fully comprehends his uncle's infamy and suspects his beloved Chugnard of guilt. In spite of his extreme youth, he sets out on his new adventure with a determination to conquer difficulties, rejoicing to leave behind him those who have proven themselves his moral inferiors.

The slow and careful unfolding of Miérendel's plot for revenge brings to mind the insidious conduct of Balzac's Cousin Betty, who, likewise, chooses innocent relatives as her victims. Like Balzac's also are the descriptions of the

the Institution Chugnard with its depraved master and its unethical and unacademic method of instruction. The details concerning the plan of the school, its smells, the appearance and habits of its teachers and the cooking of Mme. Chugnard recall the Maison Vauquer in "Père Goriot." Yet a spirit of optimism marks a signal difference between our author and Balzac. The firm and cheerful decision of Flamboche to surmount obstacles is indicative of a moral courage seldom found in the latter's works.

C. Short Stories

For his collections of short stories, the author has sought the most sensational material possible to gratify his taste for the lurid and shocking. Descriptions such as are ordinarily found in the case studies of the alienist or the physician form the nucleus of many of these tales. With very few exceptions, they are all of a piece with regards to manner and material and might well be bound together under the title of "Histoires horribles."

"Les Morts bizarres" was written in 1876, during the author's imprisonment. Its weird but powerful realism foretells the type of story which is to follow in later years. The "Miseloque, Choses et gens de théâtre" (1893) was inspired by close contact with artists and actors. But, unlike "Brave gens," which is of the same inspiration and which glorifies disinterested love and sacrifice in the name of art, these stories recount the incidents of every-day life in a style rendered naturalistic by a pseudo-scientific treatment similar to that of Zola. Passages such as the one describing a theatre prompter characterize their detailed prose. They recall forcefully the sordid language of Zola and the literary redundancy of Balzac. Concerning the prompter, we are told that he was "vieux, sale, méchant, traître, pochard, joueur, cochon, felon et assassin. Excusez du peu! Il était la parfaite incarnation du <u>vieux</u>

sale. Le linge toujours de l'autre semaine, les vêtements effiloqués et gras, le col de la redingote poudré de pellicules jusqu'au milieu du dos, les paupières miteuses, le pif roupieux, les oreilles aux poils englués de beurre, les ongles en lettres de faire part grand modèle, les pieds comme gonflés de puanteur dans ses savates de feutre humide, il sentait la crasse, la sénilité, la sueur, le relent, le chanci, le remugle, le gousset, l'escafignon, et encore quelgues autres odeurs indéfinissables et non catalogués."[1]

Balzac's description of a room in the Vauquer establishment is very similar in its accumulation of adjectives. "...Une longue table couverte en toile cirée assez grasse pour qu'un facétieux externe y écrive son nom en se servant de son doigt comme de style, des chaises estropiées, de petits paillassons piteux en sparterie qui se déroulent toujours sans se perdre jamais, puis des chaufferettes misérables à trous cassés, à charnières défaites dont le bois se carbonise. Pour expliquer combien ce mobilier est vieux, crevassé, pourri, tremblant, rongé, manchot, borgne, invalide, expirant, il faudrait en faire une description qui retarderait trop cette histoire, et que les gens pressés ne pardonnerait pas. Le carreau rouge est plein de vallées produites par le frottement ou par les mises en couleur. Enfin, là règne la misère sans poésie; une misère économe, concentrée, râpée. Si elle n'a pas de fange encore, elle a des taches; si elle n'a ni trous ni haillons, elle va tomber en pourriture."[2]

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1. Richepin, J., la Miseloque, p. 110.
2. Balzac, Honoré de, le Père Goriot, pp. 12, 13.

In respect to the portrayal of antithetic qualities, Richepin's style resembles that of the Romanticists. "L'Homme aux cent têtes" in "la Miseloque", although only a short story, recalls "l'Homme qui rit" of Victor Hugo. The heroes of both possess fine moral characters and grotesque physical qualities. Both are obliged to make professional use of their deformities. Richepin's character delights theatre audiences by means of facial contortions rendered possible by a nervous tic. However, his brave efforts so weaken him that death overtakes him before he attains success.

The "Contes de la décadence romaine" (1898) are, in the words of Arnold Guyot Cameron, "extraordinary reconstructions of the spirit and times and luxury and license and cruelty and subversion of every moral and social law." They are "marvels of classical erudition, of coloring, and of cold but ferocious gruesomeness."[1] The horrible physical and mental diseases, the terrifying arena spectacles, the nauseating debauchery indicate the decay of the Eternal City.

Atrocities such as the public violation of a Christian maiden or such as the marriage of a noble lady to a monster are typical subjects for these tales. Horrifying in the extreme is the story of a certain Publius Metellus Scaurus whose enthusiasm for the gladiatorial art leads him in constant search for something new. He is overjoyed when he obtains the human monster whose description follows: "Il est noir, noir, noir. Et chauve. Pas un fil de laine n'est resté sur le roc de son crâne, pas un. Il est aveugle.

1. Cameron, Introduction to Selections from J. Richepin, p.37

Deux grands yeux blancs qui n'y voient pas. Et il n'a pas de jambes. Il n'a qu'un seul bras. Mais, sans jambes, il bondit, par des coups de reins. Et son unique bras est très long, mobile comme une trompe d'éléphant, et tournoie autour de lui comme une queue de lion. Et, au bout, deux pouces. une tenaille. Avec cette tenaille, il happe l'ennemi, l'amène jusqu'à ses dents, l'égorge d'une morsure, boit le sang, puis siffle un chant d'oiseau."[1] This brute becomes enamoured of Blandilla, the beautiful daughter of Publius Metellus Scaurus. He shudders, moans; tears fill his eyes as he explains that he will die if she does not marry him. Now, Publius, being illustrius throught the Roman Empire because of the ancient glory of his family, because of personal honors, cannot allow his fame to suffer in this instance. ~~But~~ Devotion to the gladiatorial art causes him to grant the monster's wish.

In essence, the stories of this volume are true. History describes the sensuality of decadent Rome and the ambition, greed, and lasciviousness which were indulged to the full. "Life for life's sake"[2] became the Roman motto. Public celebrations were characterized by a delirious enthusiamm for bloody entertainment and a seeking after new and perverse sensual joys. Richepin's exaggerations are, therefore, not so extensive as the casual reader of these accounts might be led to believe. In dealing with the subject of declining Rome it required no great effort to be

1. Richepin, J., Contes de la décadence romaine, p. 185.
2. Stadelmann, H., Messalina, a Picture of Life in Imperial Rome. p. 14.

sensational or melodramatic. A certain decadent quality of his own mind enables the author to understand these scenes readily and to depict them faithfully.

In the "Contes espagnols" (1901) Richepin records his memories of a sojourn in Spain. Sites, monuments and costumes are avoided in his descriptions; he wishes his stories to contain only the soul of this jealous and vindictive people with whom he has associated and the atmosphere in which they live. He explains in the preface the procedure he follows in an effort to catch the Spanish mood and temperament. First, he allows himself to be penetrated by everything which belongs strictly to the country he is visiting; he speaks its language, he eats its food and drinks its wines. He shuns museums for he realizes that chance is the essence of adventure. He chooses his companions from the lower classes because he finds in them sentiments, prejudices and ideas which are new and original. While the upper classes have nearly the same instruction and education everywhere, the petites gens bear the stamp of their own soil. Then, too, they are less skeptical and they open their hearts as easily to a stranger as to a friend. They reveal to him their tastes, their pleasures, and their philosophy. By means of their songs, plaintive ballads and dances he learns how they think and dream. When he has sounded their conscience, he believes he knows the country. For fear of destroying the Spanish sentiments he does not risk translating the couplets which he attaches to his stories. He does not

even give their musical notation for, there, also, he fears being inexact in rendering the measure and modulation of the cantilenas which vary with the singers.

The warning that he gives the reader of his choice of material is inadequate preparation for the terrible stories he relates. He plunges immediately into accounts of jealousy and revenge which the average mind is loath to accept as characteristic, even of the most brutal. It is difficult to imagine the devotion of Cataline, in the story of that title, who cuts her hair, gouges her eyes, pulls her teeth, and finally asks her husband to kill her in order to assuage his jealousy. We shiver as we read about the little barber girl who avenges the murder of her entire family by cutting the throat of the Cardinal Grand-Inquisitor.

Twenty-four such frightful tales concerning poisonings, seductions, infidelities, sacrileges and murders comprise the book. Facts are distorted by undue exaggeration, yet the Spanish spirit, like the depraved spirit of Rome, is pervasive and indisputable. Richepin takes us anew among the Gueux and the Gitanos, this time of Spain. And perhaps, to appreciate him most, we should "Allez, là-bas, et, pour lire ce livre, attablez-vous dans quelque cabaret de port ou de faubourg, une cigarette aux livres, devant un verre d'eau fraîche et une copita d'anisado de los tigres, tandis que la criadita chantera un de ces couplets, accompagnée par un guitariste frénétique."[1]

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1. Richepin, J., Contes espanols, p. 19.

The accounts of mental and physical abnormalities which compose the volume entitled "le Coin des fous" again give evidence of the author's psychological insight and of his knowledge of diseases of mind and body. A few summaries prove a knowledge generally possessed only by the physician. He tells of an ugly, old provincial doctor who inoculates his beautiful wife with cancer and her numerous lovers with tuberculosis. The doctor's testament contains the confession of his crime and serves to corroborate for the author Balzac's statement that the most fiendish and criminal minds are found in the provinces.[1] There is also the story of a devoted watch maker who frantically strives to repair the church clock. Finally, in desperation, he hangs himself on one of its chains. The weight of his body immediately sets the clock into motion. The subject of "Booglottisme" is a physical monstrosity, a pretty young woman afflicted with a beef tongue and a feeble mind who veils herself and exacts from her lovers the promise to remain silent so that she will not be obliged to betray her infirmities. "Le Masque" portrays a man who believes himself to be the incarnation of Beauty. From the age of eighteen until the hour of his death no mortal has been permitted to see his dazzling perfection. His doctor removes the mask and the sight of such god-like features in repose causes him to swoon. A letter of the deceased reveals his reason for wearing a mask. Having considered himself the

1. op. cit. p. 56.

symbol of life and beauty he has deemed the world unworthy to look upon him. He has believed himself neither proud nor mad but a god, possessing the majesty of Zeus and the grace of Aphrodite. He dies happy to know that he has had solitary joy of being one of the perfect images of the Beautiful. "Les Soeurs Moche" has as surprising a dénouement as "le Masqué." It comments on the peaceful, provincial life of two brothers whose will requests that their tombstone bear the inscription Jules et Fernand, dits les soeurs Moche. Since they had lived as women all their lives, revelation of their masculinity astonishes their oldest acquaintances.

The "Contes sans morale" (1922) have about the same character as "la Miseloque," except that they deal with personages of all classes rather than with artists. They treat of monstrosities and of perversions, and are daring in style as well as in subject. At times, Richepin manifests a crude humor which becomes particularly shocking when directed against Catholicism. The story tells of two friends who love the same woman and who refuse to sacrifice themselves when urged to do so by their priest. They reply: "Nous aimons trop la femme, tous les deux. Il nous la faut." The abbé continues: " De toutes façons, c'est au diable que vous allez et que vous irez. Car, je le vois bien, vous finirez par vivre ensemble avec elle en concubinage, et vous serez tous damnés, voilà ce qui vous attend."[1] Perplexed, the priest wonders what Pascal would have done in this situation. His decision is prompt. Pushing casuistry to an extreme point, risking to

1. Richepin, J., le Coin des fous, pp. 122-123.

commit a sacrilege, he assumes the responsibility of saving these two souls for God. With the certainty of performing God's will, he marries them both to the woman.

D. Diverse Prose

Besides his numerous novels, plays and short stories Richepin has produced other prose works in the form of newspaper serials, pictures, essays, lectures and memoirs. He made his literary début in 1871 with a series of articles on Jules Vallès. A year later these were published in book form under the title of "les Etapes d'un réfractaire." The peculiar interest in this work today lies in its revelation of certain inclinations and aptitudes of the young author. He already manifests the traits which are to become the most salient in his entire literary production.

The most outstanding characteristic of Richepin at this time is his courage. The epilogue to "les Etapes d'un réfractaire," though only a mild diatribe against society, is of a boldness which might have proven hazardous in those days of conservative reaction against the Commune. Only four years later he is punished by a month's inprisonment for his audacity in pleading the cause of the gueux. But even after this severe castigation he continues writing with unrestraint in apparent oblivion to the probable consequences.

It is already evident in which direction Richepin inclines. His choice of Jules Vallès as a subject is by no means accidental. It is due rather to a sympathetic bond

which exists between himself and the unfortunate members of society who revolt when they fail to find their particular niche in the social and economic structure. Undoubtedly, Vallès interested Richepin from another angle. Because of his predilection for mental and physical abnormalities, he found in him excellent material for study. Here was an occasion for the youthful writer to exhibit his psychological insight by analysing a nature almost insanely proud and sensitive.

Vallès' pride, we are told, made him envious even of Christ. He would willingly have suffered crucifiction if it had promised him immortality. In his early youth he was so painfully conscious of his impoverished condition that he formulated plans for revenge against society when he should become rich. Then would come his turn to humiliate those who had looked with indifference or scorn upon his poverty. He would burn their houses, steal their documents and carry off their wives. His bitterness increased with maturity. The money earned from his writings was inadequate to supply his most pressing needs. It is not difficult to understand why money became his god. With it he might buy both happiness and revenge. "Faisons de l'argent," he said, "Morbleu! Gagnons de quoi venger le passé triste, de quoi faire le lendemain joyeux, de quoi acheter de l'amour, des chevaux, et des hommes."[1] He learned to detest all those who had known renown and who had found a means to live in comfort. He

1. Quoted by Richepin in les Etapes d'un réfractaire, p. 82.

spoke with enthusiasm of demolishing libraries and museums and of establishing a proletarian sovereignty. As an excitant for the vast army of malcontents, he published his revolutionary journal "le Cri du peuple." At the last moment before his escape to England, he advocated the burning of Paris in preference to its surrender to the army of Versailles.

Richepin does not condemn Vallès. He admits that Vallès might have given a happier course to his life by directing his energies in other channels. But he blames chiefly the society in which the rebel's bad instincts were nurtured. Had his unusual literary talent been utilized he would never have converted it into an implement of hatred. The display of luxury with all its temptations made him desire to possess wealth. Yet, in spite of his great efforts, he was frequently at the point of starvation. To Richepin, Vallès is typical of the entire proletariat in its struggle to obtain its share of the world's goods from the upper classes. He foresees the day when the uprisings of the destitute will shake the foundations of society and ultimately cause its downfall.

> "O riches et heureux de ce monde, vous tous qui vivez joyeusement votre vie, et qui ne sortez de votre paresse que pour engraisser de cadavres le fumier où pousse l'arbre de vos prospérités, ô vous les repus, vous les gavés, vous les satisfaits, en vérité je tremble pour vous. Au lieu de vous cramponner à la barre de votre vaisseau désemparé, qui roule sur une mer de larmes et de sang, écoutez donc le bouillonnement formidable qui bruit sous vos pieds. C'est le banc de corail qui monte,

> monte lentement, par l'effet des polypes, prolétaires obscurs et innombrables. Qu'il arrive á fleur d'eau, et votre navire sera soulevé, retourné, la quille en l'air, vidé comme avec la main."[1]

Clearly, Richepin is the eloquent and generous poet who is to remain forever the apologist of the gueux and the déclassés.

Unlike "les Etapes", "le Pavé" has an aim wholly artistic. It is a series of deft and delightful sketches of"Paris by day and by night, its whirl, its provincial aspects, its quiet nooks, its curious trades, its categories of conditions, of characters, of physical configurations."[2] Unfrequented byways, cabarets, factories, all the Parisian and suburban institutions which Richepin has observed during his promenades, are described in fascinating chapters.

Richepin explains his method of gathering impressions in preparation for such a work: "... le poète va tout droit devant lui, à travers les rues, en flâneur, les mains dans les poches. Il regarde les choses et les êtres, et les fixe au fond de sa mémoire, sans prendre des notes, sans presque songer même. Puis un jour vient, très longtemps après quelquefois, où il se rappelle ces choses et ces êtres. Alors, pour les évoquer plus clairement, il ferme les yeux et il feuillette à loisir cet album intérieur, dont les pages innombrables se sont couvertes quasi toutes seules de vives images multicolores."[3] Then the poet fixes these pic-

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1. Richepin, J., les Etapes d'un réfractaire, pp. 235-6.
2. Cameron, A.G., Introduction to Selections from Jean Richepin, p. 20.
3. Richepin, J., le Pavé, p. 379.

tures in the minds of others, "... grâce à la toute puissante magie des mots, qui sont aussi multicolores que la matière elle-même, aussi variés, aussi profonds, aussi créateurs."[1]

In the discussion of the "Contes espagnols" we have already indicated why the author chooses to frequent the dregs of society. It is because they belong more completely than the upper strata of society to the milieu which they inhabit and because their lives are less restrained by conventions. In addition, it must not be forgotten that he, himself, is a vagabond and a breaker of conventions and that he feels a close kinship with all who lead a carefree hand-to-hand existence. He often displays the same lack of taste as they and the same crude sensuality. His predilection for the squalid puts him entirely at ease in their ill-smelling cafés. Lastly, he is a poet and does not fear to admit it. He finds, therefore, in the simple aspects of life things which dazzle his eternally youthful soul. The commonplace causes him great delight; he goes into raptures over a glass of absinthe or a cup of coffee; his pulse quickens when he hears the rhythmical notes of the drum or the melancholy music of the barrel-organ.

His raw humor, which might be termed Zolaesque, is counterbalanced by his poetic sensibility which finds expression in his stories. It is in a genuine note of pity that he sings the praises of the cabaret keeper or that he regrets the sad lot of the poor shop worker who never enjoys the open air and sunshine. He understands the hardships of the lowly

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1. op. cit., p. 379.

and he would be their poet. The verses which open the story of "les Assis" show with what beauty he is capable of investing his descriptions:

"Quand s'entr'ouvrent les yeux des
Marguerites blances,
Quand le bourgeon tremblant palpite
au bout des branches,
Quand les lapins frileux commencent
le matin,
A sortir du terroir pour courir dans
le thyme,
Alors les premiers oiseaux chantent
leurs chansonnettes,
Font, dans le ciel plus pur, vibrer
leurs voix plus nettes,
A l'époque où le monde se rajeunit..."

"Oh", he continues, "c'est alors qu'il faut plaindre, et douloureusement, les malheureux qu'un travail sédentaire courbe sur un bureau, colle sur une chaise, dans un coin de salle ténébreuse, dans une atmosphère lourde."[1] He defends the mastroquet[2] with an eloquence which is entirely fitting. "Je veux chanter un air à la louange du mastroquet," he says. "Non pas, toutefois, sur les grandes orgues ronflantes de l'éloquence tribunitienne, mais bien sur le mélancolique orgue de Barbarie du poème en prose, avec la douceur navrée qui convient à cette lamentable victime."[3]

Richepin possesses a physical robustness and a joy of living which impart freshness and vitality to his poetry and prose. He sings paeans to the sun and to labor, forces which strengthen and console mankind. The salutary spirit of the following citation stands in sharp contrast with the heartless and gloomy pessimism of Zola. In speaking of a

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1. op. cit., p. 288.
2. Retail wine merchant.
3. Richepin, J., le Pavé, p. 277.

promenade through Paris, he asks: "N'est-ce pas curieux et beaux, cette Seine moirée par le soleil, ces gars solides à qui le travail donne des allures de statue, cette horizon parisien où le Printemps rappelle la grande et divine nature?

"Et dire qu'au lieu d'aller regarder ces spectacles réconfortants, au lieu d'aller vous rafraîchir le coeur à cet air salubre, vous auriez pu prendre un journal, vous accagnardir sur les embrouillamini de la politique, et vous faire une pinte de bile et de mauvais sang, quand il est si facile de s'en faire du bon.

"Moi, je continue ma promenade, le chapeau à la main, les cheveux au vent, et je m'emplis les regards et l'âme du joyeux soleil qui console de tout, même de vivre."[1]

The "Proses de la guerre", written during the first year of the World War, is a book of propaganda whose aim is to encourage the French soldiers and incite them to hatred for the enemy. Being too old to serve in the trenches, Richepin sends his two sons, while he himself remains at home to accomplish his literary duty. Enthusiastically he takes up his pen in the defense of France, feeling no longer any animus against her for having denied his civic rights at the time of the publication of his scandalizing "Chanson des gueux". The result is a series of articles such as are read everywhere during the crises of war. Their enthusiasm which is sometimes puerile and their strong denunciation of the enemy are manifestations frequently observed in a country which is in dan-

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1. op. cit., p. 275 ff.

ger of defeat.

He dwells at length on the difficulty of the task which he is about to undertake. He realizes that it is well nigh impossible to teach the gospel of hatred to a people so"filled with the milk of human kindness." He informs the French why they must stifle all generous feelings and he urges the poets to follow his example in shouting the condemnation of the enemy. All efforts must be bent towards the extermination of the German race which he considers to be regressing towards barbarism. The time is ripe to strike with a vengeance those who threaten the noble Mediterranean civilization of which France has been the depository.

> "Dépositaires de la civilisation méditerranéenne, dont Marseille fut une des portes ensoleillées, notre devoir est de la maintenir afin que le monde ne retombe aux ténèbres."[1]

The tone of his plea gives evidence of his deep desire to guard all that is dear to France from falling into the hands of its foe.

> "O âme française, âme gaie, généreuse, noble, âme de ce pays souriant que nos vieux poètes appelaient déjà il y a mille ans, la douce France, l'heure est venue, tu le vois bien, grâce à ces monstres, de ne plus être par trop la douce France, et de laisser fleurir en toi, même au coeur des plus incorrigibles pacifistes, des plus exotiques humanitaires, la fleur de la haine, de la haine implacable, sans remission, sans exception, justicière et vengeresse, de la haine qui va enfin devenir pour toi la belle haine, la sainte haine, la haine ayant pour épanouissement suprême l'amour entre tous les enfants de la terre, une fois Caïn exterminé." [2]

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1. Richepin, J., Proses de la guerre, p. 119.
2. ibid., p. 45.

He admits the frightfulness of such a preachment whose fatal conclusion is the annihilation of a race. Nevertheless, it is the sacred duty of the French towards all humanity.

> "C'est notre amour même de la paix entre toutes les races, qui nous en fait un droit et un devoir de la condamner (la race allemande) à n'être plus, cette race en exécration à toutes les autres, cette race en régression vers la barbarie bestiale où elle veut ramener le monde."[1]

Germany's hatred for France he ascribes to a low, ignoble and stupid envy arising from a consciousness of her own inferiority, her contemplation of France's recovered prosperity, and her inability to completely conquer and suppress the French after the Franco-Prussian war.

Wishing to keep up the morale of his country, he expresses his certainty of victory. The English have already lent their aid and brave little Belgium is fighting with all her soul. To have the Americans as an ally is far from his imagination. He favors, however, an alliance with the Japanese whom he finds, by virtue of their ancient culture, highly worthy to fight for the well-being of the entire civilized world.

He prescribes for the enemy a punishment in proportion with the wrongs they will have perpetrated. Since physical retribution is odious to so chivalrous a people as the French, he counsels them to reduce Germany to powerlessness, to oppress her with fines and taxes, with foreign occupation of her soil and with servitude. Then only will

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1. op. cit. Préface, pp. 3, 4.

victory be complete and universal justice be assured. Too optimistic, he imagines a paradisaical happiness which will embrace all Europe. Thus, he concludes: "Nous communierons tous à la Sainte Table, sous l'espèce du pain en or fait avec le blé du bon grain, en le consacrant à la religion de la paix, de la divine paix, de celle que l'Allemagne a voulu assassiner pour toujours, de celle que nous aurons, vous et nous, et vos frères Slaves, et nos frères Anglais et Belges, ressuscitée pour jamais, et dressée comme une icône vivante sur la tombe où la Guerre et l'Allemagne connaîtront enfin la douceur du Requescat in Pace!"[1]

Richepin sets for himself no literary limitations. His prodigious study of literature, particularly of the classics, of history and of philosophy, his numerous travels, his varied occupations and his keen observation supply him with a variety of subjects. He is sufficiently acquainted with American history and literature to deliver a series of lectures which he entitles "l'Ame américaine." He has come to understand the American soul through the medium of our most celebrated writers and political leaders.

Published in 1920, at a moment when our country stood in high favor in France, these lectures breathe a poetic appreciation of America. Knowing his pride in French civilization, we are not surprised to find him ascribing many of our fine American traits to the French influence. He recalls that his countrymen were the first to discover and colonize the

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1. op. cit., p. 294.

Mississippi and that they were the animating spirit which came to dwell in the heart of our country.

> ".... Cette terre qui était là, ou plutôt ce coeur qui battait là, au milieu, la vallée du Mississippi, ce sont les Français qui l'ont découverte et colonisée les premiers; ils ont été les microbes générateurs entrés dans ce coeur, et ainsi, c'est eux qui ont fait le coeur de l'Amérique."[1]

He traces the history of the Indians of whom he is an ardent admirer. He loves their language, their music and their religion. For Longfellow, who had collected all that was known in his time of Indian legends, customs and traditions, he feels a profound sympathy. He reviews the life of Longfellow and gives in exquisite prose a paraphrase of "Hiawatha". The farewell to Minnehaha has real poetic quality.

> "... Adieu, dit-il, Minni-ha-ha! adieu, ô mon eau-qui-rit. Tout mon coeur est enseveli avec vous; toutes mes pensées s'en vont avec vous. Ne revenez pas pour avoir à supporter la fatigue, pour avoir à supporter la souffrance là où la famine et la fièvre épuisent le coeur et minent le corps. Bientôt ma tâche sera achevée; bientôt je suivrai la trace de vos pas dans les îles des Bienheureux, dans le royaume de Ponemah, dans la terre de l'autre vie."[2]

The lectures on Washington, Franklin, Lincoln, Emerson, Mark Twain, and Bret Harte contain nothing new for the American reader. Richepin remains a poet throughout, but his genius bursts into its greatest eloquence when he describes our poets. Most noteworthy for their graceful and sonorous style are his chats on Longfellow and Poe. The lat-

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1. Richepin, J., l'Ame américaine, p. 50.
2. ibid., p. 27.

ter's poems, "To My Mother" and "The Raven," he gives in the excellent translations by Baudelaire and Rauvrière, respectively. The discussions of Walt Whitman, Meyer Agen and Alan Seeger include some of his own translations of their better known poems. These chapters show Richepin's force of rhetoric and skill in versification.

E. Poetry

In 1876, when Richepin wrote his "Chanson des gueux," he virtually gave the gamut of his entire poetic work. He presented the rare phenomenon of an artist who enters the career of letters equipped, from the first, with attitudes and skills which determine the course of his whole literary production. He was already "le cuistre nourri de latin, de grec et de philosophie, très fort en rhétorique, expert à toutes les entreprises littéraires et rompu aux ruses du métier, mais sans croyances et sans flamme, avide de bruit, fier d'étonner et d'épouvanter le public."[1] These traits are more apparent in the "Chanson des gueux" than in most of the succeeding volumes of poetry because of the author's youthful exuberance. However, since they are permanent traits which are evident in all his poetry, it is essential that they be studied in some detail.

The taste for notoriety was always strong in Richepin, a fact he never attempted to deny. The advice he offers to Maurice Bouchor in one of his "Chansons" is evidently the principle he himself followed to catch the attention of the public. He counsels Bouchor to remain obscure until, in the full maturity of his powers, he may safely defy an unsympathetic world. Then let any expedient, how-

1. Cornut, P. Etienne, les Malfaiteurs littéraires, p. 93.

ever unworthy, be employed to assure him his rightful place.

"Comme leur race n'est pas tendre,
Ils riront de toi. Bien!
Il le faut. Pour se faire entendre,
Etre grotesque est un moyen.

Vois! Ils s'assemblent. Sois fantasque
Barbouillé, grimaçant, moqueur.
Sur ton visage colle un masque;
Mets un faux nez; montre un faux coeur.
.....
Chante des chansons ridicules
Prêche l'absurde à plein gosier,
Dis, en voyant des renoncules,
Qu'elles poussent sur un rosier."[1]

His adherence to this theory and his unbridled licentiousness of expression made him the target of such severe criticism that he was sentenced to a month of imprisonment at Sainte Pélagie as a corrupter of public morals.

This condemnation called for a defense and he later affixed a preface to the "Chanson des gueux" in which he vindicated his alleged moral laxness. He claims that the court's denunciation of his poems for their crudity and loathsomeness establishes nothing against their morality. "Does my book encourage debauch, vice, or crime?" he asks. Calling things by their plainest names never harmed anyone. Unadorned expression is, to him, comparable to a marble statue without its vine leaf. He considers that frankness is more wholesome than the concealing of truth, for "ce qui trouble l'imagination, ce qui éveille les curiosités malsaines, ce qui peut corrompre, ce n'est pas le marbre, c'est la feuille de vigne qu'on lui met, cette feuille de vigne qui raccroche les regards, cette feuille de vigne qui rend honteux et obscène ce

1. Richepin, J., la Chanson de gueux, pp. 253, 254.

que la nature a fait sacré."[1] It is subtle flattery to him to be told that his book conceals nothing. With all its violence, its wantonness, its cynicism, it appears more moral than many works which the virtuous consider acceptable but under whose tempered style is hidden a refined and elegant corruption.

As for the content, Richepin combats the idea that his book presents a picture of people in general. The truth is that he represents only one class of people, - the outcasts. His verses contain no theories nor apologies; they are studies, pictures and, above all, poetry. He makes it an artistic virtue to depict a corner of life such as he sees it.

He feels no shame to admit his love for his heroes. He is of the same fiery and independent race as they and he desires to be their poet. The "Ballade du roi des gueux" points out similarities between the poet and the gueux and suggests the wealth of poetic material to be found in their midst.

"Venez à moi, claquepatins,
Loqueteux, joueurs de musettes,
Clampins, loupeurs, et marmousettes,
Tas de traîne-cul-les-housettes,
Race d'indépendants fougueux!
Je suis du pays dont vous êtes:
Le poète est le Roi des Gueux.

.....

Envoi

O Gueux, mes sujets, mes sujettes,
Je serai votre maître gueux.
Tu vivras, monde qui végètes!
Le poète est le Roi des Gueux." [2]

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1. op. cit. Préface, p. XI.
2. op. cit., pp. 1-2.

He loves them because he has understood their lamentable condition; he has rested his glance upon their misery, touched their wounds, dried their tears, eaten their bitter bread and drunk their wines. And he has, if not excused, at least explained their strange manner of solving their problems. He explains their need of forgetfulness, of intoxication and of joy. Their spirit of fierce independence which continually urges them on to new adventures makes their misery beautiful and noble. They are like the Wolf of La Fontaine's fable who preferred liberty, though accompanied by poverty, to shelter, food, and a restraining leash. What can be wrong in revealing the brutal poetry of these bold adventurers, of these children in revolt to whom society is usually an evil step-mother? Richepin will emulate Villon, chief of the poets in rags, and be their king.

Strange enough, he claims not to have expressed in his poems his affection for his subjects. He contents himself with making these wretches live, without hiding their vices and shames. His punishment for what he considers an unprejudiced portrayal of these lamentable characters makes him question the liberty of art. Although he does not regret sharing the accusation of immorality with Baudelaire and Flaubert, he protests against the legal control of art. Art is one thing and morality is another, and the two have nothing in common. Without doubt, there are writers who employ artistic methods to propagate political, social, and moral theories and it goes without saying that they owe explanations to authorities other than those of art. But such writers are not, accord-

ing to him, real artists. Richepin does not mean to speak of them; he is dealing with pure art which wishes to attack nothing, to destroy nothing, to change nothing, to prove nothing. He is satisfied to look at life, to express it as well as possible, to excite and charm the imagination and to touch the heart. This is not preaching the theory of Art for Art's sake. He believes, on the contrary, that it is indispensable that the poet belong to his time, that he interest himself in the life which surrounds him. Without being an active participant in life's struggles he cannot produce a truly human work. Nevertheless, he continues, "il n'en est pas moins clair que la vie exprimée poétiquement, et la vie réelle, c'est-à-dire, l'Art et la Morale, sont deux mondes absolument différents, et qu'on commet un épouvantable sophisme chaque fois qu'on juge l'un à la lumière de l'autre."[1]

After reading this explanatory preface, it becomes difficult to maintain that Richepin was insincere. We can no longer even consider him a poser, for he admits his extraordinary endeavors to attract public attention. It is obvious that he made a serious effort to understand the class he depicts. To speak and write in argot is no small achievement and such skill could not be attained without a close and protracted mingling with those who speak it. According to Lemaître "Le poète affecte d'entrer dans leur peau, qui est une sale peau, et parle leur argot, qui est une langue infame, dont les mots puent et grimacent, dont les syllabes ont des

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1. op. cit., p. XXI.

traînements gras et font des bruits de gargouille."[1] It is our contention that there is not much affectation in his treatment of the gueux. He himself, though a cultured product of the Ecole Normale, has many qualities which draw him close to them.

Some critics would be more indulgent with him on the score of his libertinage than the law courts had been. Zola says, concerning morality in literature, that the only obscene works are those that are poorly conceived and poorly executed. With talent, an author may say anything and all! Vance Thompson defends him by affirming that "Wherever and whenever art and letters attain virility, vitality, force of hand, strength of creation, there you find the Rabelaisian spirit which is indeed the spirit of the natural wholesome man, who lives and laughs, labors and prays, and is unashamed."[2] What Richepin relates, "C'est ce que nos pères nous eussent conté avec leur bon rire large et jovial, c'est ce que Grin-goire chantait aux pendus de la route, ce que Villon fredon-nait en gouaillant, c'est ce que Rabelais nous eût dit dans sa vieille langue crue, sans fanfaronnade de vice, sans af-fectation de grossièreté, sans pose triste et sans argot de mauvais lieu."[3]

To be compared with François Villon is not an unhap-py criticism of Richepin. Barbey d'Aurevilly finds in many of his verses a resemblance with and an imitation of Villon.

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1. Quoted by Cameron,A.G., Introduction to Selections from Jean Richepin, p. 44.
2. ibid. p. 41.
3. Fuster, Charles, Essais de critique, p. 173.

"Le poète de la "Chanson des gueux" est d'une race et il porte les signes de sa race. Il ressemble à Villon (par le tour d'imagination) autant qu'il l'imite."[1] Both of these poets knew at first hand the people they portrayed; although Villon, it will be remembered, was more completely one of them than Richepin. He writes of his brothers in crime, known as the Coquillards, in their own language just as Richepin writes at times of his pariahs. But while Villon found and fixed the Parisian and metropolitan spirit, Richepin advanced still farther; he paints the vagrants of the open highways as well as those of Paris. Unlike his predecessor, he is touched by nature and his best poems are inspired by what he sees beyond the city limits. Both are paradoxical; both can turn from crudity to the delicate expression of refined sentiments. But Villon's refinement and tenderness spring from his Christian faith while Richepin's come purely from his delicate sensibilities. He has none of the piety and humility which sweeten many of Villon's ballads and as a result his picture of the poor is incomplete. Reproachfully, Barbey d'Aurevilly says that only Christianity has fully understood the poor and that it is essential that the poet have the soul of a Saint Francis of Assisi to comprehend their vices, their grandeur and their virtues.[2]

Yet critics insist that Richepin idealises his unfortunates too much. This is due to the marked preference he shows for them. It is quite a common procedure for him

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1. d'Aurevilly, Barbey, le XIXe Siècle, vol.2, p. 175.
2. ibid, p. 179.

to compare the destitute with the comfortable bourgeois and conclude that the former are more fortunate because the real treasures of the earth are theirs without buying.

"Malheur aux pauvres! C'est l'argent qui rend heureux
Les riches ont la force, la gloire et la joie.

Bah! Les pauvres, malgré la misère sans trèves,
Ont aussi leurs trésors; les chansons et les rêves.
Ce peu-là leur suffit pour rire quelquefois.

J'en sais qui sont heureux, qui n'ont pour fortune
Que ces louis d'un jour nommés les fleurs des bois
Et cet écu rogne qu'on appelle la lune."[1]

Though the poor starve, freeze in the winter and die in the street, still their existence is preferable to that of the farmer and merchant who pay for their security with hard labor. Note the tone of "les Vrais gueux."

"Qui qu'est gueux?
C'est-il nous
Ou bon ceux
Qu'a des sous.

Pour les avoir, quell' misère
Oh! les pauv's gens, que j' les plains!
Souvent c'est nous que j' sons pleins
Et c'est eux qu' leu vent' se serre."[2]

To them, liberty is priceless. Freedom to wander is worth all the pain it entails. The "Epitaphe pour un lièvre" tells of a rabbit which died in captivity, surrounded by tender care, yet homesick for the fields. The rabbit says:

"Mais quoi! l'herbe coupée, est-ce donc l'herbe fraîche?
Mieux vaut l'épine au bois que les fleurs dans la crèche;
Mieux vaut l'indépendance et l'incessant péril
Que l'esclavage avec un éternel avril.
Le vague souvenir de ma première vie
M'obsédant, je sentais je ne sais quelle envie;
J'étais triste; et malgré Margot et sa bonté
Je suis mort dans ses bras, faute de liberté."[3]

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1. Richepin, J., la Chanson des gueux, p. 233.
2. ibid., p. 36.
3. ibid., pp. 50-51.

When Richepin sings of vagabondage we see its sublime aspects. His "Oiseaux de passage" contrasts the complacent lives of the barnyard fowl with the hazardous ones of the birds of passage who are eager for new adventures in unknown climes. They are:

> "... avant tout les fils de la chimère
> Des assoiffés d'azur, des poètes des fous.
>
> ---
>
> Là-bas, c'est le pays de l'étrange et du rêve,
> C'est l'horizon perdu par delà les sommets.
> C'est le bleu paradis, c'est la lointaine grève
> Où votre espoir banal n'abordera jamais."[1]

We might continue thus to cite admirable passages in which the poet, despite his protests to the contrary, shows favor for those who seek happiness in unconventional lives. In those poems where he glorifies liberty and the longing for the blue horizons we seek no quarrel with him. There he ceases to be a gueux; he is a great poet in whom are seen various literary tendencies. He is "parfois épicurien, un lettré, un renaissant et même un mythologue, qui croise André Chénier avec Mathurin Régnier et Callot."[2] Louis Desprez grants that "Il a parfois des accents de flûte d'une douceur antique qui font songer à André Chénier. Voyez 'la Vieille statue' ou 'le Bouc aux enfants'; ce dernier poème paraît sculpté dans l'ivoire par un fin miniaturiste; ailleurs le vers s'emplit d'une mélancolie vague et profonde. Je préfère la pièce intitulée: 'Tristesse des bêtes,' cette rêverie bercée par le lent cheminement d'un troupeau dans la vapeur poussiéreuse et dorée du soir tombant,

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1. op. cit., p. 69.
2. d'Aurevilly, Barbey, le XIXe Siècle, vol. 2., p. 183.

à bien des coups de gueule, à bien des cynismes affectés."[1]

Richepin is delicately sensitized to the beauties of nature. The "Tristesse des bêtes" shows to what degree he is susceptible to the various changes of color, sounds, forms and moods.

"Le soleil est tombé derrière la forêt.
Dans le ciel, qu'un couchant rose et vert décorait.
Brille encore un grenat au faîte d'une branche.
Vers les puits, dont l'eau coule aux rigoles de bois.
C'est l'heure où les barbets avec de grands abois
Font, devant le berger lourd sous sa gibecière,
Se hâter les brebis dans des flots de poussière.

- - - -

..... La nuit de plus en plus
Monte, noyant, dans l'ombre épaisse de talus
Où les grillons plaintifs chantent leur bucolique
En couplets alternés d'un ton mélancolique.
Sous la brise du soir, les herbes, les buissons
Palpitent, secoués de douloureux frissons,
Et semblent chuchoter de noires confidences."[2]

He senses the sadness of the beasts at nightfall, when a feeling of fear comes over them. Through the shadows of the night, when sleep creeps on like death, many things may happen. But at dawn, fears are dispelled. He raises his voice in praise of the sun.

"Vive le bon soleil! Sa lumière est sacrée.
Vive le clair soleil! Car c'est lui seul qui crée.
C'est lui qui verse l'or au calice des fleurs,
Et fait les diamants de la rosée en pleurs;

- - - - -

C'est lui qui de ses feux par l'amour nous enivre;
Et quand il n'est pas là, j'ai peur de ne plus vivre.

Vous comprenez celan, vous, bêtes, n'est-ce pas?
Puisque, le soir venu, ralentissant le pas.
Dans votre âme, par l'homme oublieux abolie,
Vous sentez je ne sais quelle mélancolie."[3]

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1. Desprez, Louis, l'Evolution naturaliste, pp. 284-5.
2. Richepin, J., la Chanson des gueux, p. 63.
3. ibid., pp. 63-4.

Nothing in nature is beneath his attention. We have seen how he gives tongues to the rabbit and to the fowls; how he attributes reason to the dumb beasts for whom nature has made a paradise on earth. Let us listen to the little insect who defies the poet to create anything comparable to its fragile and scintillating beauty.

"Es-tu poète? Mets ensemble
Le plus clair cristal, qui te semble
Un pleur du ciel
L'opale dont l'éclat se gaze
Sous un lait trouble, la topaze
Couleur de miel.

L'émeraude qui dans sa flamme
A l'air de faire brûler l'âme
Du printemps vert
L'escarboucle de sang trempée
Pareille à la goutte échappée
D'un coeur ouvert.

- - - - - - -

Combine d'une main savante,
Imagine, compose, invente,
Refais, refonds,
Sers toi des poinçons et des limes,
Et que tes dessins soient sublimes
Et soient profonds:

Quand ton oeuvre sera finie,
Malgré l'effort de ton génie,
Tous tes cadeaux
Ne pourront remplacer encore
Ceux dont la nature décore
Mon petit dos.

- - - - - - -

La nature, la mère auguste,
N'est pas une marâtre injuste
Comme tu dis.
Et pour d'autres que pour les hommes
Elle a fait du monde où nous sommes
Un paradis."[1]

1. op. cit., pp. 58-59.

"Nous autres gueux" which is the third and last division of the"Chanson des gueux" is undoubtedly the section to which critics object most when they accuse Richepin of obscenity and lack of taste. Many of these poems are Rabelaisian in their ribaldry. But, we are told, poets must have their ribald moments when alcohol flows freely and sorrows are forgotten. Richepin would not have us begrudge them their momentary joy bought at the price of intoxication. Many times they would give all their talent for food or forfeit their laurels for an overcoat. In "Nos gaîtés" he begs indulgence:

"Laissez-nous donc rire un peu.
Aujourd'hui le ciel est bleu,
Notre tristesse est partie.
Laissez-nous! Les jours sont courts.
On n'est pas gai tous les jours
Dans notre patrie."[1]

When love has deceived the poet or life becomes heavy with ennui, when hard work brings no assurance of success, wine is essential for his consolation.

"Pourtant, quand on est las de se crever les yeux,
De se creuser le front, de se fouiller le ventre,
Sans trouver de raison à rien, lorsque l'on rentre
Fourbu d'avoir plané dans le vide des cieux.

Il faut bien oublier les désirs anxieux,
Les espoirs avortés, et dormir dans son antre
Comme une bête, ou boire à plus soif comme un chantre,
Sans penser. Soûlons-nous, buveurs silencieux!

Oh! les doux opiums, l'abrutissante extase!
Bitter, grenat brûlé, vermouth, claire topaze,
Absinthe, lait troublé d'émeraude ... Versez!"[2]

The poor inebriated artist should not be disdained, for in his harassed mind are the ideas which may someday prove a

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1. op. cit., p. 202
2. op. cit., p. 253.

boon to society.

"Hélas! les rêveurs noctambules
A qui l'on jettera deux sous!
En les voyant enfler leur bulles
On les prend pour des hommes soûls.

Soûls en effet, les pauvres diables,
Et plus soûls que vous ne pensez!
Car leurs gosiers insatiables
Ont bu des alcools insensés.

Ils ont bu le désir qui trouble,
La foi pour qui tout est quitté,
L'orgueil âpre qui fait voir double,
L'idéal et la liberté.

- - - - -

Ces gueux qui d'espoir vain se grisent,
Ces fantoches, ces chiens errants,
Seront peut-être ce qu'ils disent.
Et c'est pour cela qu'ils sont grands."[1]

But not all the poems are so profound or serious as those quoted. Some are crudely humorous and othere merely excite laughter. One to Raoul Ponchon, the prodigious tippler among the Trois Vivants, is in true Gallic style, - in keeping with Ponchon's own carefree spirit. We let it speak for itself.

"Allez où vous pousse le vent,
En France, en Amérique, en Chine,
Allez du ponant au levant,
Du nord au sud, ployant l'échine;
Voyez le salon, la cuisine;
Vous ne serez qu'un cornichon,
Cornichon comme à l'origine,
Si vous n'avez pas vu Ponchon.

De Ponchon je suis le fervent.
Ponchon est grand comme une usine.
Ponchon est le seul vrai vivant.
Et j'attraperai une angine,
Criant comme une merlusine,
Pour que du palais au bouchon,
Chacun pût dire à sa voisine:
Si vous n'avez pas vu Ponchon!!!

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1. op. cit., pp. 280-1.

Envoi

Prince, homme ou femme, ou androgyne,
Vous ne valez pas un torchon
Et n'aurez jamais bonne mine
Si vous n'avez pas vu Ponchon."[1]

We have seen Richepin serious and melancholy, admiring and humble, sensuous and daring, humorous and ribald. We have endeavored to show that not all his verses are offensive. Many are lacking in the dignity and beauty which the author was capable of imparting to them. Unfortunately, these are the ones for which he is most widely known since the voices of condemnation were louder than those of praise. But in estimating his work without prejudice, we find, as Charles Fuster did, that it is more worthy of commendation than of condemnation. "Il y avait là, sans doute, bien des choses à ne pas lire, ou du moins à ne pas relire, - des pièces sans valeur ou simplement sérieuses, des vers franchement laids et vulgaires, des morceaux en langue verte, essais amusants, caprices d'artiste, mais qui gardent tout au plus l'intérêt d'une boutade et le charme d'une fantaisie. Et pourtant, à côté de ces pages inférieures, un admirable écrivain éclatait dans les maîtresses-oeuvres du poème. C'était une langue ferme et vibrante comme l'airain, une langue savante sans froideur et fougueuse sans folie, un de ces styles qui sont des hommes et qui affirment des personnalités puissantes. Idylles réalistes d'une savoureuse beauté, paysages des champs et des grandes routes, chemins creux blancs de poussière et de soleil, mélodies traînantes que vous apporte un orgue de Barbarie, saisissantes ou lugubres appa-

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1.op. cit., pp. 264-5.

ritions de gueux et de pauvresses, la pourpre éclatante du sang, l'éblouissement de la liberté, la gloire du vin, le tressaillement de la passion sans fausse honte, tout cela se trouvait dans cette oeuvre exceptionnelle. Il y avait là quelque chose d'une simplicité tout antique et d'une grandeur tout humaine."[1]

After his release from prison, Richepin went to Guernsey where he wrote "les Caresses," (1877). This volume is divided into four parts corresponding to four stages of love. Floréal and Thermidor being the seasons of young and mature love; Brumaire and Nivôse the seasons when love wanes and dies. The first two celebrate the fierce and sensuous joys of Richepin as he indulges his passion to an immoderate degree. Ah, well, youth does not last forever, and he wishes to become satiated before leaving love's banquet so that there will be no regrets.

> "Laisse-moi tout mon soûl m'emplir, bâfrer et mordre,
> Me régaler de notre amour comme un goulu.
> Je me ferai du mal, soit! Je l'aurai voulu.
> Mais au moins, quand viendra le jour épouvantable,
> S'il doit venir jamais, d'abandonner la table,
> Je ne m'en irai pas, ainsi que ces piteux
> Qui laissèrent passer leur bonheur devant eux..."[2]

Alas, these glorious joys are not eternal. Brumaire, the Autumn of love creeps on apace and fear of its departure saddens the poet. With Nivôse he is alone with his memories. Everywhere plaintive spectres of the happy hours of Floréal and Thermidor haunt his path. How he envies those who have faith in God and eternity where they hope to find their de-

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1. Fuster, Charles, Essais de Critique, pp. 174-5.
2. Richepin, J., les Caresses, p. 122.

parted loved ones. But he has been nourished by science and lacks a consoling faith. If he believed in God, he would reproach Him for His cruelty in separating those He has commanded to love each other. Since he cannot anticipate a reunion with his mistress, his only pleasure is in recollecting his days with her. He hears echoes from the past, - the voices of his happy youth. He likens them to the roar of the sea in an empty shell.

"Je me souviens de l'an, du mois, du jour, de l'heure,
Et je ferme les yeux sans rien dire, et je pleure.
Car dans ce mot en l'air
J'entends toutes les voix de ma jeunesse heureuse,
Comme on entend au fond d'une coquille creuse.
Chanter toute la mer."[1]

These poems caused no scandal. After "la Chanson des gueux" it required a book like "les Blasphèmes" (1884) to make Richepin again the center of attention in the literary world. Apparently, however, self advertisement was not his aim for the last-named volume has the sincerity of one who is in distress, in intellectual and emotional turmoil; of one who has sought the solution of a mystery and has found none. His poetry breathes "l'angoisse de l'homme qui s'est brisé contre le sphinx sans mot des choses. Sa poésie roule de l'angoisse dans le plus profond de ses flots."[2]

As the poet sees another century decline, he is troubled with the realization that the basic facts of the universe have not been revealed. He boldly determines to go himself in the quest of truth and find the cause of things. He humbly entreats the stars to divulge the secret of which

1. op. cit., p. 274.
2. d'Aurevilly, Barbey, le XIXe Siècle, vol.2, p. 196.

they are the guardians.

"A la pauvrette en pleurs que le doute torture,
Montrez le clair chemin qui conduit au savoir;
Offrez-lui vos secrets merveilleux en pâture;

Donnez-lui la clarté que vous semblez avoir;
Changez en hymne ardent sa cantilène triste;
Et dans le sanctuaire obscur faites-lui voir

L'Eternelle splendeur de l'Etre ... s'il existe!"[1]

Though they remain mute to his entreaties, he is undaunted. He will continue his interrogation in spite of the myriads of obstacles. He delves into the religions of the world and finally asks the sphinx to disclose her knowledge. But he receives no answer. Then he concludes that God is a creation of man's imagination.

"O Dieu, brouillard flottant sur le pré des mensonges,
O Dieu, mirage vain des désirs d'ici-bas.
Ta gloire et ton orgueil sont les fleurs de nos songes
Et sans nous tu n'es pas."[2]

God has been created by the priests in order to give concrete form to our dreams of the ideal, to console mankind with the hope of eternity.

Still in anguish, the poet retires from the world for solitary meditation. He hears ancestral voices speaking in his veins which review the nomadic history of the Huns. These people, from whom he has descended, wandered over the earth before the pale-faced Aryas came to till the soil and place their God in the sky. Their only law was might and their only God nothingness. He ascribes his disdain for laws and his instincts of revolt to his racial origin.

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1. Richepin, J., les Blasphèmes, p. 93.
2. ibid., p. 110.

"Libres et fiers, exempts de toute idolâtrie,
Ils méprisent les lois, les sciences, les arts.
Ils n'avaient ni foyer, ni temple, ni patrie,
Et ne vroyaient à rien si ce n'est aux hasards.

Oui, ce sont mes aïeux, à moi. Car j'ai beau vivre
En France, je ne suis ni Latin ni Gaulois."[1]

Having dethroned God, he attacks Reason for her incapacity to make man happy. In truth, the torments of thought rob life of its charm; the attempt to sound the depths and find the cause of each phenomena tarnishes every bright moment. Therefore, he blasphemes Reason and resolves to abandon her ways, saying:

"Je veux la paix! Je veux la paix!
Je vais goûter les biens que m'offre la nature,
Tranquillement d'un cerveau coi,
Sans qu'un sourd désespoir aussitôt me torture
De n'en pas savoir pourquoi."[2]

Next, he proceeds to rob Nature of her glory. He denies her divine order and her harmony. Everything in the universe is ruled by Chance.

"Tout ensemble n'est rien qu'un mélange sans art:
Car celui qui le crée a pour nom le Hasard.
Lui seul se trouve au fond de l'être et de la chose
Ses caprices n'ont point de but et point de cause."[3]

His blasphemies do not end here. He foresees the coming of a new Christ who will be as chimerical as the One Christians now worship. Him, also, he renounces in burning terms which he knows will endure until His advent.

"Les Blasphèmes" is a sad book not only because it is the cry of an unhappy soul but because it impugns the sacred heritage of Christianity. Fallen gods are objects of profound pity! French poets before Richepin had shown ir-

1. op. cit., p. 237.
2. op. cit., p. 276.
3. op. cit., p. 291.

reverence but none of talent equal to his had ever been so blatant in his defiance of a creed. Barbey d'Aurevilly sees Victor Hugo's imprint on every page. He also sees a similarity with Lamartine in his impious moments. But Lamartine always reaches towards God from the depth of his impiety while Richepin never does.[1] Before the publication of "le Désespoir" Lamartine had the wisdom to expunge his most violent invectives against God. But it is doubtful that this gentle soul could ever have uttered the crudities found in "les Blasphèmes."

In "Mes Paradis" written ten years later (1894), we learn that Richepin has at last found the peace he had so ardently sought. Though he is still as atheistic as in former years, his disbelief has become less painful because of his determination to enjoy the many pleasures offered in daily life. Fully convinced that there is no life hereafter, he has resolved to seize the joys at hand. He appreciates them more since he knows that they will come to an end with death.

"Ce qui fait la félicité
De vivre, c'est la mort future.
Etre en doute de sa pâture
Vous tient l'appétit excité."[2]

The simplicity of family life enchants him; the presence of his children exercises a stabilizing influence over him. Books help him to escape from his disillusions; he rereads the stories of adventure read in his youth. Music and the theatre beguile his weary hours. Time spent with

1. d'Aurevilly, Barbey, le XIXe Siècle, p. 191.
2. Richepin, J., Mes Paradis, p. 161.

old friends is precious to him. Still sound in body, he practises the athleticism of his early youth. He is proud to describe his physical vigor.

"Avoir le sang toujours frais,
Tous les membres prompts et prêts,
Poignets, épaules, jarrets
Taille étroite, poitrail large;
En ses membres prêts et prompts
Entendre aux moindres affronts
Les tambours et les clairons
De ce sang sonnant la charge."[1]

To those who would find contentment in life he counsels:

"Quand un sot vous arrête en chemin, passer outre;
Préférer cependant l'imbécile au jean-foutre;
Ne rien faire qu'un jour on doive renier;
Croire que chaque instant qui vient est le dernier;
Laisser de temps en temps sa cervelle en jachère;
Trouver bon qu'un vacher soit fou de sa vachère;
Apprendre le français chez les gens qui l'ont su;
Le nez camard, ne pas prétendre au nez bossu;
Vivre très près du sol pour s'en nourrir les moelles;
Le plus souvent qu'on peut, regarder les étoiles;
Voyager; ne pas trop respirer le même air;
Et ne jamais rester un ans sans voir la mer."[2]

Here is no longer the despairing note of "les Blasphèmes", but a sane effort to make other things compensate for his lack of faith.

"Les Glas" (1922) predicates the spirit of its poetry. It is composed of the sad songs of the septuagenarian who is approaching death. Like most pessimists, he usually loves life and is reluctant to leave it, although sometimes he longs for death. His poetry shows no diminution of virtuosity; it imparts to the reader the melancholy which pervades his own soul.

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1. op. cit., p. 319.
2. op. cit., p. 300.

"Il pleut, il pleut
Sur la peau de mon âme.
Tant que ça peut,
Il pleut, il pleut!
O Mort que je réclame,
Quand viendras-tu tambour,
Battre la fin du jour
Sur la peau de mon âme?
Il pleut, il pleut!"[1]

His life, in retrospect, appears like a beautiful poem.

"Vie, adorable Vie, admirable poème
Dont les mensonges sont les seules vérités!
Une page! Rien qu'une! Un vers! Toujours le même!
J'en mâcherai la fleur plusieurs éternités."[2]

But all is not yet ended. Richepin, the stalwart Bohemian, will not resign himself to meet death with head bowed. Rather, he will combat it with all his strength so that his demise may be as majestic as his life has been vigorous. In his "Prière à mes cinq sens" he implores his senses to remain with him in the last struggle that he may die valiantly. He begs them to remember how generous he has been with them and entreats them to show their gratitude by serving him until the end.

"O mes bons serviteurs, aidez votre bon maître
A se tirer le front haut de ce mauvais pas!
Ne l'abandonnez pas! Ne le trahissez pas!
Grain pourri qui déjà s'écrase avant la meule,
Ne le laissez pas sourd, aveugle, infirme, veule!
Il a besoin de vous, de l'appui mutuel
De vous tous, ses seconds, dans cet affreux duel.

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Quand l'étoile devra s'éteindre à l'horizon,
O vous, les serviteurs vieillis dans ma maison,
Que ce soit avec vous, sans qu'y manque personne,
Tous unis, braves, gais, riant du glas qui sonne,
Et que ce soit d'un coup, dans un éclatement
Formidable dans un grand jet d'or essaimant,
Dans un dernier éclair de lumière agrandie ..."[3]

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1. Richepin, J., les Glas, p. 55.
2. ibid., p. 128.
3. ibid., pp. 171-173.

The remaining volumes of poetry do not show the unity of thought which is evident in those already discussed. They lack in strength and consistency because they represent no great emotional or intellectual crises; they aim to depict no social class or condition. However, the author's mastery of versification and his richness of language manifest themselves everywhere.

The fascination which the sea always exercised over him is expressed in "la Mer." He has frequently sought consolation by her side when overcome with sorrow and he has always departed with his spirit restored. He calls her:

> "Consolatrice aux mots profonds et pleins de charmes
> Qui sait ce qu'il faut dire aux plus désespérés.
> Consolatrice dont la main sèche leurs larmes!"[1]

He considers the sea as the mother of humanity. Man is still at her mercy for without her water and her salt he would perish. He forecasts a time when life will cease, when the ocean's water will be absorbed in the rocks of the earth. He exhorts the ocean to delay the fatal hour.

> "O mer, que ton printemps se garde dans la fleur!
> O mer, ne hâte point l'heure du noir mystère
> Où dans l'exhalaison de ton suprême pleur
>
> S'envoleront notre être et l'âme de la terre."[2]

The notes appended to many of Richepin's poems lead us to conclude that they were greatly appreciated in public gatherings. They were read at funerals,[3] in the great amphitheater of the Sorbonne, at the opening of theaters,[4] at the

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1. Richepin, J., la Mer, p. 43.
2. ibid., p. 359.
3. Richepin, J., la Chanson des gueux, p. 272.
4. Richepin, J., Prologue pour la réouverture de la Comédie Française.

Trocadéro and elsewhere. Those written from 1914 to 1918 are entitled "Poèmes durant la guerre" and were published at the insistence of his friends. He calls them "pièces de circonstance demandées à un poète faisant sa partie dans une cérémonie publique."[1] These poems have approximately the same spirit as the "Proses de la guerre". One was written to attach to Christmas presents sent to the front, one to advance the sale of Belgian flags for the benefit of refugees, one to present a sword of honor to the King of Belgium, several to welcome the American soldier, and many to express gratitude to the other allies.

"La Bombarde, Contes à chanter" was published to please an old friend, Raoul Ponchon. As their title indicates, these are rhymed stories which tell of new gueux. Many of them are extremely sophisticated and remind one of the lugubrious short stories. There is an obvious repetition of subjects found elsewhere..

"Les Interludes," which was the last volume of Richepin's poetry to be published, is composed of verses written and recited at various periods of his life and dedicated to his two youngest sons. Those in which he speaks of himself are particularly charming for they have a simplicity not found in other poems possessing biographical facts. One can picture him with his sons at his knees listening to the stories of his birth at Medea, of his experiences at sea, of his maternal grandfather who was a locksmith from the region of Thiérache, of his nomadic ancestor named Richepin who was a village

1. Richepin, J., Préface to Poèmes durant la guerre, p. 1.

fiddler. One poem called "Sweet Home" shows how attractive a suburban home can be, even to one of gypsy blood.

Richepin's poetic style is both classical and romantic. Lemaître calls him "the most Latin of our French poets" because of his "firm syntax, somewhat hard precision, retouched colors, full of rude sonorousness."[1] He adds elsewhere: "M. Jean Richepin a la sonorité, la plénitude, la couleur franche, le dessin précis, une langue excellente, vraiment classique par la qualité, et il est le dernier de nos poètes qui ait, quand il le veut, le souffle, l'ampleur, le grand flot lyrique. Il est le seul qui, depuis Lamartine et Hugo, ait composé des odes dignes de ce nom et qui n'ait pas perdu haleine avant la fin."[2] The subjective quality which is always present constitutes a point of similarity between him and the romantics. He repeats that he is "de sang touranien" and that he has "les yeux de cuivre." His greatest poems relate his joys and his sorrows in a manner reminiscent of Lamartine and Hugo. They are, however, of a truculence unknown to these masters.

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1. Quoted by Cameron, A.G., in Introduction to Selections from Jean Richepin, p. 67.
2. ibid., p. 76.

F. Plays

Collaborating with André Gill, Richepin made his début as playwright and actor in "l'Etoile" (1873). But it was not until 1883, when he played in "Nana-Sahib," that he demonstrated to any degree his ability in the field of the drama. Despite its melodramatic qualities, critics proclaimed his piece a success because of the excellent acting and splendid verse.

Its setting is Hindustan during a period of revolt against English rule. Nana-Sahib, fiancé of the noble Djamma, takes the English governor and his daughter, Miss Ellen, as hostages to a fortress in the jungle. Djamma, fearing that the latter may alienate Nana-Sahib's affections, sets her free. In so doing, she makes defeat certain for Nana-Sahib who deserts his losing army and flees into the jungle.

Cimrou, a pariah, now becomes Djamma's eager suitor. Knowing the secret of the hidden treasure of Siva, he needs only to marry a noble lady to raise his station and make the treasure his. In spite of Djamma's protests, her ambitious father, Tippoo-Raï, concludes the marriage.

The last and most striking act takes place in the caves of Siva. The newly married, Cimrou and Djamma, and Tippoo-Raï are walking through the dank and eerie subterranean passages. Finally, they reach a room whose ceiling

is supported by giant pillars, whose walls are encrusted with jewels and whose floor is strewn with gold dust. These treasures, Cimrou refuses to share until Djamma becomes less disdainful of his attentions. His brutal advances are interrupted by Nana-Sahib's sudden entrance into the cave. Cimrou, accusing Tippoo-Raï of betrayal, kills him. Then the two remaining men engage in a fierce struggle in which Cimrou is mortally wounded. As Djamma remains obdurate to her husband's demands, she and Nana-Sahib are doomed to death also. In vain, the latter strives to open the heavy steel door. Cimrou lights a funeral pyre which the lovers mount. With flames engulfing them, they avow their eternal love for each other.

In taking an historical event as a point of departure, Richepin follows a precedent set by the romantic writers of the early part of the nineteenth century. Like his predecessors he gives little thought to the strict portrayal of fact. Improbable situations and spectacular settings are given primary importance. "Nana-Sahib" will not be remembered for its portrayal of the Sepoy rebellion, but, rather, for its underground corridor full of horrors and its gorgeous treasure chamber which transplant one into a world of fantasy. Tippoo-Raï, dazzled by its glistening jewels, exclaims:

> "Dieu! je suis aveuglé. C'est comme une vapeur
> D'étoiles. C'est un tas de diamants. J'ai peur.
> Il m'a semblé plonger mes mains dans de la lave,
> Ça me brûle. --"[1]

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1. Richepin, J., Nana-Sahib, p. 120.

Much of the play's action is as unreal as its settings. Nana-Sahib's well-timed entry, at the moment when Djamma needs protection against her villainous husband, causes great astonishment since only Cimrou is known to possess the secrets of the cave. Our fears for Djamma's safety are allayed for only a short time, however. For some inexplicable reason, the door through which Nana-Sahib has previously entered will not open. Death on the funeral pyre, the penalty for Djamma's chastity, furnishes a dramatic but improbable scene.

"Par le glaive" (1892) depicts the city of Ravenna under the domination of Conrad, a foreign invader. For want of a leader, the unhappy citizens are unable to vanquish their detested ruler. After an absence of six years years, Guido, who has been thought dead, returns. He finds Rinalda, formerly his fiancée, married to Conrad. To vindicate herself, she declares that her marriage to Conrad was inspired by patriotism. She has protected Guido's little brother, Rizzo, in the hope that he will some day deliver the city. In Rinalda's apartment Guido is betrayed by an enemy. Rinalda hides him in her oratory and throws the key from her window to convince her husband that no one is there. While the townspeople revolt, Guido's half brother, Strada, enters and accuses Rinalda of treachery. Desiring death, she welcomes his angry threats of murder. Strada's previous demands that she surrender Guido to a commoner's daughter, Bianca, for the good of the state have overwhelmed her with grief. A moment before the news of Con-

rad's defeat and death is announced, she precipitates herself on Strada's sword. Bianca enters and commands that the oratory door be forced open. To Strada's astonishment, Guido emerges. Noble to the end, Rinalda places Guido's hand on Bianca's saying that death alone makes her sacrifice possible.

In "la Martyre" (1898) Richepin, contrary to his own belief, apotheosizes the principles of Christianity which he had attacked in "les Blasphèmes." Imperial Rome furnishes the setting for the play. The heroine, Flamméola, like many of the noble people of her time, is surfeited with pleasure and contemplates suicide. She smiles with satisfaction, however, when a merchant of monsters brings her the gladiator, Latro, a female midget, Tamrys; and two Christian priests, Aruns and Johannès. For Johannès she conceives a strong liking. But Aruns arrives with consistent punctuality to save his brother when he is about to succumb to her charms. Latro, impelled by jealousy, stabs Johannès who recovers under Flamméola's tender care. In the midst of an ardent love scene, Aruns comes to announce their betrayal by Latro and Caesar's persecution of the Christians. He regrets that Johannès will be deterred by his earthly love from participating in the "celestial banquet" of martyrdom. Ashamed of his weakness, the latter follows Aruns, professes his faith in God and is crucified by Caesar's order. At his hour of death, Flamméola comes to proclaim herself a Christian. Latro, angered by her persistent love for Johannès, stabs her. Dying, she ascends to the cross and still touched by the grace of Eros rather than by that of God, embraces Johannès who, believing her saved, baptizes her

with her blood.

The factitious quality of much of the action of these plays constitutes a defect. Richepin might have made his excellent verses express profound psychological truths. In "la Martyre" he might have depicted the struggles which took place in Johannès' soul as he was torn between love for the pagan Flamméola and devotion to God. A logical linking of events is wanting. The inappropriate introduction of surprises and highly fantastic situations detracts from the value of these historical plays. Jules Lemaître's judgment of "la Martyre" is applicable also to "Nana-Sahib" and to "Par le glaive." "Le drame lui-même est de peu de prix et n'est point sans banalité. Les caractères y sont, ou étrangement inconsistent, ou d'une simplicité excessive; à vrai dire ce ne sont que des rôles."[1] The verses of these plays save them from complete failure. They are "tour à tour un divertissement et un éblouissement, et qui se suffisent à eux-mêmes. C'est eux et non le drame, qu'il faut aller entendre."[2]

The inspiration for Richepin's greatest plays was not found in history. Those which will be admired by posterity are attached to no particular time. They are plays of common folks, sailors, peasants, and tramps, and their power and beauty are products of their simplicity.

The author had learned through personal experience and through contact with seamen to look upon the sea as a dramatic force "that makes and unmakes happiness, that separates parents and children, husbands and wives, and betrothed,

1. Lemaître, Jules, "Critique de "la Martyre'", Revue des Deux Mondes, Vol. 355, p. 228. (May 1, 1898).
2. ibid.

that sunders hopes after years of hopeless awaitings, that strains the patience of love, that rivals the affections of the land, that weds and welds to her the souls of men, which she disputes with the brides of the earth."[1]

One of the best of his pieces, "le Flibustier" (1888), concerns three people whose destinies are, to a great extent, shaped by the sea. Two cousins, Janik and Pierre, have been betrothed since infancy. Yet they scarcely know each other for Pierre has been at sea for sixteen years. Hopefully, Janik goes daily with her old grandfather Legoëz to watch the ships come in. One day, during their absence, a sailor, named Jacquemin, arrives bringing news of Pierre's death. Janik's mother, fearing that this announcement may be fatal to Legoëz, permits him to believe that Jacquemin is the long awaited Pierre. Janik, unaware of the deception, soon falls in love with Jacquemin. The latter reciprocates her affection but, conscience-stricken, confesses that he is not Pierre.

But since the two love each other all might have ended happily at this point if the supposedly dead Pierre had not returned. Jacquemin departs denounced by Pierre whom Janik humbly accepts as her fiancé. But the grandfather finds him less amiable than Jacquemin. Pierre is no longer a seaman but a landholder in Mexico. His descriptions of the great mountains, plains and rivers of this distant land make no appeal to Legoëz. When Pierre expresses a desire to return there and remain a terrien for the remainder of his days,

1. Cameron, A.G., Introduction to Selections from Jean Richepin, p. 27.

Legoëz knows for a certainty that Janik will never consent to marry him. In time, it becomes obvious to Pierre that he must renounce Janik and consent to her preference for Jacquemin.

A masterpiece of grace and simple strength, this play ably revives atmosphere of the ancient and legendary land of Brittany. Legoëz typifies the patriarchal Breton sailor. He is an imposing character who becomes somewhat declamatory when he speaks of the sea as a kind of divinity, terrible, but always beloved. How he disdains the rivers which flow through the fertile plains of Mexico!

"Les fleuves! Oui, je sais. Ça coule à la dérive.
Sans doute, c'est de l'eau; de l'eau qui marche; mais
Elle s'en va toujours et ne revient jamais.
Ce n'est pas comme ici. La marée est fidèle.
Elle a beau s'en aller au diable, on est sûr d'elle.
Au revoir! Au revoir! dit-elle en se sauvant.
Car elle parle. Car c'est quelqu'un de vivant.
Et tout ce qu'elle crie, et tout ce qu'elle chante,
La mer, selon qu'elle est d'humeur douce ou méchante!
Et tous les souvenirs des amis d'autrefois,
Dont la voix de ses flots a l'air d'être la voix?
Et les beaux jours vécus sur elle à pleines voiles!
Et les nuits où l'on croit cingler vers les étoiles!
Ah! mon Pierre, mon gas, tout ça, ce n'est donc rien?
Maudit soit le pays qui t'a rendu terrien!
Il peut être plein d'or; je n'en ai pas envie.
Certes, je n'irai pas y terminer ma vie. (vent.
Pour moi, tout vent qui vient de la terre est mauvais
Un vrai marin, ça meurt sur la mer, ou devant."[1]

These lines have a vigor and sonority suggestive of the waves they describe.

"Vers la joie" (1894) is a fairy tale which serves to teach a lesson of wisdom. We are told by the old Bibus, the raisonneur in the play, that the world is in its old age

1. Richepin, J., le Flibustier, p. 295.

and that man is perishing from an illness due to his extraordinary efforts to develop his intelligence and refine his sentiments. He may be cured only by undoing what civilization has accomplished, by imitating those whose isolation has protected them from civilizing influences. Man must go into the fields to learn how to work, love and be happy.

Bibus' wisdom owes nothing to education. He is known among the farm folks as a shepherd and as somewhat of a sorcerer. Under his guidance, the sick and spiritless Prince is nurtured back to health and vigor among simple country people. Much to his mentor's delight, the Prince conceives a tenderness for a farmer's daughter and marries her. On his wedding day, he expresses his gratitude to the humble guests for the lesson they have taught him.

> "C'est par l'amour qu'il faut se retremper en lui;
> C'est de la terre, où sa sueur perle en rosée,
> Que remonte la sève à la plante épuisée;
> Il en est le profond, l'immortel réservoir."[1]

The advice Bibus offers might have been uttered by Jean Jacques Rousseau who also believed that man's happiness and goodness increased in proportion as he withdrew from the corrupting influence of science and art. What Richepin failed to comprehend was that return, through voluntary effort, to the simplicity of more primitive times is impossible. All anterior development is permanent. The man of the present is so completely a product of the past that he cannot deliberately return to nature. Certain individuals may, indeed, suffer a relapse and fall into a primitive manner of living. Then,

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1. Richepin, J., Vers la joie, p. 302.

however, they regress to animalism and are no longer in possession of the goodness or nobility which Rousseau and Richepin attribute to their simple folks.

But Richepin does not concern himself profoundly with psychological truth. He is imaginative and lyrical and he expresses in beautiful verses his impressions of nature and life. His strength lies in his ability to arouse the emotions and to create a sympathetic feeling for his pieces. His poetry is charged with nostalgic tenderness when he writes of rustic types. He even makes us love the tramp whom experience has taught us to mistrust. He depicts him as generous, gay and wise, as one who loves liberty and the wide open spaces. That love, in Richepin's eyes, is one of the greatest virtues. He lauds his endurance, his courage, his pride and his instinctive scorn for all things bought at the price of servitude.

We first meet with the hero of "le Chemineau" (1897) at the end of harvest season, on the farm of Maître Pierre. Like Bibus, in "Vers la joie", his unusual ability to set things in order, to cure sick animals, and to speed the harvesting, makes him an asset to the farmer. Maître Pierre begs him to remain. But, in spite of the advantages offered him and in spite of his love for the servant girl Toinette whom he has seduced, the Chemineau departs.

Time passes. Toinette is married to François who has accepted Toinet, the little Chemineau, as his own son. The latter, now a young man, loves Maître Pierre's daughter but, because of his low birth, he is unsuccessful in winning her hand. His sorrow is so great that he seeks relief in the

village cabarets. His failing health and constant intoxication trouble Toinette. The Chemineau returns and is prompted by his conscience to help his unhappy son. By intimidating Maître Pierre, he achieves his purpose and the marriage which Toinet desires restores happiness to Toinette's household. For a short time the Chemineau lingers with those he loves. But family life is like imprisonment; he is tormented by a longing for the great highways. Only Toinette understands this longing and interprets it.

"Dis-leur que des pays, ce gueux, il en a cent,
Mille, tandis que nous, on n'en a qu'un, le nôtre;
Dis-leur que son pays, c'est ici, là, l'un, l'autre,
Partout où chaque jour il arrive en voisin;
C'est celui de la pomme et celui du raisin;
C'est la haute montagne et c'est la plaine basse;
Tous ceux dont il apprend les airs quand il y passe;
Dis-leur que son pays c'est le pays entier,
Le grand pays, dont la grand'route est le sentier;
Et dis-leur que ce gueux est riche, le vrai riche,
Possédant ce qui n'est à personne: la friche
Déserte, les étangs endormis, les halliers
Où lui parlent tout bas des esprits familiers,
La lande au sol du miel, la ravine sauvage,
Et les chansons du vent dans les joncs du rivage,
Et le soleil, et l'ombre, et les fleurs et les eaux,
Et toutes les forêts avec tous leurs oiseaux!"[1]

On Christmas eve, when all, except the aged and dying François, are at mass the Chemineau resolves to leave. He contemplates François' quiet slumber and wonders whether he himself will merit so peaceful a death. Assuredly not!

"..... Je serais un voleur
De mourir ainsi! .. Moi, je suis un grenipille,
Un vagabond, un hors-la-loi, hors-la-famille,
Un qui, dans ses haillons de gueux pour tout linceul,
Saura partir ainsi qu'il partit toujours, seul,
Sans parents, sans amis, sans rien, sans qu'il redoute
De mourir comme il a vécu, sur la grand'route."[2]

With fierce energy he takes up his stick and exclaims:

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1. Richepin, J., le Chemineau, p. 266.
2. ibid., p. 280.

"..... Suis ton destin!
Va, Chemineau, chemine! "[1]

Richepin describes his Chemineau's helplessness in the hands of Destiny. "He is at once masterless and thoughtless. No crime urges him on. No disturbing melancholy drags him to and fro. He is a searcher ... He quests the Holy Graal, - the phantom Graal which he shall never find. Mysterious blue horizons beckon him to flee. Life slips by him with its serenities and pleasant hours; he knows not of them. Women cry to him of love. He kisses their wet faces and as he wanders on he wonders what this love may be and fashions a strange little song, all about wet eyelids and gentle kisses and broken hearts, and he trudges on towards the flying horizon, trolling a little strange song. Always nostalgia of the great highway drags him hither and thither; always the false blue horizons summon him: then he dies in a wayside ditch."[2] In the story of the Chemineau Richepin presents his most able portraiture of the vagabond.

It is well to end the discussion of Richepin's plays with this masterpiece. He wrote others which are not comparable in poetry or in realism. For his themes he has drawn from every age, from every class, from every milieu. In "le Chien de la garde" (1889) he portrays a Napoleonic soldier; in "la Belle au bois dormant" (1907) he tries pure fantasy; in "M. Scapin" (1886) he gives life to the puppets of the Italian stage; in "les Truands" (1899) he revives the spirit

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1. op. cit. p. 281.
2. Cameron, A.G., Introduction to Selections from Jean Richepin, p. 32.

of François Villon; in "Don Quichotte" (1905) he takes us back to the days of chivalry. Believing that all types of spectators react favorably to poetry, he wrote most of his plays in verse. He proved his literary affiliations with romantic poets by borrowing from medieval history and from the exotism of far off countries. But always, no matter what the source or subject, no matter what weaknesses are manifested, his plays are written in verses whose quality compensates for all else that remains to be desired.

III. CONCLUSION

The designation of Jean Richepin as "l'homme qui a des biceps"[1] has both a literal and figurative significance. Obviously, it refers to his excellent physique, to his strong muscles which he frequently displayed in athletic feats before a curious and astonished public. It applies equally to his mental powers and implies a flexibility and strength of intellect equalling his physical suppleness and vigor. His eagerness to show this mental athleticism led him on many occasions to indulge in literary tours de force. Then he displayed his knowledge of psychology, of physiology, of history, of ethnology, of languages, of science and of world literature. His was no mediocre intellect and he meant to show his strength from the moment of his first appearance in the world of letters. This he did through a constant variation of subject and of method. But while this stratagem achieved its purpose in winning public acclaim, it was ultimately to become detrimental to the author's reputation. For in his extraordinary endeavors to exhibit each phase of his talent and intellect, Richepin appears to have lost sight of the more serious literary aims. This is particularly true of his fiction in which are found no underlying thought, no philosophy and no moral purpose. However, because of his unusual literary skill, some of his novels

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1. Fuster, Charles, Essais de Critique, p. 169.

are masterpieces. Those, particularly, in which he manifests his ability in psychological analysis ("Mme. André," "le Cadet"), are executed with rare insight and show a discriminating and profound human understanding.

What Richepin needed to make him great for all time was a rigorous self discipline and a determination to find his best manner and to seek perfection in it. But the hardships which would have attended the striving for such an ideal were contrary to his simple and easy philosophy of life. He would have revolted against literary restraint as he revolted against restraining social conventions. His belief that an ultimate nothingness is the destiny of man caused him to seek a full and pleasurable life. This one time president of the Ligue des Gourmands was, like his good friend Raoul Ponchon, a bon vivant to the end of his days. He found philosophizing disconcerting and an inquiring into the cause of things a futile operation which robbed the golden present of its joy. This lesson he had learned through experience in the days of his youth when an attempt to solve the mysteries of the universe left him no wiser. He, therefore resolved to intoxicate himself with every pleasure of the moment.

> "Enivre-toi, quand même et non moins follement
> De tout ce qui survit au rapide moment,
> Des chimères de l'art, du bien, du vin des rêves
> Qu'on vendange en passant aux réalités brèves."[1]

This frantic pursuit of the transient joys did not permit a serious cultivation of literary perfection.

Richepin is often lightly dismissed by critics who

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1. Richepin, J., Mes Paradis, p. 368.

see "sous le peintre des loqueteux et des franches ripailles, sous l'insulteur des dieux, sous le négateur de toutes les choses respectées, un artiste très paradoxal, très personnel, avide de réclame, affamé de nouveauté plus ou moins neuve et tirant des pétards pour étonner le bourgeois."[1] This criticism is true only in part; it emphasizes the reprehensible in Richepin without fully revealing his rare qualities as an artist. Moreover, it might lead one to the erroneous assumption that Richepin always sought to shock and astonish. The sincerity of his explanatory prefaces indicates a greater profundity. It was part of his literary technique to startle his readers and this he seems to have succeeded in doing in nearly all of his productions. Nevertheless, we contend that even without these undignified efforts, he would have achieved the recognition he desired. His truculence and his lack of a sense of propriety were due to something deeper than a passion for notoriety. They were due rather to the savage instincts of the Touranian, of the Zingari who is attracted to the fantastic aspects of life, and to a love of nature and of independence.

One restraining influence was the classical training Richepin received at the Ecole Normale. But it made of him a strange paradox for it was incapable of obliterating the traits inherent in him. So it was that, as well as being the brilliant littérateur of normal school training, he remained the vagabond endowed with fierce instincts of revolt.

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1. Fuster, Charles, Essais de Critique, p. 170.

His antithetic qualities place him in direct line with the Romanticists. In addition, he possesses the sense of youth, the love of color, the bravery, the hatred of conventionality, the need of action, the taste for the lugubrious and revolting, and the brilliant imagination: - in short, most of the traits which contributed to the success of Romanticism.

The fact that he is comparable in some respects to Zola does not contradict his close adherence to Romantic principles. Rather, it serves to confirm it, for Zola himself gave evidence of Romantic tendencies. In the brutality of his language and in the depiction of human beings, he is far from attaining the Naturalistic ideal. His characters really belong in the gallery of romantic monsters. It is precisely in this respect that Richepin resembles Zola. Unfortunately, however, his lack of sociological purpose in his novels, places him on a plane inferior to Zola.

From the free expression of his diverse tendencies proceed Richepin's poetic versatility and his consequent resemblance to writers of contrasting traits. Now, he is a Villon writing of his beloved gueux, again, he resembles the André Chénier of the "Bucoliques", and again, he has a lyrical quality which reminds us of the Victor Hugo of "les Contemplations" and "la Légende des Siècles." With his mastery of the vernacular and his love for brilliant and brutal images, it is a strange paradox that he should be so akin to the French classics in precision of sense and distinctness of form. Jules Lemaître said: "He is one of those rare writers to whom one

can listen always with a feeling of entire security; you are sure, at least, that he will not sin against syntax nor against the genius of the language."[1] Nevertheless, his finest verse is not of classical inspiration but more closely comparable to Victor Hugo's than to that of any older poet.

It would be difficult to maintain that Richepin was a great writer at all times, in all his genres. But it is certainly not too much to call him a great poet. He has a spontaneity, a vigor and a health, a frankness and a freshness which, together with an unfailing prosodical perfection, endow his poetry with unusual force and beauty. When he sings of nature, of primitive souls, and of the outcasts, Richepin is superb.

1. Quoted by Robertson,W.J., A Century of French Verse, p.310.

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